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Chaucer and the Theme of Mutability.

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CHAUCER AND THE THEME OF MUTABILITY

A Dissertation

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in

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by

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ABSTRACT

In the Introduction to this study, the concept of mutability is clarified by contrasting the pre- and post-Progress attitudes toward change; it is seen that in pre-Progress thought the concept involved that of mortality. Five predominant motifs of the mutability theme are distinguished: transitoriness (which includes the symbol and the uses of fortune), decay of the world (expressed in classical and mediaeval times chiefly in the Golden Age literature), ubi sunt, putrefaction, and contempt of the world. Chapter I presents a documentary survey of the history of the concept of mutability from Plato to the Renaissance and distinguishes the notion from that of mere change, exemplified especially in the writings of Heraclitus and Ovid. A brief historical sketch of the various motifs of the mutability theme are also presented.

Chapter II studies and identifies the theme and its variations in two works which Chaucer translated entirely, the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius and the De Contemptu Mundi of Innocent III; and in another work which he

translated in part, Le Roman de la Rose of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. These works, representative of the Middle Ages, greatly influenced Chaucer's thought and provided a substantial amount of the mutability material which he incorporated into his poetry; thus they are indispensable for illuminating his peculiar sensibility of impermanence.

Chapters III-VI examine the extent and function of the mutability theme and identify its variations (except putrefaction, which never occurs) in Chaucer's works. In five of the twenty-one short poems the theme figures substantially, significantly in six others; in the Book of the Duchess, the theme of transitoriness at least tenuously unites the frame with the dream-vision and is used to intensify the loss expressed in the elegy; in the Parliament, the De Contemptu Mundi theme provides the contrast to the worldly and sensuous Garden of Love; in the Troilus, the mutability theme and its variations provide Chaucer's concept of tragedy (the de casibus type) and lend complexity of character and philosophical depth to the poem as a whole; furthermore, the De Contemptu Mundi theme, expressed in the epilogue, and the transitory theme, implied in the celestial imagery of the love scenes, provide Chaucer's chief commentaries on life as

portrayed in the poem; in the Knight's Tale, the mutability theme supplies the substructure of the entire poem; in the tales of the Monk, the Man of Law, and the Merchant, the theme is interwoven into the plots; finally, it is found to appear, if only incidentally, in all but eight of the remaining tales. It is concluded that, with the exception of love, no other theme is more predominant in Chaucer's poetry; yet in almost every instance it is the mutability of love which finally occupies his attention.

This study finds, moreover, a perceivable pattern in Chaucer's uses of the mutability theme: As his artistic scope became more and more oriented toward the world of experience, so did the transitory motif become predominant and the De Contemptu Mundi motif tend to disappear. If the De Contemptu Mundi at the end of the Troilus was religiously motivated, it was not unrelated to Chaucer's gradual moving away from literary conventions generally and toward the world of the Canterbury Tales. Theseus' speech at the end of the Knight's Tale approximates Chaucer's position in the remaining tales. The final reconciliation of his art and his religion is seen in his acceptance of a world everywhere colored by its impermanence.

INTRODUCTION

It is singularly unsophisticated to remark that the theme of mutability is perhaps the most persistent theme in all literature. Especially is this true of English literature of the mediaeval, Renaissance, and Jacobean periods. But then came the idea of progress, and the ideas of mutability, mortality, decay of the world, and putrefaction were pushed into the corners of literature--only to be revived in the literature of disillusionment which followed in the wake of world wars and hitherto unimaginable scientific achievement; the god of progress is no longer being universally worshipped.¹ Philosophers, writers, even the scientists themselves are demanding a reinterpretation of spiritual values; and while this reinterpretation is not intended to reproduce stoical indifference, the Gnostic or Manichean dichotomy of the principles of Good and Evil, or the mediaeval contempt of the world, it is similar to antiquity in this: it no longer accepts the Victorian dogma that "this is the best of all possible worlds"; and it is oriented to values which transcend both man himself and the material world. S. G. F.

Brandon is representative of these modern prophets:

We find that the further development of scientific knowledge since the nineteenth century has done little to confirm the optimistic doctrine of Man's inevitable progress . . . indeed, to the contrary, it has had the effect of exposing its lack of factual justification and of making obvious the intellectual nihilism which has inevitably followed the supplanting of the old Christian interpretation of the universe and Man's place and purpose therein by a discipline based exclusively on the data of sensory experience. . . . The revelation of the inadequacy of the Weltanschauung of its optimistic humanism is exposing at last the seriousness of its gradual and tacit abandonment of the traditional Christian interpretation of life. The steady sapping of its spiritual foundation has left the edifice of Western culture perilously balanced on the flimsy basis of a few traditional sentiments. That the whole structure is in danger of collapse is the opinion of many men of learning and insight of varying schools of thought. Clearly Western culture must either renew its spiritual foundations and acquire an effective Weltanschauung, or else it must surely yield to that culture and civilization which now battles for Man's allegiance under the name of Communism. . . . But the question which here naturally raises itself is that of how far educated human beings would be likely to remain contented with a view of life which definitely limited the field of their hopes and fears to the event of their death.²

Certainly then the god of progress is being called to testify; and the scientific glorification of the material world is no longer without its dissenters. In a context such as this, therefore, the concept of mutability takes on much historical significance.

This is a study of the theme of mutability in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer. In view of the importance of mutability in Chaucer's poetry, it is in a way surprising that a study of this theme in his complete works has not yet been undertaken. In 1915, G. L. Kittredge wrote:

Now this thought--that life and love and happiness are transitory--is not, with Chaucer, a commonplace reflection, with which he has only a concern that is conventional and impersonal and external. Nor is it, again, a dogma of experience, to which he has dispassionately adjusted his philosophic scheme. It is an element in his nature: it beats in his heart, and flows in his veins, and catches in his throat, and hammers in his head. All men are mortal, no doubt, but seldom do we find one in whom mortality is a part of his consciousness.³

But beyond pointing out the expression of mutability in one of Criseyde's speeches (Troilus, V, 1051-85; Kittredge, p. 129) he does not pursue the theme to any great extent.

In 1917, Bernard Jefferson, in Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius,⁴ studied many aspects of the mutability theme found in Chaucer's works, such as fortune, fame, true and false felicity. He also indicated all the passages in the works of Chaucer which find their sources in the Consolation, some of which deal with other aspects of the mutability theme; but these he merely catalogued. Jefferson was concerned, however, primarily with the Consolation as Chaucer's source. As a result, therefore, he rightfully

takes no account of the large amount of mutability material in the works of Chaucer not found in the Consolation; nor does he analyze any of Chaucer's works very thoroughly (with the exception of four of the shorter poems, taken almost exclusively from the Consolation) in attempting to show how mutability functions in the works themselves. For example, Jefferson says about the Troilus: "The entire poem abounds in allusions to the transitory nature of worldly joys, now brightening, now darkening, but ever fading entirely away in the end" (pp. 125-26). He makes little attempt to develop this idea; it is, in fact, almost incidental to his discussion of Troilus' fatalism, Criseyde's concern for true and false felicity, and the place of Fortune in the poem--all taken, of course, from the Consolation. In short, Jefferson's excellent study is concerned with the mutability theme in the works of Chaucer in so far as this theme appears in the Consolation.

Of course there have been a number of articles (or sections of larger works) which, directly or indirectly, treat of the mutability theme in individual poems, The Parliament of Fowls or The Knight's Tale, for example. These studies are by their very nature limited; often they are even erroneous because they fail to take into account not only the

mediaeval attitude toward, and the mediaeval use of the theme of, mutability generally, but they also fail to consider the general pattern of Chaucer's use of the theme throughout his entire works. These studies of the individual poems will, in fact, be examined throughout the course of this dissertation. There are, moreover, numerous obiter dicta on mutability in the works of Chaucer, such as in Willard Farnham's examination of the Troilus as a De Casu tragedy,⁵ or in discussions of the character of Criseyde.⁶ As yet, however, scholarship has not offered an adequate study of mutability as such, nor has Chaucer scholarship offered an adequate study of the theme as it is found and functions in Chaucer's poetry generally.

When one attempts to write about mutability, his first problem is to define the term. This statement is not so naive as it might appear. The OED defines mutability as "disposition to change, variableness, inconstancy." The adjective, "mutable," is defined as "liable or subject to change or alteration"; "fickle; variable." Now this is obvious enough: this is the aspect of mutability which is most commonly associated with Fortuna. The problems, however, are two: the OED's definition is not so broad as it might be and some of the critics have used the term somewhat vaguely. As for the

former, the idea of "transitoriness" should be included in the concept of "mutability"; no better evidence for this can be had than in Geoffrey Chaucer's translation of the Consolation of Philosophy:

But the schynyng of thi forme (that is to seyn,
the beute of thi body), how swyftly passynge is
it, and how transitorie!

Certes it es more flyttyng than the muta-
bilite of floures of the somer sesoun.⁷

It was Chaucer, incidentally, who first introduced the terms "mutability" and "mutable" into the English language, in his translation of Boethius' Consolation.⁸ As for the critics' vague use of the terms, I shall cite but a few examples.

In Wells's A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, for example, we read: "The 'ubi sunt' formula, on which is based the second section of this piece [The Sayings of St. Bernard], has well been said to be 'as universal as the themes of mutability and mischance.'"⁹ Is "ubi sunt" something separate from "mutability" (to say nothing of the precise distinction between "mutability" and "mischance")? Benjamin Kurtz, in speaking of Bernard of Cluny's De Contemptu Mundi, says this: "But no extreme of horror is reached, and the theme dissolves into a long treatment of the mutability of all earthly glory, with much of the old Ubi Sunt formula."¹⁰ Kurtz deals principally with the putrefaction

theme and its presence in the Old English Address of the Lost Soul to the Body. In the process, he says that "Homer's reminder of the mutability of lovely manhood is not decayed flesh, but the generations of leaves scattered on the earth, while the forest puts forth again" (p. 250). This certainly implies that the theme of putrefaction is a part of, if not intimately related to, the theme of mutability. And what Kurtz implies, Huizinga explicitly states. In regard to the Middle Ages, he says:

All that the meditations on death of the monks of yore had produced, was now condensed into a very primitive image. This vivid image, continually impressed upon all minds, had hardly assimilated more than a single element of the great complex of ideas relating to death, namely, the sense of the perishable nature of all things. It would seem, at times, as if the soul of the declining Middle Ages only succeeded in seeing death under this aspect.

The endless complaint of the frailty of all earthly glory was sung to various melodies. Three motifs may be distinguished. The first is expressed by the question: where are now all those who once filled the world with their splendour? The second motif dwells on the frightful spectacle of human beauty gone to decay. The third is the death-dance: death dragging along men of all conditions and ages.¹¹

Huizinga's "motifs" are the clearest distinction of "themes" within the theme of mutability which I have seen anywhere. But the fact remains that putrefaction and the death-dance are parts of the mutability theme; exactly where does one

draw the distinction? And is not the death-dance itself part of the mortality theme and therefore separate from the mutability theme? Lest it be thought that I am deliberately confusing the issue, note George Williamson's observation on this point: "In seventeenth-century England the ideas of mutability and mortality unite in the quarrel about the decay of the world."¹² Mutability and mortality, then, are separate concepts. But is such actually the case? Immediately after Kittredge notes Chaucer's interest in mutability (transitoriness) he says: "All men are mortal, no doubt, but seldom do we find one in whom mortality is a part of his consciousness" (supra, p. iii).

In 1920, Edwin Greenlaw attempted to show that the predominant source of Spenser's Two Cantos of Mutabilitie is Lucretius' De Rerum Natura.¹³ Having summarized the fifteenth book of Ovid's Metamorphoses, Greenlaw concludes: "Ovid deals with change; Spenser and Lucretius deal with Mutability" (p. 458). If this is not very clear, William P. Cumming, in his article "The Influence of Ovid on Spenser," shows precisely what Greenlaw means:

His statement is that Lucretius and Spenser deal with the goddess of Mutabilitie while Ovid deals with Change. By this he means that Ovid represents things as endlessly changing into something new, while Lucretius and

Spenser deal with struggles against supernaturalism as typified in Spenser by the arguments of Mutability. Ovid is interested in mere Protean shifting from shape to shape; Lucretius and Spenser are concerned with the mortality of all things, physical and supernatural. Philosophically, the chief source of Mutability is Lucretius's De Rerum Natura.¹⁴

George Williamson's statement is worth quoting at length because it shows how thoroughly confusing this whole matter might be. In discussing the viewpoints of both Greenlaw and Cumming, he says:

For Spenser's immediate source Professor Cumming has the stronger case, but in allowing for the complexities of the problem Professor Greenlaw has the advantage, since he has more regard for the confusion of philosophies in a mind like Spenser's. And yet not even he makes a sufficient allowance, if Hakewill may be a case in point. After quoting Philo on the reciprocal vicissitude of the four elements of the world, Hakewill remarks:

Hitherto Philo, wherein after his vsuall wont he Platonizes, the same being in effect to bee found in Platoes Timaeus, as also in Aristotles booke de Mundo, if it be his, in Damascene, and Gregory Nyssen. And most elegantly the wittiest of Poets [Apologie or Declaration of the Power and Providence of God in the Government of the World (1627), p. 113].

Whereupon he quotes Ovid's Metamorphoses (15,241-51) on the mutation of the elements. From this instance it would appear that Spenser could have felt that he was still Platonizing rather than introducing discordant Lucretian factors when he argued the case of mutability. But Hakewill then adds a passage from Du Bartas developing the Pythagorean philosophy of change, which here

involves the elements, their combination in a harmony like music, the Lucretian figure of the alphabet to explain the diverse objects of the world, and finally the Ovidian lump of wax with its mutation of shapes [ibid., p. 114]. Other arguments from Lucretius in this passage show how easily Du Bartas, Hakewill, or Spenser could mingle or confuse the Lucretian theory of mortality with the Pythagorean philosophy of change. In the perception of a Lucretian feeling for mortality in Spenser, Professor Greenlaw comes closer to the truth than Professor Cumming, for Ovid's Pythagorean discourse never arrives at the idea of the decay of the world, and this is precisely where Spenser does arrive.¹⁵

The concept of "mutability," then, contrary to the OED, certainly involves more than simply the concept of change. Ovid's doctrine that "all things are ever changing; nothing perishes" can never be equated with the idea of mutability. The concept of mutability, properly speaking, involves the concept of mortality. Let me state it this way: the concept of mutability always includes the concept of mortality; but the concept of mortality does not necessarily include that of mutability. In a word, one can consider the fact of death without seeing life as a transitory or a changing-toward-death process. It all has to do with the concept of change; and different ages have enwrapped this concept in the colors of their own milieux. Looked at from a historical perspective, Ovid's doctrine (that of Pythagoras, of course)

is somewhat of an exception: not very many philosophers have ever taken the doctrine of the transmigration of souls very seriously; and certainly the doctrine has had very little influence in the history of Western literature. But there is a much more important consideration of this word "change," and the viewpoints of the different ages can best be seen in the light of the idea of progress.

In general, one might say that until the idea of progress began to take hold in the mid-seventeenth century, the whole Western world viewed any kind of change as a change for the worse, a process toward decay. What J. B. Bury says about the Greek philosophers holds good from ancient times until a short time beyond the end of the Renaissance. He states:

The general view of Greek philosophers was that they were living in a period of inevitable degeneration and decay--inevitable because it was prescribed by the nature of the universe. We have only an imperfect knowledge of the influential speculations of Heraclitus, Pythagoras, and Empedocles, but we may take Plato's tentative philosophy of history to illustrate the trend and the prejudices of Greek thought on this subject. The world was created and set going by the Deity, and, as his work, it was perfect; but it was not immortal and had in it the seeds of decay. . . .

The theories of Plato are only the most illustrious example of the tendency characteristic of Greek philosophical thinkers to idealize the immutable as possessing a higher value than that which varies. This affected all their social speculations. They believed in the ideal of an absolute order in

society, from which, when it is once established, any deviation must be for the worse. Aristotle, considering the subject from a practical point of view, laid down that changes in an established social order are undesirable, and should be as few and slight as possible (Politics, ii, 5). This prejudice against change excluded the apprehension of civilization as a progressive movement. It did not occur to Plato or anyone else that a perfect order might be attainable by a long series of changes and adaptations. Such an order, being an embodiment of reason, could be created only by a deliberate and immediate act of a planning mind. It might be devised by the wisdom of a philosopher or revealed by the Deity. Hence the salvation of a community must lie in preserving intact, so far as possible, the institutions imposed by the enlightened lawgiver, since change meant corruption and disaster. These a priori principles account for the admiration of the Spartan state entertained by many Greek philosophers, because it was supposed to have preserved unchanged for an unusually long period a system established by an inspired legislator.

Thus time was regarded as the enemy of humanity. Horace's verse,

Damnosa quid non imminuit dies?

"time depreciates the value of the world," expresses the pessimistic axiom accepted in most systems of ancient thought.¹⁶

E. K. Rand testifies to the persistence of this same attitude throughout the Middle Ages:

If young and old in the Middle Ages saw visions and dreamed dreams, if they sometimes looked gloomily on the pleasures of the present, it was partly because they read the work of Cicero, glossed by Macrobius. They might have felt far less dismal had they not been so well read in the Classics of antiquity. For the Greeks were not as they sometimes are pictured,--happy children playing under a cloudless sky,--nor was the typical Roman mood a stolid satisfaction in laws and

roads and conquests. There are multitudes of attitudes and emotions, and there is plenty of somber pessimism in the literatures of both nations.

What doth not ruinous time degrade? The age of our sires, worse than that of theirs, has brought us forth more sinful still, soon to give birth to offspring yet more vicious.

This is from the genial Horace, who, imbibing something of his bitterness from Hesiod, thus closes a series of odes addressed to the rising generation and intended to hold aloft for their benefit the great guiding principles of life.¹⁷

And, finally, Richard Foster Jones discusses this attitude as it prevailed throughout the Renaissance; indeed Jones points out some extremely significant ramifications which evolved from this pessimistic attitude:

This theory [that the moderns are inferior to the ancients] is, of course, the direct antithesis of the idea of progress, which has profoundly influenced modern thought. And just as to those who were imbued with the latter idea any change seemed a change for the better, so in the Renaissance those who were oppressed by the belief in a declining universe considered every change a change for the worse. . . .

Perhaps, more than we discover in print, this lingering conception of universal decay was at the bottom of the worship of antiquity and the regard for Latin and Greek writers which characterized the criticism of the neo-classical period. Somewhere underlying the doctrine of imitation, which oppressed the age, must have been the feeling that modern minds were by necessity inferior to ancient. Pope's "Hail, Bards triumphant, born in happier days" could hardly have been inspired by any other idea but this. Though the critics of the day seldom express the theory directly, it is not improbable that in their subconscious minds resided the conviction of

inevitable inferiority through the decline of nature. How else could a critical theory like that of close imitation secure such a strong hold upon intelligent people, or how could there have been such extravagant and servile worship of men who had lived many ages before? At any rate, when the first conspicuous onslaught on imitation appeared after the middle of the next century, the author found it necessary to attack this very idea of nature's decay, and that, too, from the scientific point of view. In fact, Edward Young's Conjectures on Original Composition, which in places sounds startlingly like the mid-seventeenth century, proves that in order to overthrow the doctrine of imitation Young felt compelled to combat the idea of universal decay.¹⁸

It is precisely this concept of change which prevailed, which, in fact, almost exclusively predominated, from classical antiquity to the rise of the idea of progress in the mid-seventeenth century. And Williamson, more than Greenlaw or Cumming, reveals a delicate sensitivity to the mediaeval and Renaissance consciousness when he points out "how easily Du Bartas, Hakewill, or Spenser could mingle or confuse the Lucretian theory of mortality with the Pythagorean philosophy of change" (supra, p. x). The fact that these writers found it unnecessary to distinguish--perhaps, were not even aware of a distinction--between change and mortality shows, I think, their concept of mutability: the Renaissance, and especially the Middle Ages, were never troubled by the assimilation of disparate concepts into their own peculiar sensibility. It

is all right, therefore, for a critic to distinguish the themes of "mutability" and "mortality"--and usually their contexts justify the distinction--but it is important to realize that when one is dealing with pre-progress literature, the concepts are usually not mutually exclusive.

There is a reason, however, why these terms and themes--decay of the world, ubi sunt, mutability, mortality, contempt of the world, putrefaction, and the others--are often not clearly defined, and sometimes are used interchangeably, in the writings of most of the critics and in the literary works themselves. First, the critic's ultimate thesis determines his point of view toward these various concepts. It is understandable and indeed correct, for example, for Willard Farnham, in contrasting the mediaeval contempt for and the Renaissance acceptance of the world, to say that the mediaeval tragical narrative, such as Boccaccio's De Casibus Virorum; the putrefaction theme which predominated all other aspects of death at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries; and the ubi sunt poems and the Ars Moriendi treatises--to say that all these are forms of the contempt of the world theme.¹⁹ He is speaking broadly and we know what he means. Too, it is all right, for example, for Huizinga to relate, and for Kurtz to separate,

the mutability and the putrefaction themes: such clarification of concepts is completely justifiable in the contexts of their over-all theses. If, therefore, it is confusing to the uninitiated who are seeking a clarification of these terms, it is, nevertheless, unavoidable. The second reason that these terms are not always clearly defined is the very nature of the ideas themselves. Any one of these themes, or terms, can in a given context be used as a common denominator for the others: it is largely a question of emphasis. One can view putrefaction, for example, as a memento mori or as a memento vitae brevae. One can view the De Casibus form as the mutability of the goddess Fortuna; as revealing the transitory nature of worldly goods; or as a form of contempt of the world, because the world's goods are illusory and can ensnare man to his damnation. The points of view are endless!

The concept of mutability, however, is more common to all these themes, and it is therefore more valid as a common denominator than any other of these concepts. If I may use Huizinga's analogy, and broaden it, I should say that all of these other themes are motifs of the theme of mutability. I say this because the classical, mediaeval, and Renaissance attitudes toward change are basic in, and are subsumed under,

all these other concepts. It is, indeed, much more basic than the attitude toward death; for the classical and Christian attitudes toward death were quite different. It is this concept which has the most firm philosophical basis, which has occupied the philosophers from the time of Heraclitus to the time of Lipsius; indeed, even to the time of Alfred North Whitehead, who prophesied that "that religion will conquer which can render clear to popular understanding some eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact."²⁰ It is this concept, more than any of the others, which is contained in the genres, such as the ubi sunt, contempt of the world, the De Casibus, and the Golden Age, but which is itself too broad and too abstract to be fully contained in any one genre.

The mediaeval concept of mutability (and attitude toward change) was not essentially different from that of classical times. It was, certainly, more conscious and therefore more intense, chiefly because Christianity emphasized those elements in Greek and Roman philosophies which lay at the basis of the concept of mutability. It was, too, more complex because their heritage was an amalgamation of Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Christian (both Biblical and Patristic) thought. In brief, the mediaeval concept of mutability

cannot be completely understood apart from its origins and influences. For this reason, I have devoted the chapter which follows to the study of the history of the concept. At the end of this investigation, I have appended illustrations of the various motifs on the theme of mutability, such as the ubi sunt and the decay of the world variations of the theme; this, partly because of the critics' confusion of the "motifs" with the "theme," but chiefly because these themes can be identified in the works of Chaucer. In view of the fact that there is no study of the history of the concept of mutability as such, this chapter might possibly have an incidental usefulness in itself.

The second chapter makes a study of mutability in the Consolation of Philosophy, in Innocent III's De Contemptu Mundi, and in Le Roman de la Rose; the first two Chaucer translated completely, and the last, at least in part. These are not only representative works of the Middle Ages, but they strongly influenced Chaucer's thought; and since he translated these works, the suspicion is well founded that they are extremely valuable in illuminating his sensibility.

Chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six study the theme of mutability in the works of Chaucer: in relation to his sources and in its artistic function in each of the poems in

which it appears. The various motifs of the theme are identified in his poetry. The aim of these chapters is threefold: first, to show that the theme of mutability is much more important in Chaucer's poetry than has been hitherto realized; second, to formulate some generalizations, at least tenuously, which will not only illumine Chaucer's works generally, but which might suggest a background, if not indications, for interpreting his poems in particular; and third, to arrive at some insight into Chaucer's poetic sensibility, that complex mechanism, as it were, which unifies his entire poetic vision and which inspires the delicate balance or tension in his poetry between the truly earthly and the truly spiritual, the truly worldly and the truly supernatural, indeed, that element of his poetic vision which originates and maintains his elusive poise.

I have said that in a way it is surprising that a study of mutability in the works of Chaucer has never been adequately undertaken. In another way, however, this is not surprising. The final impression of Chaucer's poetry is life-in-fullness and life-in-abundance; the epitome, in fact, of action, of movement, of humor, of joie de vivre, of love: in short, we rarely think of Chaucer as a tragic poet (even the Troilus is not sustained grief, like a Greek tragedy). The

theme of mutability is not so important on the surface of Chaucer's poetry as it is at the core of his poetic vision. It determines his Weltanschauung, it reveals his sensibility, it restrains his complete commitment to life--it even restrains his final commitment as a poet. The mediaeval concept of mutability is quite different from the modern concept of disillusionment and its vast Wasteland.²¹ The mediaeval man knew that this was a wasteland all along, but he also viewed life as a pilgrimage. Beyond the horizon he saw another world. It was the eternal city, out of the reach of time, of change, of decay. And if these eternal shadows forever outlined the transitoriness of the world and forever informed the immediacy of time, this did not mean that the pilgrims could not have fun along the way; in fact, this eternal shrine, always lingering in the background, "gave to the incidents of life a zeal and color which they might otherwise have lacked" and "added intensity to thought and energy to passion."²² Chaucer was such a mediaeval man; but beneath all the joie, and gladnesse, and jolitee, he never for a moment forgot that it was half-way pryme.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

¹I do not mean to imply here that the mutability theme completely disappeared from literature after the mid-seventeenth century. It is found, in fact, in the writings of Coleridge, Keats, Arnold, Thomas Wolfe, and others. The theme is not exceedingly prominent, however, in these writers. I am speaking of general trends in history and in literature, and, as such, my statement in the text is valid.

²Time and Mankind: An Historical and Philosophical Study of Mankind's Attitude to the Phenomena of Change (New York, 1951), pp. 186-88. See also J. B. Bury, The Idea of Progress (London, 1928), pp. 332-33; pp. 351-52; and Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background in Anchor Books (New York, 1953), pp. 17 ff.

³Chaucer and His Poetry (Cambridge, Mass., 1915), p. 72.

⁴Princeton, N. J., 1917.

⁵The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (New York, 1936), pp. 137 ff.

⁶See R. K. Root, ed., The Book of Troilus and Criseyde (Princeton, N. J., 1926), p. xlviii. See also Kittredge, op. cit., p. 129.

⁷F. N. Robinson, 2d ed. (Boston, 1957), iii, pr. 8, 35-39. Throughout this dissertation, all my references to Chaucer's works are from this edition. It might be conveniently mentioned here that at the first citation of a work I shall

give full bibliographical information; thereafter I shall use abbreviated citation, and in the text when possible.

⁸Kittredge also uses the term to mean "transitory"; "Everything passes, mutability is the order of the world." Op. cit., p. 129. I am well aware that "transitoriness" might be the effect or the nether aspect of "changeableness"; but this is not always the case: the distinction has to be made.

⁹J. E. Wells, A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1400 (New Haven, 1916), p. 389.

¹⁰"Gifer the Worm: An Essay Toward the History of an Idea," University of California Publications in English, II (1929), No. 2, 235-61.

¹¹J. Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages, in Anchor Books (New York, 1956), pp. 138-39.

¹²"Mutability, Decay, and Seventeenth-Century Melancholy," ELH, II (1935), 126.

¹³"Spenser and Lucretius," SP, XVII (1920), 439-64.

¹⁴SP, XXVIII (1931), 249.

¹⁵Op. cit., pp. 135-36.

¹⁶Op. cit., pp. 9-12.

¹⁷"Mediaeval Gloom and Mediaeval Uniformity," Speculum, I (1926), 257.

¹⁸Ancients and Moderns: A Study of the Background of the "Battle of the Books," Washington University Studies in Language and Literature, N. S., VI (St. Louis, 1936), 29-42.

¹⁹Op. cit., pp. 41-42.

²⁰Adventures of Ideas (New York, 1935), p. 41.

²¹It is interesting to note Willard Farnham's expression that T. S. Eliot "performs a Dance of Death through the Waste Land of our existence." His remark immediately following this establishes the difference between the mediaeval and modern wastelands: "He sees our fruitfulness gone and an utter lack in us to produce anything but an incongruous juxtaposition of useless activities." In Essays in Criticism by Members of the Department of English, University of California (Berkeley, 1929), p. 29.

²²Theodore Spencer, Death and Elizabethan Tragedy: A Study of Convention and Opinion in the Elizabethan Drama (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), p. 37. For a similar idea, see Dorothy Sayers' "Introduction" to her translation of Dante's Il Purgatorio in The Penguin Classics (Edinburgh, 1955), p. 23.

CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPT OF MUTABILITY FROM ANTIQUITY THROUGH THE MIDDLE AGES

The mediaeval attitude toward mutability is a complex of many influences. It was inherited, essentially, from Greek and Roman philosophy and literature. It was influenced by Jewish thought handed down in the Old Testament and in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. It was, finally, influenced most importantly by Revelation and the whole structure of Christianity. In fact, as the idea of an immutable God and the promise of eternal happiness became more real to the people of the Middle Ages, in that proportion did life and happiness become more transitory and the world more insignificant. The theology of Christianity, however, was formulated largely in terms of the pre-Christian philosophies, and the classical influence in general was never absent in the Middle Ages. Since mutability is primarily a philosophical concept or, more accurately, since the meaning of "mutability" depends upon a particular philosophical attitude

toward change, the full understanding of the mediaeval sensibility of change-toward-decay cannot be adequately studied apart from its influences.

For this reason, therefore, this chapter presents a documentary outline of the history of the concept of mutability. The theme of mutability, as I have pointed out in the Introduction, permeates, and manifests itself in the motifs of the Golden Age (the nether aspect of the decay of the world), ubi sunt, putrefaction, and contempt of the world. After this documentary outline will follow a brief explanation and a few examples of each of these motifs of the mutability theme. Thus their relationship to the general theme of mutability and to each other will perhaps be made clearer.¹

MUTABILITY

The phenomenon of change has been perceptible from the very beginnings of mankind, but the first person to attempt a philosophical explanation of it was Heraclitus of Ephesus (536-470 B.C.).² For Heraclitus, all things were in a continual state of flux: "Into the same river you could not step twice, for other and still other waters are flowing" (XLI); and "To those entering the same river, other and

still other waters flow" (XLII). Man himself participates in the flux: he too is changing, as is the river, so that, "Into the same river we both step and do not step. We both are and are not" (LXXXI). "In change is rest" (LXXXIII); and, "Being born, they will only to love and die, or rather to find rest, and they leave children who likewise are to die" (LXXXVI). "Time is a child playing at draughts, a child's kingdom" (LXXIX). Strife brings all things into existence (LXII). This tension is thus expressed: "The name of the bow is life, but its work is death" (LXVI).

The flux, then, is a major part of the philosophy of Heraclitus. But Heraclitus never attempts to give an ultimate reason for the flux, nor, in his philosophy, does this change imply a loss: life and death are one in the circular continuum of change. Such a philosophy can only be optimistic about the "hurrying out of existence," since death does not imply a loss.³ Indeed the concept of mutability takes on significance only when this world is seen as transitory (implying a loss) in contrast to the other world of permanence and fixity: this contrast we find in Plato.

In Plato, says Vossler, "for the first time were united the most emphatic assertion of individual immortality and the most emphatic denial of a sensuous future life,"

and he continues:

At this point the religious question of the Here-after enters upon its philosophic stage. . . . The realization that the future world is supersensuous and invisible passes on as a permanent acquisition and a philosophic leven--now less, now more, effective--into the religion of Christendom.⁴

Plato, by his construction of the World of Ideas, made an absolute distinction between the world of sense, becoming and visible, and the place of the mind or being, invisible and unchangeable. Timaeus says:

First, if I am not mistaken, we must determine, What is that which always is and has no becoming; and what is that which is always becoming and has never any being? That which is apprehended by reflection and reason always is, and is the same; that, on the other hand, which is conceived by opinion with the help of sensation and without reason, is in a process of becoming and perishing, but never really is.⁵

The changing world of phenomena, in fact, merely confuses the intellect. In the following passage from the Phaedo, Socrates is explaining to Cebes:

"Again, we said this some time ago, that when the soul makes use of the assistance of the body for the study of something, by using sight or hearing or some other sense--for this is the bodily method, the study of something through sense--it is dragged by the body towards what is never constant, and it vacillates, and is confused, and dithers as though it were drunk, because it is in contact with things that are in that sort of state?"

"Yes."⁶

Socrates then discusses the fate of the pure soul, the soul

which has overcome the life of the body and is now separated from it:

"Then in this state it goes away to the place which is like itself, invisible, to that which is divine and deathless and wise, and when it arrives there it is its lot to be happy, freed from uncertainty and folly and fears and wild desires and all the other ills from which man suffers, and (as is said of those who have been initiate into the Mysteries) in very truth spending the rest of time in company with gods? Is that to be our account of the matter, Cebes, or something different?"

"That most certainly," said Cebes. (Ibid., p. 79)

The greatest achievement and at the same time the very nucleus of Plato's theology is the idea of immortality. The human soul comes from the divine realm of Ideas and, like the Ideas, is without beginning or end. Its contact with the body and other material phenomena defiles it, and only through abstinence and contemplation of the Good can it again become pure. Thus, "the denial of what is ephemeral is in itself and for itself virtue, immortality, and blessedness" (Vossler, I, 27).

In brief, the only reality for Plato is the World of Forms; the material world is devoid of essence and therefore non-existent.⁷ Henceforth, this absolute transcendence of the divine, spiritual realissimum will give to humanity its true perspective and range. Indeed the consciousness of the flux and the transitoriness of the material world, as

opposed to the permanence and the eternity of the other world, will have a fixed place in the history of ideas. Christian thought will assume this Platonic distinction and emphasize it; the awareness of the mutability of this world and the things of this world will reach its climax in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance. Because the influence of Aristotle, however, is most important in mediaeval cosmology, some attention may now be devoted to his more influential works.

The notions that the region beneath the moon is changeable and full of corruption and that the region beyond the moon is unchangeable originated with Pythagoras.⁸ It was Aristotle's influence, however, which was responsible for this distinction as we find it in the Middle Ages. In De Mundo, having described the celestial region with the fixed stars and the six planets which are below them, he writes:

After the aetherial and divine element, which is arranged in a fixed order, as we have declared, and is also unchangeable, unalterable, and impassive, there comes next the element that is through the whole of its extent liable to change and alteration, and is, in short, destructible and perishable.⁹

In the same work, he continues:

God . . . maintains the orderliness and preservation of the whole: except that he is not in the centre--

for here lies the earth, this turbulent, troubled place--but high aloft, pure in a pure region, which we rightly call "heaven" (ouranos) because it forms the uppermost boundary (oros . . . ano) or "Olympus" because it shines brightly all over (hololampas) and is removed from all darkness and disorderly motion such as occurs among us when there is a storm or a violent wind. . . . all ages . . . allot the upper region to God: all of us men stretch out our hands to the heavens when we pray. . . . So also the same place is occupied by the most honoured of perceptible things, the stars and the sun and the moon; and for this reason only the heavenly bodies always keep the same order and arrangement, and are never changed or altered; while the transient things on earth admit many alterations and conditions. (Ibid., pp. 399-401)

It was Aristotle, in fact, who is responsible for the absolute distinction between the "terrestrial" or "sublunary" or "elementary" matter and the "celestial" matter, or a nobler "fifth body" (pempton soma) which he called aither "from the fact that it "runs always" (aei thein) and eternally."¹⁰

"Aristotle invented the whole unhappy theory because he wanted to maintain the divinity of the heavenly bodies, and therefore to assert that they are unchanging and move always with absolute uniformity."¹¹ It is the breakdown of this theory which is ultimately responsible for the Renaissance concept of the decay of the world and, consequently, of Renaissance man's melancholy.

Of all the classical writers, however, Lucretius (99-55 B.C.) has the most to say in regard to mutability. A

major interest of Lucretius in his De Rerum Natura is mortality: it is useless to fear death; it will come inevitably. The world is "a ceaseless warfare between life and death, the constant succession of forms taking momentary shape out of matter that is itself imperishable" (Greenlaw, p. 453). If one understands the universal law by which "Nature preserves her own immortality while destroying the visible manifestations of it" (loc. cit.), that "fear of Acheron" will be "sent packing which troubles the life of man from its deepest depths, suffuses all with the blackness of death, and leaves no delight clean and pure."¹² In the process of unveiling these horrors of death, Lucretius has much to say about the mutability of individual objects. The dominant theme in the following passage is that of mortality, but notice how the concept of mutability creeps in and how the two concepts are, ultimately, intricately related:

Besides, what is this great and evil lust of life that drives us to be agitated amidst doubt and peril? There is an end fixed for the life of mortals, and death cannot be avoided, but die we must. Again we move and have our being always amidst the same things, and by living we cannot forge for ourselves any new pleasure; but while we have not what we crave, that seems to surpass all else; afterwards when we have attained that, we crave something else; one unchanging thirst of life fills us and our mouths are for ever agape: and it is uncertain what fortune the next years may bring, what chance has in store, what end awaits us. And by protracting life we do not deduct one jot from the time

when death shall last, nor are we strong enough to diminish that so as to leave a shorter time after our taking off. Nay, you may live to complete as many generations as you will, nevertheless that everlasting death will still be waiting, and no less long a time will he be no more who has made an end of life, with today's sun, than he who fell many a month and year before. (Ibid., i, ll. 1076-1094, pp. 245-47)

And in another part of the same work:

Sadly also the cultivator of the degenerate and shrivelled vine rails at the progress of time and wearies heaven; not comprehending that all things gradually decay, and go to the tomb outworn by the ancient lapse of years. (Ibid., i, ll. 1171-74, p. 169)

The bulk of Lucretius' work treats primarily of mortality: Lucretius argues that since the parts which compose the whole (the kosmos and everything in it) are mortal, the whole is therefore mortal. His arguments for the decay of the parts, however, are based primarily on the concept of birth-growth-decay. The following passage, in fact, sums up his method of argument very well:

For certainly we must own ourselves convinced that many elements flow away and pass out from things; but still more must be passed in, until they have touched the pinnacle of growth. After that by minute degrees age breaks the strength and mature vigour, and melts into decay. (Ibid., ii, ll. 1128-32, p. 165; under-scoring my own)

Thus the concepts of age, change, and time are usually involved in Lucretius' discussions of mortality; this is indeed symptomatic of the general difficulty of attempting

to distinguish the two concepts of mutability and mortality in the pre-progress writers. The following passage again shows how the concept of time is involved in the concept of mortality:

Again, do you not see that stones even are conquered by time, that tall turrets do fall and rocks do crumble, that the gods' temples and their images wear out and crack, nor can their holy divinity carry forward the boundaries of fate, or strive against nature's laws? Again, do we not see the monuments of men fall to pieces, asking whether you believe that they in their turn must grow old? Do we not see lumps of rock roll down torn from the lofty mountains, too weak to bear and endure the mighty force of time finite? (Ibid., v, ll. 306-315, pp. 361-62)

This attitude of Lucretius is typical of that of the classical period. Unlike Plato, Lucretius does not contrast the mutable world with immutable reality, but he does, nonetheless, realize that "we have not here an abiding city." This same pessimistic attitude is found in the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, and if the former emphasized the aspect of mortality, the latter emphasizes that of mutability. This Epicurean and this Stoic looked at the physical universe in the same way; they merely reacted differently.

In Book IV of his Meditations, Marcus Aurelius makes these observations:

34. Willingly give thyself up to Clotho, allowing her to spin thy thread into whatever things she please.

35. Everything is only for a day, both that which remembers and that which is remembered.

36. Observe constantly that all things take place by change, and accustom thyself to consider that the nature of the Universe loves nothing so much as to change the things which are and to make new things like them. For everything that exists is in a manner the seed of that which will be. But thou art thinking only of seeds which are cast into the earth or into a womb: but this is a very vulgar notion.

37. Thou wilt soon die, and thou art not yet simple, nor free from perturbations, nor without suspicion of being hurt by external things, nor kindly disposed towards all; nor dost thou yet place wisdom only in acting justly.

41. Thou art a little soul bearing about a corpse, as Epictetus used to say (i, c. 19). . . .

43. Time is like a river made up of the events which happen, and a violent stream; for as soon as a thing has been seen, it is carried away, and another comes in its place, and this will be carried away too.

48. . . . To conclude, always observe how ephemeral and worthless human beings are, and what was yesterday a little mucus, to-morrow will be a mummy or ashes. Pass then through this little space of time conformably to nature, and end thy journey in content, just as an olive falls off when it is ripe, blessing nature who produced it, and thanking the tree on which it grew.¹³

In Book VI, he comments further:

15. Some things are hurrying into existence, and others are hurrying out of it; and of that which is coming into existence part is already extinguished. Motions and changes are continually renewing the world, just as the uninterrupted course of time is always renewing the infinite duration of ages. In this flowing stream then, on which there is no abiding, what is there of the things which hurry by on which a man would set a high price? It would be just as if a man should fall in love with one of the sparrows which fly by, but it has already passed out of sight. Something of this kind is the very life of every man, like the exhalation

of the blood and the respiration of the air. For such as it is to have once drawn in the air and to have given it back, which we do every moment, just the same is it with the whole respiratory power, which thou didst receive at thy birth yesterday and the day before, to give it back to the element from which thou didst first draw it. (Ibid., pp. 236-37)

It is convenient at this point to glance back at the authors who have been discussed so far in order to see their relationships to each other and to anticipate the influence which they will have on posterity. Philosophically, Heraclitus was the first to broach seriously the problem of change: for him all things were always in a constant state of flux. Behind this flux was a cosmic urge which manifested itself in the strife of opposites. There was, furthermore, no loss in change; the change amounted to a chemical change, wherein a loss is not actually involved, but one thing really, totally, and completely becomes something else. This doctrine of Heraclitus was, in fact, an optimistic one and was strongly contrary to the popular pessimism in regard to change which prevailed in Ephesus and in all of Greece.

Having been influenced by Heraclitus' theory of flux and Socrates' theory of universals, Plato came along with his World of Forms as opposed to the world of phenomena: the world of the constant flux, of change, of shadows, of unreality. From then on there could be no question about it:

Plato's attitude toward matter and toward the phenomenal world became irrevocably fixed in the history of ideas, and it is precisely this attitude which passed on to Christianity and to the Middle Ages. What the popular belief had been in regard to change until this time had now become philosophically formulated, but formulated in such a way that change gave reason for even more pessimism. Now, matter, opposed to the Good and to the World of Forms, is unreal; it lacks being; it is, in fact, a hindrance to the complete liberation of the soul. This dichotomy between matter and form is indeed the ultimate philosophical basis of the mediaeval sensibility of the transitoriness of all human things.

Aristotle abandoned Plato's transcendental realm of ideas; he considered these separate forms as an unnecessary duplication. His forms are immanent in reality itself. For Plato "the flux of becoming has being in so far as it participates in the Idea, or in so far as the Idea is embodied in it"; but for Aristotle "there is no essential being except the essences which we discern as such in the stream of reality; and they do not enter becoming from a transcendental realm of being, but essence begets essence in the infinite, uncreated stream of reality itself" (Voegelin, III, 274). But while Aristotle abolished Plato's myth, he did distinguish

between prime matter and substantial form; thus the distinction between changeable matter and immutable form was kept.

More important, however, in the history of thought was Aristotle's distinction between the celestial and the terrestrial realms. For Aristotle the world was eternal. The heavenly spheres were composed of a "fifth matter," a quintessence, which did not change or decay. The earth, made up of earth, air, fire, and water, was always changing and subject always to generation and decay. This process on the earth itself was endless, but only because the heavens, which were themselves divine and eternal because of the matter from which they were made, could exercise an unending influence on this our mortal earth. This distinction became absorbed in mediaeval cosmology and remained fixed until it was exploded by the observations of Galileo in the early seventeenth century.

Shortly after Aristotle philosophy fell into a decline. At this time appeared the Epicureans and the Stoics, of whom Lucretius and Marcus Aurelius are, respectively, the representatives. The Epicureans were materialists, who denied the spiritual in any form. Life itself was the result of atoms, and death was simply the displacement of these same atoms.

Change was an endless process because the movement of atoms was a continuous process. Thus, for Lucretius, change, mortality, decay were all parts of an endless process of the movement or displacement of atoms. The universe itself would eventually decay; the atoms, themselves indestructible, would eventually separate and fall into an infinite void--this would be the dissolution of the universe. But like the continual generation and decay here on earth, a new universe would someday be generated; and thus the endless circle would have begun again. The theory is rather simple, philosophically. Lucretius always remains on the mechanical level: he does not attempt to explain very satisfactorily the reason for this constant change in this constant pattern. The point that I should like to make, however, is this: whatever the explanation for change in the world, be it valid or not, is secondary for my purpose. All philosophies at one time or other have had to deal with change; and it has occupied the poetic sensibility just as much as it has philosophical thought.

The Stoics also occupied themselves with change, but as in the case of the Epicureans, it did not occupy the primary focal point of their philosophy. The philosophy of the Stoics was ethically orientated: virtue was their primary

study and all else was subordinate to this. Essentially, the Stoics repudiated the world. And the fact that the world was always changing, the fact that life and the things of the world were transitory--these ideas which are seen so clearly in Marcus Aurelius' Meditations--proved to the Stoic that the world had little value and deserved only contempt. In this way virtue could be more seriously cultivated; it was the only thing, in fact, which was worth cultivating because only this is permanent--as opposed to the external world of fleeting shadows.¹⁴ At the basis of this whole problem of mutability, therefore, lies the distinction, perhaps incipient in Heraclitus but irrevocably made explicit in Plato, of change and permanence, matter and form, mortal and eternal. This is indeed the expression of the conflict of man and accounts for the sensibility of mutability in the poetry of all time, but especially in that of the Middle Ages.

A problem must be mentioned here if one is to complete the picture of the classical philosophical concept of change: The problem of the transmigration of souls or metempsychosis. The most important philosophers of this school are Pythagoras and Empedocles. Like Heraclitus, both of these philosophers were occupied with the phenomena of change, but like him also, they did not view change as necessarily a loss. In a word,

change was not so closely associated with mortality. It would not be necessary to mention these philosophers at all were Ovid's influence not important throughout the Middle Ages in general, and particularly on Spenser's Two Cantos of Mutabilitie in the Renaissance.

In the fifteenth book of his Metamorphoses, Ovid has Pythagoras discuss the universal law of change:

"Nothing in all the world is free from change:
All is a flux of forms that come and go;
While time itself glides on with ceaseless flow;
And like a stream that cannot stop or stay,
The restless hour goes fleeting on its way.
Like wave impelled by wave, which onward speeds,
Both driven itself, and driving what precedes,
So flee the times, and follow as they flee,
For ever new: what was, has ceased to be;
What has not been, is born, as, one by one,
Created ever new, the moments run."¹⁵

Having discussed the changing seasons, Pythagoras continues:

"Our bodies too are changing constantly,
And rest not; nor tomorrow shall we be
What we have been, and are: there was a day
When housed within our mother's womb we lay,
Mere seeds and hopes of men, and closely pressed
Within her body, gave and found no rest,
Till nature brought her craftsman's hand to bear,
And freed us from that home to space and air.
A weakling first the new-born baby sprawled;
Soon four-foot like a jungle beast he crawled;
Then, using some support, by slow degrees,
He stood erect, with weak and trembling knees;
Then swift and strong, through manhood's age he ran
To years of service in life's midmost span;
And these discharged, he reached the final stage,
The swift descent and steep decline of age,
By which the strength that manhood once enjoyed

Is undermined, enfeebled, and destroyed.
 Milo, grown old, falls weeping when he sees
 His arms, which once with those of Hercules
 In mass of solid muscle might have vied,
 Now hanging weak as water at his side;
 And Helen weeps, when in her mirror shown
 She sees the wrinkled features of a crone,
 And thinking: 'Twice in days of old was I
 By lovers seized'; she asks in wonder: 'Why?'
 Devouring time, and envious age! you prey
 On all things, sapping all with long decay;
 All feel the tooth of time, and all are brought
 By slow degrees and lingering death to nought.
 (Ibid., 351-52)

These two passages, isolated as they are from the general context, represent some of the most excellent expressions of the concept of mutability found in classical literature and no doubt had their influence on the Middle Ages. But the general Pythagorean philosophy of change is stated in the next few pages. Note that the Lucretian concept of mortality has been severely modified:

"Nothing, I say, the form it has can hold:
 Inventive nature fashions new from old.
 Believe me, nought is lost the cosmos through:
 Things merely change and take an aspect new.
 We call it birth, when things begin to be
 What they were not; and likewise, when we see
 Things ceasing now to be what once they were,
 We call it death, and thus the names confer.
 Some movement of component parts suppose,
 With interchange of place 'twixt these and those:
 The sum of things is constant: what we call
 Change, that is, change of form, comes swift to all."
 (Ibid., pp. 352-53)

This passage makes clear the Ovidian (Pythagorean) concept

of change. Edwin Greenlaw says that "this conception of mortality, not of mere Protean shifting from shape to shape, is the point differentiating Ovid and Lucretius" (op. cit., p. 458). The following passage makes clear the philosophy behind Ovid's Pythagorean discourse:

"Know this: the sky and all that lies below,
 This earth, and all therein, through changes go.
 We, too, as part of nature, own the law,
 And, being, not only bodies, as we saw,
 But souls with power to fly, who, free to roam,
 In trunks of beasts and cattle make our home,
 Let us, aware that souls may dwell therein
 Of fathers, brothers, or remoter kin,
 Or fellow-men at least, let bodies be;
 Let all from harm and disrespect go free;
 Else may we at our tables serve such meat
 As once Thyestes to his doom did eat.

 Destroy what harms: destroy, but do not eat;
 Take genial foods, and keep your mouths from meat."
 (Op. cit., p. 359)

This makes clear that Ovid's purpose in relating these various transformations has been to illustrate the fact that the souls of men eventually pass into beasts and that therefore animal food should not be eaten: "the Pythagorean passage is truly suited to the book of which it is a part" (Greenlaw, p. 458), since Ovid is dealing with metamorphoses. For this reason Greenlaw says: "Ovid deals with change; Spenser and Lucretius deal with Mutability" (loc. cit.).

This distinction creates a problem: what, indeed, is

the basic distinction between change and mutability? Did not Plato also believe in the transmigration of souls to some extent, as in his allegory of Er? And do not the Christians, as well as Plato before them, believe in the immortality of souls? In a word, does "mutability" necessarily imply complete and final mortality, as Greenlaw says? He has pointed out that, in Spenser, even the gods are mortal, and are therefore subject to decay like everything else; he has also pointed out that in Stanza XVIII Spenser speaks of the decay of the minds of men, an argument which Lucretius had used against the immortality of the soul.

Certainly the concept of "mutability" cannot be limited to that change which leads to complete mortality (in effect, total annihilation), such as we find in Lucretius. If this were the case, we could not speak of mutability in connection with Plato, Aristotle, or Christianity. Nor is it correct, I think, to speak of this Pythagorean change as explained in Ovid's fifteenth book of the Metamorphoses as "mutability." The true definition must be placed somewhere in between these two extremes. We have seen that Ovid brings up the concept of mutability in this book but resolves the problem, finally, in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. Ovid's purpose is to justify metamorphoses, mere

transformations; and for this he chose the Pythagorean doctrine. First of all, Pythagoras does not treat the doctrine here in the fifteenth book of Ovid philosophically; his function in the book is primarily to justify Ovid's poetic undertaking. Thus we have Pythagoras justifying this "mere Protean shifting from shape to shape." Second, the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, whether that of Pythagoras or of Empedocles, does imply mutability and mortality to a certain degree but its emphasis is on the terminus ad quem, and not the terminus a quo, of the change. For this reason, "mortality" does not imply a loss; and the concept of change remains in vacuo, that is, in its most abstract form, apart from any philosophical implications. This concept had no influence whatever on mediaeval philosophy or on mediaeval thought generally.¹⁶ A good example of this is Chaucer's particular fondness for the Metamorphoses and his abiding sense of the mutability of all things. In short, as I have pointed out in the discussion of Plato, the concept of mutability began, and continued to prevail throughout the classical and mediaeval periods, when the dichotomy of matter and spirit was brought into clear focus; the concept of change is vitally understood only when it is contraposed to the concept of permanence.

One of the classical works which had an incalculable influence on the Middle Ages was "Scipio's Dream," the closing portion of the sixth book of the De re publica of Cicero. Since this work was of course known through the translation and commentary of Macrobius, it will therefore be valuable, I think, to examine it.

The idea of sublunar mortality is here. Africanus tells Scipio:

But below the Moon there is nothing except what is mortal and doomed to decay, save only the souls given to the human race by the bounty of the gods, while above the Moon all things are eternal.¹⁷

We have already seen how closely the concepts of "mutability" and "mortality" are related in this cosmological scheme. To make the heavens immortal, Aristotle had to think up a "quint" essence, which was not subject to change and alteration.

Note how the concepts of "mutability" and "mortality" blend in the following passage, wherein Africanus tells his grandson Scipio how brief and inconsequential is the life span and the fame of individuals:

"But of what importance is it to you to be talked of by those who are born after you, when you were never mentioned by those who lived before you, who were no less numerous and were certainly better men; especially as not one of those who may hear our names can retain any recollection for the space of a single year?

For people commonly measure the year by the circuit of the sun, that is, of a single star alone; but when all the stars return to the place from which they at first set forth, and, at long intervals, restore the original configuration of the whole heaven, then that can truly be called a revolving year. I hardly dare to say how many generations of men are contained within such a year; for as once the sun appeared to men to be eclipsed and blotted out, at the time when the soul of Romulus entered these regions, so when the sun shall again be eclipsed at the same point and in the same season, you may believe that all the planets and stars have returned to their original positions, and that a year has actually elapsed. But be sure that a twentieth part of such a year has not yet passed.

"Consequently, if you despair of ever returning to this place, where eminent and excellent men find their true reward, of how little value, indeed, is your fame among men, which can hardly endure for the small part of a single year? Therefore, if you will only look on high and contemplate this eternal home and resting place, you will no longer attend to the gossip of the vulgar herd or put your trust in human rewards for your exploits. Virtue herself, by her own charms, should lead you on to true glory. Let what others say of you be their own concern; whatever it is, they will say it in any case. But all their talk is limited to those narrow regions which you look upon, nor will any man's reputation endure very long, for what men say dies with them and is blotted out with the forgetfulness of posterity." (Ibid., sections xxi-xxiii, pp. 277-79)

Just as man himself and his fame are limited in time, so also is he limited in space; Africanus the Elder had brought Scipio (who was later to conquer Carthage and in doing so to earn the surname of Africanus the Younger) into the circle of the Milky Way. About his dream, Scipio records:

When I gazed in every direction from that point, all

else appeared wonderfully beautiful. There were stars which we never see from the earth, and they were all larger than we have ever imagined. The smallest of them was that farthest from heaven and nearest the earth which shone with a borrowed light [the Moon]. The starry spheres were much larger than the earth; indeed the earth itself seemed to me so small that I was scornful of our empire, which covers only a single point, as it were, upon its surface. (Ibid., section xvi, p. 269)

It is therefore this cosmological vision which enables man to see how brief is his stay on the earth; and how small the earth really is in comparison with the rest of the universe. And like Plato's Republic, which served as Cicero's model for the De re publica, this work strongly contrasts the earthly and the heavenly realms. For example, Scipio had asked the elder Africanus if his father Paulus and the others whom people think of as dead were actually still alive.

Africanus replied:

"Surely all those are alive," he said, "who have escaped from the bondage of the body as from a prison; but that life of yours, which men so call, is really death." (Ibid., section xiv, p. 267)

Again, when Scipio was near the realm of the fixed stars, so that he was able to hear their harmonious music, he kept gazing back upon the earth. Africanus said to him:

"I see that you are still directing your gaze upon the habitation and abode of men. If it seems small to you, as it actually is, keep your gaze fixed upon these heavenly things, and scorn the earthly." (Ibid., section xix, p. 273)

Of all the works which have been studied thus far, it is this work of Cicero which will have the most influence upon the Middle Ages, and this because of the Commentary of Macrobius.¹⁸ It is obvious to what extent Cicero was indebted to Plato, not only as to the form and the theme of De re publica, but also in regard to the philosophy which it contains. This is only one more example which illustrates the fact that it was the philosophy of Plato, reinforced by Christian doctrine, which established the basis for the mediaeval sense of the transitoriness of this world and of the constant gazing at eternity which characterizes the Middle Ages.

Mutability and mortality were not only a philosophical preoccupation of the classical writers, but they also appeared in classical literature. In Aeschylus' Agamemnon, for example, Cassandra cries:

Alas, poor men, their destiny. When all goes well
a shadow will overthrow it. If it be unkind one
stroke of a wet sponge blots all the picture out;
and that is far the most unhappy thing of all.¹⁹

Sophocles, in his Ajax, has Odysseus say:

Alas! we living mortals, what are we
But phantoms all or unsubstantial shades?

And Athena then muses:

A day can prostrate and a day upraise
All that is mortal.²⁰

In Oedipus at Colonus, Oedipus tells Theseus:

Most gentle son of Aegeus! The immortal
 Gods alone have neither age nor death!
 All other things almighty Time disquiets.
 Earth wastes away; the body wastes away;
 Faith dies; distrust is born.
 And imperceptibly the spirit changes
 Between a man and his friend, or between two cities.
 For some men soon, for others in later time,
 Their pleasure sickens; or love comes again.
 (Fitts, p. 410)

One of the best expressions of mutability, however,
 occurs in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex. After Oedipus had completely realized his true identity, the Chorus chants:

Races of mortal man
 Whose life is but a span,
 I count ye but the shadow of a shade!
 For he who most doth know
 Of bliss, hath but the show;
 A moment, and the visions pale and fade.
 Thy fall, O Oedipus, thy piteous fall
 Warns me none born of woman blest to call.
 (Storr, I, 113)

Long before the Greek dramatists, Homer's Iliad
 instances this ubiquitous consciousness in regard to the
 transitoriness of life. In Book VI Diomedes (son of Tydeus)
 and Glaucus (son of Hippolochus) come together between the
 two armies to do battle. Diomedes, not knowing Glaucus,
 asks him to identify himself. Whereupon Glaucus speaks:

"Great-souled son of Tydeus, wherefore inquirest thou
 of my lineage? Even as are the generations of leaves,
 such are those also of men. As for the leaves, the
 wind scattereth some upon the earth, but the forest,

as it burgeons, putteth forth others when the season of spring is come; even so of men one generation springeth up and another passeth away."²¹

Glaucus then relates his lineage.

The Greek Anthology records the Greek consciousness of the uncertainty and of the transitoriness of human life (note, incidentally, the inseparability of the notions of "mortality" and "mutability" in this passage):

Do not thou, being mortal, reckon on anything as if thou wert immortal, for nothing in life is certain for men, the children of a day. See how this sarcophagus holds Cassandros dead, a man worthy of an immortal nature.²²

Nor is this sensibility of the transitoriness of life and the inevitability of death lacking in Roman literature. It is sufficient to mention only two writers who were quite preoccupied with this concept. The first is Horace. In Book I, Ode XI, the poet tells Leuconoe:

Show wisdom! Busy thyself with household tasks; and since life is brief, cut short far-reaching hopes! Even while we speak, envious Time has sped. Reap the harvest of to-day, putting as little trust as may be in the morrow!²³

Ode IV in the same book also expresses this consciousness of the brevity of life:

Despite thy fortune, Sestius, life's brief span forbids thy entering on far-reaching hopes. Soon shall the night of Death enshroud thee, and the phantom shades and Pluto's cheerless hall.²⁴

Indeed the concept was so widespread that Seneca wrote an essay on the subject, De brevitae vitae. He begins thus:

The majority of mortals, Paulinus, complain bitterly of the spitefulness of Nature, because we are born for a brief span of life, because even this space that has been granted to us rushes by so speedily and so swiftly that all save a few find life at an end just when they are getting ready to live. Nor is it merely the common herd and the unthinking crowd that bemoan what is, as men deem it, an universal ill; the same feeling has called forth complaint also from men who were famous.²⁵

Seneca's essay is the only work which I know of that deals with the transitoriness of life and the inevitability of death directly, almost exclusively. His main thesis is, of course, that "life, if you know how to use it, is long" (p. 229); that they alone really live who take time for philosophy, "for they are not content to be good guardians of their own lifetime only. They annex every age to their own" (p. 333); this, he says, "is the only way of prolonging mortality -- nay, of turning it into immortality" (p. 339). Seneca's philosophy was primarily ethical: for him, the study of philosophy should orientate the soul toward virtue. Thus, like Plato before him and Boethius after him, this dichotomy between the spirit and the external world gives to his consciousness of the transitoriness of all things an intensity which is equalled only in the work of his follower, Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy. Note the following passage, for example:

Present time is very brief, so brief, indeed, that to some there seems to be none; for it is always in motion, it flows and hurries on; it ceases to be before it has come, and can no more brook delay than the firmament or the stars, whose ever unresting

movement never lets them abide in the same track. The engrossed, therefore, are concerned with present time alone, and it is so brief that it cannot be grasped, and even this is filched away from them, distracted as they are among many things. (P. 319)

All that we are certain of, in fact, is the present moment; and this is the philosophy behind the carpe diem theme, an aspect of which might be seen in the following passage:

All things that are still to come lie in uncertainty; live straightway! See how the greatest of bards cries out, and, as if inspired with divine utterance, sings the saving strain:

The fairest day in hapless mortals' life
Is ever first to flee [Virgil, Georgics,
iii. 66 sq.].

"Why do you delay," says he, "Why are you idle? Unless you seize the day, it flees." Even though you seize it, it still will flee; therefore you must vie with time's swiftness in the speed of using it, and, as from a torrent that rushes by and will not always flow, you must drink quickly. And, too, the utterance of the bard is most admirably worded to cast censure upon infinite delay, in that he says, not "the fairest age," but "the fairest day." Why, to whatever length your greed inclines, do you stretch before yourself months and years in long array, unconcerned and slow though time flies so fast? The poet speaks to you about the day, and about this very day that is flying. (P. 315)

For Seneca, life could be "lengthened" by "the love and practice of the virtues, forgetfulness of the passions, knowledge of living and dying, and a life of deep repose" (p. 351). As for those who follow a life of vice, he tells them:

Heaven knows! such lives as yours, though they should pass the limit of a thousand years, will shrink into the merest span; your vices will swallow up any amount of time. The space you have, which reason can prolong, although it naturally hurries away, of necessity escapes from you quickly; for you do not seize it, you neither hold it back, nor impose delay upon the swiftest thing in the world, but you allow it to slip away as if it were something superfluous and that could be replaced. (P. 303)

The De brevitae vitae makes it readily apparent that Seneca, like his fellow-Stoic Marcus Aurelius, was intensely aware of the transitoriness of life.²⁶ This awareness, however, gained its impetus from a counter-awareness: that of a permanent, unchanging self-identity which finds its full realization in the practice of virtue; the truly virtuous man, in fact, assumes God. Georges Poulet states this in a different way:

To the spontaneous flight of the self Stoicism advises the opposing of a voluntary maintenance of the self; and that by an anticipated acceptance of the future, and especially of the future extremity, of death. Thus the permanence of being would be realized.²⁷

Thus, like Plato, Seneca is intensely aware of the contrast between the shadows and the realissimum, between becoming and permanence.

The De brevitae vitae stands quite a distance in time from the "constant flux" of Heraclitus, but the two are related in the philosophy of Plato and in his concept of virtue,

which liberates the soul from the contamination of matter. Seneca, however, has incorporated this "flux" into man's awareness, so that it gains a personal immediacy which classical learning has hitherto not expressed; and he has directed the concept of virtue to what amounts to a total acceptance of man's destiny: this identifies one with God, the source of all permanence of being. This Stoical attitude toward time, life, and the world influenced Christianity to a very great extent; and the philosophy of Plato helped Christianity to articulate the mode of its own existence. In fact, all the classical writers with whom we have dealt here have had their influence on the Middle Ages; certain elements in Christianity merely brought a deeper intensity and a stronger impetus to this aspect of classical thought which was inherited by the Middle Ages.

However, before the expression of this concept of mutability in the Christian era is discussed, it is necessary to consider the concept as it appears in the Old Testament. The idea of the transitoriness of life and the inevitability of death is not particularly prominent in the Old Testament, but it is present, and the fact remains that the Old Testament influenced the Middle Ages, especially through the New Testament and through the writings of the Fathers.

It should not be surprising that the concept of mutability is not so prominent in the Old Testament. The reasons for this are many, only the more important of which I shall mention here. The concept of mutability usually prevails in the literature of a people with a strong sense of the spiritual and a strong sense of their own individualities. Certainly this was not the case with the Israelites. Yahweh was essentially inscrutable. The attempt to explore the metaphysical possibilities of "He who is" was not made until post-Christian times. Voegelin strikes the heart of the matter:

The God of Israel revealed himself in his wrath and his grace; he caused the joy of loyal obedience as well as the anguish of disobedience, triumph of victory as well as despair of forsakenness; he manifested himself in natural phenomena as well as in his messengers in human shape; he spoke audibly, distinctly, and at great length to the men of his choice; he was a will and he gave a law--but he was not the unseen Measure of the soul in the Platonic sense. A prophet can hear and communicate the word of God, but he is neither a Philosopher nor a Saint. (Op. cit., i, 240-41)

This same primitivism in regard to the speculation about the soul also prevailed in Israel: it is never clear that the Israelites ever conceived of the soul as something spiritual, a permanence within the flux; certainly they did not believe that the soul survived after death. When, in the third

century and only under Persian influence, the concept of immortality did enter Jewish thought, its expression was crude indeed. The Greeks would have been horrified at the idea of the resurrection of the old body (see Vossler, op. cit., I, 39). In brief, the Israelites could not clearly conceive of, certainly could not formulate an idea of, a spiritual substance. This deficiency is seen in their emphatic, ever-present Messianic hopes, wherein they dreamed of the realization of an earthly kingdom.

The transience of life, furthermore, is usually found in the awareness of a people who have a strong sense of their own individualities. The Jews' adherence to clans and tribes, their consciousness of being a chosen people, their belief that the spirit of Yahweh "is present with the community and with individuals in their capacity as representatives of the community, but it is not present as the ordering force in the soul of every man" (Voegelin, op. cit., I, 240): these obviously absorbed any personalized, brooding sensibilities into the nationalistic, epic existence of Israel. It was, incidentally, this tendency of the Jews to identify themselves with the tribe and their disbelief of the soul's survival after death which made them experience triumph and defeat "with a poignancy hitherto unknown to man" (ibid., p.

241). The concept of mutability is not strong in ancient epic: there is only one expression of it in Homer. There are, nevertheless, some expressions of this concept in the Old Testament, such as in Psalm 38:

And indeed all things are vanity: every man living. Surely man passeth as an image: yea, and he is disquieted in vain. He storeth up: and he knoweth not for whom he shall gather these things.²⁸

In Psalm 89, the Psalmist compares time and eternity, wherein he uses the familiar image of the withering grass:

For a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past. And as a watch in the night, things that are counted nothing, shall their years be. In the morning man shall grow up like grass; in the morning he shall flourish and pass away: in the evening he shall fall, grow dry, and wither. . . . Our years shall be considered as a spider: the days of our years in them are threescore and ten years. But if in the strong they be fourscore years: and what is more of them is labour and sorrow. (4-10)

In Psalm 101, the poet sings that his days "are vanished like smoke," "have declined like a shadow," and that he is "withered like grass" (4, 12). Psalm 102 again uses the same image of the withering grass (note, incidentally, the inseparability of the notions of "mutability" and "mortality" here):

He [the Lord] remembreth that we are dust: man's days are as grass, as the flower of the field so shall he flourish. For the spirit shall pass in him, and he shall not be: and he shall know his place no more. (14-16)

In Ecclesiasticus, Jesus the son of Sirach again expresses the same idea by means of the same image:

Remember that death is not slow. . . . All flesh shall fade as grass, and as the leaf that springeth out on a green tree. Some grow, and some fall off: so is the generation of flesh and blood, one cometh to an end, and another is born. Every work that is corruptible shall fail in the end: and the worker thereof shall go with it. (xiv, 12, 18-20)

And who is not familiar with the ever-recurrent theme of Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity" (i. 2)? "One generation passeth away, and another cometh," says the Preacher (i, 4). One of the major themes of this book is expressed thus: "All things have their season, and in their times all things pass under heaven" (iii. 1).

A few other passages in the Old Testament express the transitoriness of life and the vanity of all earthly things, but these are the major and the more typical ones. It might be noted in passing that the mutability of the grass, the leaves, and the flowers is among the more popular images used to express the mutability of human life: this is true from Homer to Boethius and beyond, into the Middle Ages. One might be reminded at this point that Chaucer introduced the term "mutabilite" into the English language (in his translation of the Consolation of Philosophy) when he pointed to the "mutabilite of floures of the somer sesoun" (iii, pr. 8,

11. 38-39) to show the transitoriness of bodily beauty.

Classical and Jewish thought each played their parts in preparing the world for Christianity. If classical thought bequeathed a clear-cut concept of the spiritual, Israel bequeathed the concept of monotheism: Plato's Bonum was Israel's Yahweh, a personal God vitally interested in the affairs of men. And perhaps what is just as important here in a study of mutability, the Israelites bequeathed to Christianity the story of Creation. Aristotle believed that the world is eternal, that it was never created. Plato also believed that the world is eternal but that it was generated. His teachings, however, regarding the initial generation of the world are not very clear. There is, on the other hand, never any question about the creation of the world in the minds of the Israelites; Genesis makes it clear that God created Adam and Eve in time. These concepts--plus the Platonic inherent defect of matter--were absorbed into the teachings of Christianity and, within the framework of Christian revelation, took on a meaning powerful enough to electrify the Christian sensibility with an awareness of the transitoriness of life and of the world which had not been realized before.

It would be tedious to itemize the ideas of mutability

that appear in the New Testament. The transitoriness and the vanity of this world as contrasted with the permanence and the eternal happiness of the next: this is indeed the major burden of the Gospels and the Epistles. The problem is to discover what particular factor or factors in Christianity made for this deeper intensity and stronger impetus. Perhaps part of the answer lies in the Christian viewpoints toward creation and death.

The concept or doctrine of creation once and for all instilled into the popular consciousness the idea that man was contingent and dependent. Man was created in the image of God and was destined to return to God. The revelation of Christ and the Apostles gave this assurance. This realization, in fact, was intensified by the mediaeval teaching in regard to the preservation of existence. Georges Poulet states very clearly the mediaeval teaching along these lines:

If from being nothing they came to be something, if from the possible they passed to the actual, if their existence remained contingent and dependent, that was because such existences were created existences. In one sense they were being created every moment; not that God was obliged each moment to create them anew, but rather that in all the range of their existence, by the same act of will, the Creator caused them to be and to endure. . . .

Thus sustained by the permanent continuity of substantial form, the moving continuity of time unrolled itself, so mobile and so fluid that it was impossible to distinguish consecutive moments.

No doubt, such fluidity implied a part of nonbeing. But what distinguished this time from Heraclitan time or even Platonic time--time of pure mobility--was that it was a movement toward an end. The finality of the movement gave it in return something that transcended its materiality. Even in his body the Christian of the Middle Ages felt a continuous orientation toward a spiritual perfection. Time had a direction. Time finally carried the Christian toward God. (Op. cit., pp. 3-6)

Creation was therefore more than just a historical fact. In the mediaeval consciousness, the existence of every single man found its beginning and its continuance in this single action of God. Specifically, the end of this divine action was, from man's point of view, the enjoyment of the beatific vision, supreme and eternal happiness. But all that

was naturally spontaneous and instantaneous in spiritual life--the act of comprehending, the act of feeling, the act of willing or of enjoying--all of this was being achieved in man only through time, only with the help of time, only as if borne by time toward its completion. But in proportion as this act was brought close to its point of perfection, in proportion as it approached its own completion in time, it tended to release itself from time. At the very moment it attained its fullness, all its temporality disappeared. It was brought to perfection in an instant which transcended time and which, as long as it lasted, lasted within a duration that was permanent. (Ibid., p. 6)

Poulet concludes:

For the man of the Middle Ages, then, there was not one duration only. There were durations, ranked one above another, and not only in the universality of the exterior world but within himself, in his own nature, in his own human existence. (Ibid., p. 7)

It is therefore not surprising that human time took on an immediacy in the mediaeval consciousness which it had not had in the consciousness of the ancients. Time was no longer man's own, to do with as he pleased; it was no longer mere mobility, hurrying past man's vision. It was now a means of salvation, a fleeting opportunity which appeared more fleeting amid the urgency of the spiritual "now." Life had a beginning and an end: it was, in fact, a pilgrimage toward an eternal duration. It was this eternal duration ceaselessly haunting the mediaeval consciousness that made the temporal duration always seem vain and transitory. The two durations were always counterpoised in the mediaeval mind.

The second factor which was responsible for this new impetus in regard to the sensibility of the transitoriness of life and of the world was the Christian attitude toward death. There was, for the most part, among the Greeks "the impersonal and graceful sadness of minds accustomed to acquiesce in the natural cycle of life and death" (Kurtz, p. 250). Plato looked upon death as a welcome release from contaminating matter. The Epicureans taught that "we may be sure that there is nothing to be feared after death, that he who is not cannot be miserable" (Lucretius, op. cit., iii, ll. 866-67). The Stoics accepted the fact of death with the same

equanimity that they accepted the fact of life. These are only random instances of the attitudes of the ancients toward death. Perhaps the Greek Anthology most adequately approximates the Greek attitude toward death, and here it is never pictured as hideous or something to be especially feared. And this attitude persisted from Homer all the way down to and beyond Seneca.

The Christian concept of death, however, was vastly different from that of the Greeks and Romans. Christianity taught that death is a penalty for the sins of Adam and Eve: through the sin of Adam death entered into the world, says St. Paul. Theodore Spencer makes the following observation:

Christianity added one remarkable doctrine which pagan disillusionment and transcendental philosophy had never mentioned. It taught that death was a punishment for man's sin. This was a notion entirely foreign to Greece and Rome; as Lessing remarked, "to deem death a punishment, could not of itself have occurred to the brain of a man who only used his reason, without revelation." . . . when death was considered a punishment, it became at once the most critical moment of life. To think of death was to think of sin, and to think of sin was the only way to purify the soul. Death was no longer merely a step across a threshold or the closing of a door, it was the crucial event in human experience.
(Op. cit., pp. 5-6)

No one can deny Spencer's statement in this regard. In Book XIII of The City of God, Augustine argues that death is penal

and had its origin in Adam's sin. He says:

And therefore it is agreed among all Christians who truthfully hold the catholic faith, that we are subject to the death of the body, not by the law of nature, by which God ordained no death for man, but by His righteous infliction on account of sin; for God, taking vengeance on sin, said to the man, in whom we all then were, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."²⁹

It is natural, and even inevitable, that this view of death should be a major factor in contributing to Christian pessimism in regard to the transitoriness of life and of the pleasures of this world. Add to this the Christian teachings of personal immortality, the Judgment, its teachings of Heaven and Hell (the visionary descriptions of which are found early in Christian history), and its constant reminders that man must die to the world in order to gain heaven (Baptism, for example, is itself a symbol of man's death to the world)--it was inevitable that there appear in Christian literature a more intense and refined sensibility of the mutability of all earthly things. This new intensity can be seen in almost all the writings of the early Fathers of the Church; only a few passages need be cited here.

In his letter to Heliodorus, St. Jerome writes:

Are you conscious, I would ask, of the stages of your growth? Can you fix the time when you became a babe, a boy, a youth, an adult, an old man? Every day we are changing, every day we are dying, and yet we fancy

ourselves eternal. The very moments that I spend in dictation, in writing, in reading over what I write, and in correcting it, are so much gone from my allotted time. We write letters and reply to those of others, our missives cross the sea, and, as the vessel ploughs its furrow through wave after wave, the moments which we have to live vanish one by one. Our only gain is that we are thus knit together in the love of Christ.³⁰

In like manner St. Ambrose, in the Hexaemeron, remarks that:

Today you may see a strong, maturing young man, flourishing in the greenness of life, with a pleasing appearance and an attractive complexion; tomorrow, changed in appearance and face he meets you; and he who on the preceding day seemed to you most splendid because of his comely form, on another day appears wretched and wasted by the weakness of some illness. Hardship breaks very many, or want weakens them, or miserable condition vexes them, or wines destroy them, or old age weakens them, or pleasures make them unmanly, or study deprives them of their blooming complexions. Is it not true that the grass has become dry and the flower has fallen? Another man, renowned because of his grandfathers and great-grandfathers, and having derived honor from the decorations of his ancestors, a man famous because of the military badges of an ancient family, abounding in friends, surrounded on every side by hangers-on, leading forth and bringing back a very large household--this man, having been suddenly overturned by the great danger that falls upon him, is abandoned by everyone, is left behind by his companions, is indeed actually attacked by his neighbors. Behold, it is true that just as the grass withers before it is pulled up, so it is with the life of man.³¹

St. Augustine, in The City of God, speaks of mutability in terms which betray a Senecan influence:

For no sooner do we begin to live in this dying body,
1 than we begin to move ceaselessly towards death. For

in the whole course of this life (if life we must call it) its mutability tends toward death. Certainly there is no one who is not nearer it this year than last year, and to-morrow than to-day, and to-day than yesterday, and a short while hence than now, and now than a short while ago. For whatever time we live is deducted from our whole term of life, and that which remains is daily becoming less and less; so that our whole life is nothing but a race towards death, in which no one is allowed to stand still for a little space, or to go somewhat more slowly, but all are driven forwards with an impartial movement, and with equal rapidity. For he whose life is short spends a day no more swiftly than he whose life is longer. But while the equal moments are impartially snatched from both, the one has a nearer and the other a more remote goal to reach with this their equal speed. It is one thing to make a longer journey, and another to walk more slowly. He, therefore, who spends longer time on his way to death does not proceed at a more leisurely pace, but goes over more ground. Further, if every man begins to die, that is, is in death, as soon as death has begun to show itself in him (by taking away life, to wit; for when life is all taken away, the man will be then not in death, but after death), then he begins to die so soon as he begins to live. For what else is going on in all his days, hours, and moments, until this slow working death is fully consummated?³²

The early Fathers thus set the pattern and the pace for the treatment of the theme of mutability in the literature of the later Middle Ages. Henceforth literature will abound with references to the mutability of life, of fame, and of fortune until the end of the Renaissance. The theme of mutability appears in religious and secular literature alike. In the next chapter, the theme will be discussed as it appears in Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy, the Romance

of the Rose, and Innocent III's De Contemptu Mundi; these are important not only because they were Chaucer's sources and because he chose to translate these works, but also because they are works which are fairly representative of the Middle Ages generally. Here, however, the theme is cited in a few other works of the Middle Ages; first, to show how really widespread and commonplace the concept of mutability was; and second, to show how the mediaeval interest in mutability always revolved around the transitoriness of life and of the world. This interest in the problem is always personal, practical, and preoccupied with death. This is in contrast with the preoccupation of the ancients, which was usually speculative; of all the ancients, in fact, only Seneca can be said to be preoccupied with the thought of death. Since it is not clear that the Anglo-Saxon melancholy in regard to the mutability of all things is in the classical and Christian traditions, Old English literature has been discussed in an appendix.

It is enlightening to note that the mutability theme was so commonplace that it appears in public documents:

. . . I Stephen, Count of Boulogne and Mortain . . . in this year of our Lord's incarnation 1126--seeing that the bounds of this our age are breaking and falling daily into decay--seeing, again, how all the transitory pomp of this world, with the flowers and

rosy chaplets and palms of flourishing kings,
 emperors, dukes and all rich men do wither from
 day to day; how, again, death casts them all into
 one mingled mass and hurries them swiftly to the
 grave--seeing all this, I give, grant, and make
 over to God and to St. Mary of Furness, and to
 the abbot of that monastery . . .³³

The mutability theme also appears in one of the more important religious works of the Middle Ages, the Ayenbite of Inwyt. Note how the Senecan idea, that we begin to die as soon as we begin to live, takes on a more intense meaning in a context which visualizes the torments of hell. It is, ultimately, this vivid visualization of an eternal afterlife which informs the mediaeval consciousness with the realization of the transitoriness of all earthly things:

This life is but a wending, for sooth, for sooth:
 a wending well short. For all the life of a man,
 though he lived a thousand years, were but a
 point compared to the other life that shall last
 ever without end, either in sorrow or in bliss
 without ending.

The king, the earl, the prince, the emperor who formerly had bliss in the world, and are now in hell, weeping, crying, yelling, sorrowing--these bear us witness of this. "Alas," they say, "what is our power, nobility, riches, boasting worth to us now? All is gone, more quickly than the shadow, or the flying bird, or the arrow of the cross-bow. And thus goes all our life. We were born and very quickly borne to our graves. Our whole life is but a little prick. Now we are in sorrow without end. Our bliss is turned into weeping and our carols into sorrow. Our garlands, robes, partying, dishes, and our other goods have failed us." Such are the songs of hell. As the writings tell us (and show us), this life is but a wending,

and living is but a wending. To live therefore is but to die; and this is as true as the Pater Noster. For when you begin to live, you begin to die. And all your age and time that has passed, death has won from you, and holds them. You say that you have sixty years, but death has them and will never yield them. . . . For you die day and night as I have said.³⁴

Perhaps no devotional work of the Middle Ages is so filled with the mutability theme as The Imitation of Christ of Thomas à Kempis (written about 1410). It is indeed significant in determining the extent to which mutability was a part of the mediaeval outlook to note that some twenty editions of Richard Whitford's translation of this work appeared in England from 1530 to 1585.³⁵ It was during this period of the Renaissance that the mediaeval sensibility generally still prevailed.

The main theme of The Imitation of Christ is that all things are passing but Christ. In the first chapter of the book Thomas says: "How great a vanity is it . . . to love things that shortly shall pass away, and not to haste thither where joy is everlasting." Almost every chapter of the work, in fact, is a variation of this one basic theme, the contrast of the temporal and the eternal states. Temporal joy is as nothing compared to that joy which is eternal (ii, 6). In the first chapter of the second book, we find:

Thou hast here no place of long abiding, for

wheresoever thou be come thou art but a stranger and a pilgrim and never shalt thou find perfect rest till thou be fully joined to God. Why dost thou look to have rest here since this is not thy resting place? Thy full rest must be in heavenly things, and all earthly things thou must behold as things transitory and shortly passing away.

Indeed Thomas almost leads the reader to believe that "sin" and "delight in transitory things" are identical:

Think all the world as naught, and prefer my service [the author is personifying Christ here] before all other things; for thou mayst not have mind on me and therewithal delight thee in transitory pleasures.
(iii, 53)

In the same chapter he writes:

O how sure a trust shall it be to a man at his departing out of this world, to feel inwardly in his soul that no earthly love nor yet the affection of any passing or transitory thing hath any rule in him!

And in another place, "Forsake the love of transitory things and seek things that be everlasting. What be all temporal things but deceivable?" (iii, 1). All things should be suffered for eternal life, for "an hour shall come when all thy labours and troubles shall cease. And truly that hour is at hand, for all is short that passeth with time" (iii, 47).

The spirit of truth teaches those who have it "to love heavenly things, to forsake the world that is transitory, and to desire both day and night to come thither where joy is everlasting" (iii, 4). Indeed, there is hardly a book which

betrays this mediaeval sensibility of the transitoriness of life and of the world more than this work of Thomas à Kempis. He writes that "the end of all men is death, and the life of man as a shadow suddenly slideth and passeth away" (i, 23). Why should one fear the vain judgments of mortal man? "This day he is, and tomorrow he appeareth not" (iii, 36). In truth, "man is but as grass, and all his glory is as a flower in the field which suddenly vanisheth away" (ii, 7). These are but a few of the references to the theme of mutability in The Imitation of Christ; there are many others.³⁶ The Platonic contrast between the permanent World of Ideas and the mutable World of Shadows has come a long way; and The Imitation of Christ is the exact measure of the limits which this contrast reached within the framework of mediaeval Christianity.

GOLDEN AGE AND DECAY OF THE WORLD

In this chapter particularly and throughout the entire dissertation, I refer to "Golden Age" and "decay of the world" interchangeably. The Golden Age is but the poetical expression of the idea of the decay of the world and, until the Renaissance, was its foremost expression. It has been pointed out that Plato and Aristotle believed that the world is eternal. The idea of the world's mortality, however, was

expressed most fully and with the greatest power by Lucretius, who argued that decay in the elements, the parts, necessarily meant decay in the whole.³⁷ The idea of the world's growing old is also expressed in the Psalms.³⁸ The notion of the world's mortality is, certainly, consonant with the general attitude of the Greek and Roman philosophers toward change, as a deteriorative process. Given this fact and the early Christian idea that the end of the world was near at hand, it is easy to see why St. Cyprian's influence, along with Lucretius, was very important in disseminating the concept of the world growing old. In the following, Cyprian speaks vividly about the world's mortality in his over-all context that the end of the world is imminent:

And this [to come willingly when the Lord calls in death] . . . much more ought to be done now--now that the world is collapsing and is oppressed with the tempests of mischievous ills; in order that we who see that terrible things have begun, and know that still more terrible things are imminent, may regard it as the greatest advantage to depart from it as quickly as possible. If in your dwelling the walls were shaking with age, the roofs above you were trembling, and the house, now worn out and wearied, were threatening an immediate destruction to its structure crumbling with age, would you not with all speed depart? . . . Lo, the world is changing and passing away, and witness to its ruin not now by its age, but by the end of things.³⁹

Except for an occasional reference here and there throughout the Middle Ages,⁴⁰ however, the views of Lucretius and

Cyprian did not reach the popular imagination until the Renaissance, when the discovery of change in the heavens greatly accelerated the belief in the world's decay. Until this time, the poetical expression of the Golden Age was the most prominent manifestation of this theme.

In his Apologie (1627), George Hakewill not only holds Lucretius and St. Cyprian responsible for the false idea of the decay of the world, but, he says, what has led many to this erroneous opinion "is that idle tale and vaine fancie forged by Poets, & taken up by some Historians, & beleaved by the vulgar of the foure ages of the world."⁴¹ He then quotes this "idle tale" from Ovid's Metamorphoses and points out Boethius' and Juvenal's borrowing of it in the Consolation and Thirteenth Satire, respectively.

The story of the Golden Age entered literature in Hesiod's Works and Days, in the eighth century B.C. The work is essentially an exhortation to industry. After the Fable of Pandora, Hesiod relates the four races of men, the first of which is the golden race:

First of all the deathless gods who dwell on Olympus made a golden race of mortal men who lived in the time of Cronos when he was reigning in heaven. And they lived like gods without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief: miserable age rested not on them; but with legs and arms never failing they made merry with feasting beyond the reach of

all evils. When they died, it was as though they were overcome with sleep, and they had all good things; for the fruitful earth unforced bare them fruit abundantly and without stint. They dwelt in ease and peace upon their lands with many good things, rich in flocks and loved by the blessed gods.⁴²

He then describes the silver, bronze, and iron races, the last two interrupted by his description of the Homeric race of heroes, which is obviously out of place. Through the four ages of men the condition of the world deteriorates, so that the poet says, "Would that I were not among the men of the fifth generation" (*ibid.*, p. 15). Thus begins the literary genre which expresses the desire for the stable, changeless order which existed in the world before it began to decline and decay.

Since the Golden Age will be treated in the following chapter in connection with its appearance in the Consolation of Philosophy and Le Roman de la Rose, it is sufficient here merely to indicate its widespread appearance in literature after Hesiod and to show its relationship to the concept of mutability generally.

It has already been stated that the theme appears in Ovid's Metamorphoses, Juvenal's Thirteenth Satire, the Consolation, and Le Roman de la Rose. It is also found in Virgil's Aeneid, Dante's Inferno, in the works of Deschamps, and, as

will be seen, in Chaucer's Former Age. The Garden of Paradise in Genesis is, in fact, related to this genre.⁴³ In all these influential works, the depiction of the Golden Age is essentially the same: no diseases, no labor, no misery of old age, no wars, happiness in full, brotherhood inspired by love, no greed, no competition or commercialism--in short, the Golden Age is the literary expression of mankind's universal yearning to be free from all the ills which plague mortality.⁴⁴

It also reveals an attitude toward change. If, indeed, change involves deterioration and decay, it stands to reason that any age, seeing its own miserable condition of mortality, should look upon the beginning of the human race as a state of ideal earthly perfection. This is especially true in the absence of the doctrine of original sin. Here again, we see the intimate connection between mutability and mortality. It is the element of change in this ideal order of the Golden Age, the fact that this order was subject to mutability, which has effected the present condition of our mortality.

UBI SUNT

The ubi sunt formula is perhaps as old as mankind. Of all the motifs or variations of the theme of mutability, this is the easiest to distinguish because it is stereotyped; "C'est probablement la question plaintive: Ubi sunt . . . etc., qui forme le point de depart de notre motif poetique," says Gilson.⁴⁵ This theme is found rather sparsely in classical literature, more frequently in the Old Testament, still more frequently in the Patristic writings, and indeed abounds throughout the literature of the Middle Ages.

In The Greek Anthology, for example, we find:

Where is now Praxiteles? Where are the hands of Polycleitus, that gave life to the works of ancient art? Who shall mould Melite's scented ringlets, or her fiery eyes and the splendour of her neck? Where are the modellers, the carvers in stone?⁴⁶

Another illustration of the theme is found in Ovid's Metamorphoses, when Ajax exclaims, "Where now is the eloquent Ulysses?"⁴⁷

The most influential source of the theme, however, is the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. "Where is the learned? where is he that pondereth the words of the law? where is the teacher of little ones?" asks Isaias (xxxiii, 18). In IV Kings, the author asks, "Where is the king of Emath, and the king of Arphad, and the king of the city of

Sepharvaim, of Ana and of Ava?" (xix, 13). In Baruch, the author tells his hearers to "learn where is wisdom" that they may "know also where is length of days and life" (iii, 14). Then he says that few have found the treasure of wisdom and asks: "Where are the princes of the nations, and that rule over the beasts that are upon earth? That take their diversion with the birds of the air? That hoard up silver and gold, wherein men trust . . . They are cut off, and are gone down to hell . . ." (16-19). In First Corinthians, St. Paul echoes Isaias: "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (i, 20). From this source, the Bible, the Church Fathers took up the formula.

The formula entered Christian literature with the Syrian Saint Ephrem (306-373), whose influence is seen in the writings of Saint Cyril of Alexandria (370-444); both writers appropriated the formula from First Corinthians (quoted above), in its exact form. Isidore of Seville (d. 636), however, used the theme creatively and abundantly and is perhaps responsible for its wide diffusion; the Etymologiae and the Synonyma were popular source-books for mediaeval preachers and poets. In the Synonyma, for example, he writes:

Brevis est hujus mundi felicitas, modica est hujus saeculi gloria, caduca est et fragilis temporalis potentia. Dic ubi sunt reges? ubi principes? ubi imperatores? ubi locupletes rerum? ubi potentes saeculi? ubi divites mundi? quasi umbra transierunt, velut somnium evanuerunt.⁴⁸

From this time on, the theme is found abundantly in the Patristic writings, especially in those of Saints Prosper of Aquitaine, Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, and Bernard. The following excerpt from the writings of St. Bonaventure provides an excellent illustration of the full development of the theme and an indication of the course that it will take in mediaeval poetry generally:

Transierunt enim omnia tanquam umbra et tanquam navis quae pertransit fluctuantem aquam, cujus non est invenire vestigium. In malignitate enim sua consumpti sunt. Et virtutum, heu, quam plurimi nullum signum reliquerunt! Ubi sunt principes gentium, et qui dominati sunt super bestias, quae sunt super terram, qui argentum thesaurizaverunt et aurum congregaverunt, qui civitates et castra exstruxerunt, reges et regna bellando divicerunt? Ubi sapiens, ubi scribe, ubi conquisitor hujus saeculi? Ubi Solomon sapientissimus? Ubi Alexander potentissimus? Ubi Samson fortissimus? Ubi Absalon speciosissimus? Ubi Assuerus gloriosissimus? Ubi Caesares potentissimi? Ubi reges et principes inclyti? Quid profuit illis inanis gloria, brevis letitia, mundana potentia, magna familia, carnis voluptas, divitiarum falsitas, concupiscentiae suavitas? Ubi risus, ubi laetitia, ubi jactantia, ubi arrogancia, ubi generositas sanguinis, ubi pulchritudo corporis, forma elegans, juvenilis decor, praedia magna, palatia immensa, mundi sapientia? De mundo sunt haec omnia, et mundus quod suum est diligit et tamen haec omnia cum

mundo non diu subsistunt. Transibit enim mundus
et concupiscentia ejus.⁴⁹

It is clear from this passage that two new elements have been added to the ubi sunt theme as it appeared in the Old Testament: the enumeration of the names of famous men and women and an emphasis upon the transience of feminine beauty. Whatever form or combination of forms the ubi sunt might take, the phrase itself echoed throughout the Middle Ages until it reached its climax, it seems, in the works of Villon.

It is unnecessary to multiply instances of the theme as it appears in the literature of the Middle Ages.⁵⁰ "Hwer is Paris and Heleyne,/ That weren so bryht and feyre on bleo?" and "Were beth they biforen us weren,/ Houndes ladden and hauekes beren . . .?"⁵¹ are only random instances of the formula's ubiquitous occurrence. At least five of Deschamps' ballades deal with this theme.⁵² It is found in Lydgate's Like a Midsomer Rose. Indeed the theme became a theological and poetical banality. Of the latter, Villon's "Ballade of Ladies of Times Gone By" remains the lasting monument:

Say where, not in what land, may be
Flora the Roman? Where remain
Fair Archippa's charms, and she--
Thais--in beauty so germane?
Echo, calling afar, in vain,
Over the rivers and marshes wan,
Lovelier once than girls profane
But where are the snows of last year gone?

Where's Heloise, that learn'd lady
 For whom was gelded--priestly gain!--
 Pierre Abelard at Saint Denis?
 For love he bore such weight of pain.
 But where's the Queen who did ordain
 And give command that Buridan
 Be sewed in a sack and flung to Seine?
 But where are the snows of last year gone?⁵³

The final stanza of the ballad names seven more illustrious women of the past. With the exception of the later Middle Ages, typified by Villon, where the theme became almost exclusively trite and banal, it is not too far-fetched to remark that the frequency of the occurrence of this formula is the approximate measure of the prevailing sensibility of the transitoriness of all things.

PUTREFACTION

The putrefaction motif is, in a sense, the vividly depicted answer to the question, Ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere? This motif is not found in Greek and Roman literature;⁵⁴ its first significant appearance is in the Book of Job. "I have said to corruption," says Job, "Thou art my father; to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister" (xvii, 14); "They shall lie down alike in the dust and the worms shall cover them" (xxi, 26). Kurtz considers Job the main source of this theme:

Straight from Job, then, and a few passages scattered in Ecclesiasticus, The Wisdom of Solomon, and other books of the Old and New Testaments--with no tradition bridging the centuries between, and with no important source in any other ancient literature of the West--comes a theme that, misunderstood, ignobly transformed, and applied to a new purpose, develops into the Gifer-theme of the Middle Ages. (Op. cit., p. 256)

This theme first appeared in English literature in the Address of the Soul to the Body; here the poet is attempting to teach with power the lesson that life in the world, vain as it may be, determines the soul's destiny in the afterlife. The name of the worm in the poem is Gifer; whence comes the term "Gifer theme."

The worm is a glutton, one whose jaws
are sharper than a needle, He is the first
to creep down into the earth cave.
He slits the tongue, bores through the teeth,
eats the eyes up in the head,
and to that wealth of feasting opens a wide way
to other worms, when the wretched body
has grown cold, that for a long time
was clothed in robes. It is now worm's meat,
his food in the earth; and everyone
who is a wise man will remember this.⁵⁵

The Address of the Soul to the Body offers the only example of the putrefaction theme in Old English literature.

The Gifer theme is indeed only a part of the more general theme of putrefaction. Any depiction of physical decomposition after death constitutes the putrefaction theme. In the Sayings of Saint Bernard (1250-1300), for example,

both the worm imagery and other imagery expressive of decay are found:

Saint Bernard seith in his bok:
That mon is worm and wormes cok,
And wormes he schal feden.
Whan his lyf is him bireved,
In his rug and in his heved
Wol foule wormes bredden.

The flesch schal melten from the bon,
The senewes sundren everichon,
The bodi schal defyen.
And ye that wolen the sothe sen,
Under the graves, ther they ben,
And loketh hou thei lyghen.⁵⁶

Of the Patristic writings dealing with this theme, the most influential were Innocent III's De Contemptu Mundi and St. Bernard's Meditationes Piissimae de Cognitione Humanae Conditionis. The theme as it appears in Innocent's work will be pointed out in the following chapter. As for Bernard's work, the Sayings (above) itself testifies to its vast influence. This work is not nearly so morbidly detailed as is the work of Innocent. The following excerpt, in fact, might well suggest the method and theme of the Meditationes:

Nihil enim aliud est caro, cum qua tanta
tibi societas, nisi spuma caro facta, fragili
vestita decore: sed erit, quando erit cadaver
miserum et putridum et cibus vermium.⁵⁷

Up to this point, it is clear that the purpose of the putrefaction imagery is to incite a memento mori.

Actually, the putrefaction theme is not very dominant in Middle English literature to 1400. Outside of a few relatively insignificant poems, such as Signs of Death,⁵⁸ its most complete and vivid expression is found in the Sayings of St. Bernard. It is in the late Middle Ages, following upon the Black Death, that the theme becomes widespread, not only in literature but also in painting and sculpture.⁵⁹ At this time, in fact, the preoccupation with the physical horrors of death ceases to be a memento mori and is enjoyed in and for itself. Huizinga testifies to this and offers, I think, an adequate explanation for the fact:

The imagination of those times relished these horrors, without ever looking one stage further, to see how corruption perishes in its turn, and flowers grow where it lay.

A thought which so strongly attaches to the earthly side of death can hardly be called truly pious. It would rather seem a kind of spasmodic reaction against an excessive sensuality. (Op. cit., pp. 140-41)

Perhaps no poetry better illustrates this enjoyment of the horrible details of decay and the lack of the pious purpose of this imagery than that of Villon. The following is the last stanza of The Great Testament (written in 1461):

Death makes him shudder and turn pale,
Pinches his nose, distends his veins,
Swells out his throat, his members fail,
Tendons and nerves grow hard with strains.
O female flesh, like silken skeins,
Smooth, tender, precious, in such wise

Must you endure so awful pains?
 Aye, or go living to the skies.
 (Works, I, 193)

When the putrefaction theme was used for a memento mori, it was closely related to mutability. It functioned as a reminder of the fleeting moments of time and of the inevitability of death. Not used for this purpose, the putrefaction material has no relation to the theme of mutability.

CONTEMPT OF THE WORLD

Of all the mutability motifs under consideration in this study, the critics' use of the contempt of the world idea is most likely to lead to confusion. This is so because some critics use the expression generically to embrace not only the general concept of mutability but also the different variations of this theme, the ubi sunt, for example.⁶⁰ Second, because of the popularity of the theme during the Middle Ages, particularly from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, some critics tend to give the impression that the idea is uniquely Christian. It is all right to use the expression generically, provided its relation to the concept of mutability and its various motifs is understood; but the contempt of the world has its origin in Plato's dichotomy of the changeable world and the fixed,

stable World of Ideas. It was the "contemptible," contaminating world of change, in fact, which led Plato to postulate the World of Forms and to deny existence to the world of phenomena. The Stoics were even more emphatic about their repudiation of the world. From these philosophies, ultimately, and from Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, and Manicheism, immediately, "early Christianity acquired ready-made descriptions of the world as irrational and civil disorder" (Farnham, p. 14). Add to these the Aristotelian despair for the sphere "beneath the moon," the doctrine of original sin, an intense certitude about the afterlife and a vividly conceived hope of attaining it, and it becomes clear why Christianity effected a new and vigorous emphasis on the classical contempt of the world. Indeed, the popularity of the theme seems inevitable.

With Christianity, in fact, the dichotomy between a personal, all-good God and the sinful, transitory world became very vivid and very specific. Witness the words of St. Isidore of Seville:

Si praesentia despexeris, sine dubio aeterna invenies; si saeculares res et humanas calcaveris, facile et leviter coelestem gratiam accipies, et cum eo regnabis qui vivis et mortuis dominatur. Divitiae nunquam sine peccato administrantur. Nullus res terrenas sine peccato administrat. Valde rarum est ut qui divitas possident ad

requiem tendant; qui curis terrenis se implicant,
a Dei timore se separant. Qui in rerum amore
diligitur, in Deo nullatenus delectatur.

(Migne, op. cit., col. 866)

While the specific motive for contempt of the world, however, might be that the world is a source of sin and therefore an obstacle to one's union with God, the philosophical basis for this motive is the instability and the inherent transitoriness of the world itself. This idea continually appears in the contempt of the world treatises throughout the Patristic and the mediaeval periods, both the formally entitled De Contemptu Mundi treatises and those which are de contemptu mundi in substance. Another aspect of the contempt of the world motif which appears in some of these works is the vilification of the body. This too stems from Plato's dichotomy and his insistence upon the contamination of matter. In short, the Christian contempt of the world is not essentially different from that of the classical thinkers; it is, however, much more extravagant and exaggerated because of Christianity's rigid asceticism.

The expression of the world's transitoriness in these treatises usually takes the form of viewing man's life here upon earth as a pilgrimage or any other image which might express the difference between man's temporary and permanent abodes. In "On the Mortality," for example, St. Cyprian

writes:

We should consider, dearly beloved brethren--we should ever and anon reflect that we have renounced the world, and are in the meantime living here as guests and strangers. . . . Who that has been placed in foreign lands would not hasten to return to his own country? . . . What a pleasure is there in the heavenly kingdom, without fear of death; and how lofty and perpetual a happiness with eternity of living!

(Roberts and Donaldson, op. cit., p. 275b)

The same idea is inspired in Bernard's Meditationes, like Cyprian's work a genuine de contemptu mundi treatise, even though it is not labeled as such.

Nullus est ibi peregrinus, sed quicumque illāc venire merebuntur, securi in propria patria patria manebunt, semper laeti, et semper satiati de visione Dei. (Migne, op. cit., cols. 505-506)

Innocent's De Contemptu Mundi, the first formally entitled treatise of this genre and certainly the most important, will be studied in the following chapter. It is sufficient here, however, simply to glance at a few of his chapter headings to see how much of his contempt of the world stems from the world's transitoriness. The following are only a few of these chapter headings: De incommotis senectutis et brevitae vitae hominis (caput x), De brevi laetitia hominis (caput xxii), De vicinitate mortis (caput xxiv), and De incertitudine divitiarum (caput xvi). Thus it is clear, I think, that the transitory theme is an integral part of the idea of

the contempt of the world.

The popularity of Innocent's work is shown by the fact that he started a genre which is found through the fifteenth century. A few of the more important works are Bernard of Moras' De Contemptu Mundi, that of St. Anselm, of Jacopone da Todi, and the Augustinus De Contemptu Mundi, written in England in the fifteenth century. Stephen Langton wrote a Latin poem on contempt of the world, and Petrarch's Secretum is more popularly known as his De Contemptu Mundi. Indeed, contempt of the world literature abounds in the Middle Ages and appears even in Elizabethan times. Of these, I shall mention only that of Bernard of Moras, because it is next in importance to Innocent's work, and that of the unknown author in fifteenth-century England, because actually it is the first genuine example of the genre written in English. It will be seen that the transitory theme is of the essence of these two works.

F. J. E. Raby sums up Bernard's work thus:

Of Bernard of Moras it can be said that no one before him, even the unknown author of the Urbs beata Hierusalem, or Hildebert in his Me receptet Syon illa, had risen to such heights in describing the longing of the pilgrim for his home. Non habemus hic manentem civitatem! -- the true monk should have his eyes fixed on the world to come . . .⁶¹

In the Augustinus De Contemptu Mundi the author, as the title

indicates, lends authority to his sayings by attributing them to Augustine. The motives furnished for the "contempt" are almost exclusively the transitoriness of the world and of its joys. The author makes liberal use of the ubi sunt formula, speaks of the world's "schorte gladnes," says that "hys welthis been vncerteyne," that its power slides away "as doth a brokele pottle that fresshe ys and gay." In fact, says he, "Truste ye rather to letters wrytten in yis: than to the wrecched worlde that fulle of synne ys"; "The ioye of thys wrecched worlde ys a schorte feeste, yt ys lykened to a schadewe that may not longe laste." Near the end of the poem, he advises, "Sette thin herte in heuene aboue and thenke what ioye ys there, and thus to dyspyse the worlde y reede that thou leere."⁶² It is ironical that this work, the last significant De Contemptu Mundi in the history of English and Latin literature, should cite Augustine, the great Platonist, as the authority for the contempt of the world.

The second aspect of the contempt of the world motif is, as I have said, the vilification of the flesh. The most significant treatises in this regard are Innocent's De Contemptu and Bernard's Meditationes. No author equalled Innocent's vitality and vividness in his defilement of the body. For him, man is "conceptus in pruritu carnis in

fervore libidinis, in fetore luxuriae: quodque deterius est in labe peccati"; he is born "ad laborem, dolorem, timorem," and what is even more miserable, "ad mortem" (see below, p. 92). Innocent, in fact, often piles up dung-images with all the strength of a virtuoso. This is not quite true of Bernard, however. These words of Bernard are perhaps the strongest in his entire treatise:

Secundum exteriorum hominem de parentibus illis
venio qui me ante fecerunt damnatum, quam natum.
Peccatores peccatorem in peccato suo genuerunt,
et de peccato nutriverunt. Miseri miserum in
hanc lucis miseriam induxerunt. Nil ex eis habeo,
nisi miseriam et peccatum, et corruptibile hoc
corpus quod gesto. . . . Quid sum ego? . . .
plorans et ejulans traditus sum hujus mundi ex-
silio; et ecce jam morior plenus iniquitatibus
et abominationibus. (Migne, op. cit., col. 487)

Such description, however, is sustained in only one chapter of the entire work. The vilification of the body, as in these works of Innocent and Bernard, finds its ultimate philosophical basis in Plato's attitude toward matter. This, in fact, brings us back to the philosophical basis of the entire concept of mutability in all its colorations: the spiritual, eternal transcendence as opposed to the material, finite world. In the following chapter, it will be seen how this dichotomy, implied in the concept of mutability and all its motifs, is operative in three of the most representative

works of the Middle Ages, three works, furthermore, which Chaucer translated.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

¹In Appendix I, I shall deal with mutability in the Old English period.

²Apparently Heraclitus did not record any of his philosophy; at least none of his writings are known. I. Bywater, in Heracliti Ephesii Reliquiae (Oxford, 1877), published for the first time a collection of fragments, directly or indirectly attributed to Heraclitus, found in the works of subsequent philosophers. G. T. W. Patrick, "A Further Study of Heraclitus," The American Journal of Psychology, I (1888), 643-73, translates the section from Bywater's work, "Fragments on Nature," the part which is pertinent to this study. To this work I am indebted for my quotations of the fragments. See also G. S. Kirk, Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments (Cambridge, 1954); Sri Aurobindo's Heraclitus (Calcutta, 1941), for the relation of Heraclitus to the Mysteries; Eric Voegelin, The World of the Polis; in Order and History (Baton Rouge, 1957), II, 220-40.

³See Voegelin, ibid., pp. 236-37.

⁴Karl Vossler, Mediaeval Culture: An Introduction to Dante and His Times (New York, 1929), I, 28.

⁵Timaeus, in The Dialogues of Plato, trans. B. Jowett (New York, 1871), II, 523-24.

⁶Plato's Phaedo, ed. and trans. R. S. Bluck (London, 1955), pp. 76-77.

⁷For further evidence of this dichotomy in the works of Plato, see: The Republic, in Jowett, op. cit., pp. 341-44; Symposium, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, in Loeb Classical Library (New York, 1925), pp. 195-97, 205-207.

⁸William Harris Stahl, trans., Macrobius: Commentary on the Dream of Scipio (New York, 1952), p. 131, n. 7.

⁹De Mundo, ed. and trans. D. J. Furley, in The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, 1955), p. 353.

¹⁰Aristotle: On the Heavens, trans. W. K. C. Guthrie (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), 270b, p. 25.

¹¹A. E. Taylor, A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus (Oxford, 1928), p. 89.

¹²De Rerum Natura, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, in The Loeb Classical Library (New York, 1928), p. 173.

¹³The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, trans. George Long, in Harvard Classics (New York, 1909), II, 220-22.

¹⁴For a similar idea in regard to the Stoic reconciliation of change and permanence, see Studies in Human Time, trans. Elliott Coleman, in Harper Torchbooks (New York, 1959), p. 41.

¹⁵The Metamorphoses of Ovid, trans. A. E. Watts (Berkeley, 1954), p. 350. Note the following from Ovid's Art of Love:

Now already be mindful of the old age which
is to come; thus no hour will slip wasted from
you. While you can, and still are in your
spring-time, have your sport; for the years
pass like flowing water; the wave that has
gone by cannot be called back, the hour that
has gone by cannot return. You must employ

your time: time glides on with speedy foot,
 nor is that which follows so good as that
 which went before. These plants, now wither-
 ing, I saw as violet-beds; from this thorn
 was a pleasing garland given me. That day
 will come when you, who now shut out your
 lovers, will lie, a cold and lonely old woman,
 through the night; nor will your door be
 broken in a nightly brawl, nor will you find
 your threshold strewn with roses in the morning.
 How quickly, ah, me! is the body furrowed by
 wrinkles, and the colour fled that once was in
 that lovely face!

Trans. J. H. Mozley, in The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, 1947), III, 59 ff.

¹⁶This statement does not hold true, however, for the Renaissance. To the extent which Ovid influenced Renaissance thought in regard to change, to that extent did Renaissance thought tend toward the idea of progress and away from the concept of change as a corruptive phenomenon.

¹⁷Trans. C. W. Keyes, in The Loeb Classical Library (London, 1928), section xvii ff. of The Republic, p. 271.

¹⁸See E. K. Rand, "Mediaeval Gloom and Mediaeval Uniformity," Speculum, I (1926), 253 ff.

¹⁹Dudley Fitts, ed., Greek Plays in Modern Translation (New York, 1947), p. 46.

²⁰Sophocles, trans. F. Storr, in The Loeb Classical Library (New York, 1924), II, 19.

²¹Homer: The Iliad, trans. A. T. Murray (New York, 1928), VI, ll. 146-52; p. 273.

²²Trans. W. R. Paton, in The Loeb Classical Library (New York, 1925), Vol. II, Book VIII, no. 327; p. 175.

²³Horace: The Odes and Epodes, trans. C. E. Bennett, in The Loeb Classical Library (New York, 1927), p. 33.

²⁴Ibid., p. 17.

²⁵Seneca: Moral Essays, trans. John W. Basore, in The Loeb Classical Library (New York, 1932), II, 287. The quotations in my text are from this edition.

²⁶See also the Moral Epistles, nos. 4, 12, 24, 26, 49, 61, 101, 117, 118.

²⁷Coleman, op. cit., p. 41.

²⁸The Douay-Rheims version (New York, 1938), vv. 6-7. The Douay-Rheims version (this edition) is used throughout this dissertation since it is based on the Vulgate.

²⁹Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, 1887), II, 252.

³⁰A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Second Series (Grand Rapids, 1954), VI, 131.

³¹Patrologiae Cursus Completus, ed. J. P. Migne, Series Latina (Paris, 1879-87), XIV, col. 123; translation my own. I have placed the original passage in Appendix II.

³²Schaff, ed., Original Series, op. cit., II, 249.

³³G. G. Coulton, Life in the Middle Ages (New York, 1933), IV, 108; Coulton's translation from the Monasticon, V, 247.

³⁴Avenbite of Inwyt, ed. Richard Morris, in EETS, Original Series, 23 (London, 1866), p. 71; see also p. 81 for the idea of the transitoriness of beauty. It might conveniently be mentioned here that there are expressions of mutability in the Divine Comedy, even though the loci dramatis are outside of mortal time. See the Modern Library College edition, trans. Carlyle-Okey-Wicksteed, Inf., vii; Purg., xi, xx, xxxi; Para., v, xv, xvi, xvii, xxvi, xxvii, xxix; especially Para., xiii, for a modified concept of the Aristotelian doctrine of the permanent heavens and the mutable earth. For an excellent statement of the theme as it is expressed in mediaeval religious lyrics, E. K. Chambers and F. Sidgwick, eds., Early English Lyrics (London, 1911), pp. 282-85. For other statements of its expression in mediaeval literature generally, Huizinga, op. cit., pp. 138 ff.; H. S. Bennett, Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century (New York, 1947), p. 100.

³⁵See Richard Whitford's translation of The Imitation of Christ, Edward J. Klein, ed. (New York, 1941), "Introduction," p. xxxi; all future citations of the Imitation are from this edition.

³⁶See I: 3, 11, 20, 22, 23, 25; II: 6, 7; III: 14, 16, 33. There are also numerous references to man as a pilgrim and an exile, to the woe which always follows joy, and to related themes.

³⁷See especially the final passage of Book II of Rouse's translation, op. cit. Only generally related to this point but extremely useful for illuminating the whole concept of change in ancient and early Christian times is Theodor E. Mommsen's chapter "Augustine on Progress," in Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Ithaca, 1959), pp. 265-98.

³⁸Psalm 101, v. 27.

³⁹"On the Mortality," in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Buffalo, 1886), V, 475.

⁴⁰See, for example, Coulton's excerpt which he translated from Walther v. der Vogelweide, Lachmann, 124, l. Op. cit., III, 16.

⁴¹Apologie or Declaration of the Power and Providence of God in the Government of the World, Consisting in an Examination and Censure of the Common Error Touching Nature's Perpetual and Universal Decay, p. 323. Quoted from Williamson, op. cit., p. 132.

⁴²Hesiod: The Homeric Hymns and Homerica, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, in The Loeb Classical Library (New York, 1926), p. 11.

⁴³It is interesting to note that St. Bernard (?) describes even the celestial paradise in terms of the Golden Age: "Nulla erit ibi tristitia, nulla angustia, nullus dolor, nullus timor, nullus ibi labor, nulla mors, sed perpetua sanitas semper ibi perseverat." Meditationes Piissimae, de Cognitione Humanae Conditionis (attributed to St. Bernard and therefore printed with his works). Migne, Pat. Lat., clxxxiv, col. 505.

⁴⁴For the best and fullest treatment of this subject, which I have merely outlined here, see A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas, eds. Lovejoy, Chinard, Boas, and Crane (Baltimore, 1935), I.

⁴⁵Etienne Gilson, Les Idées et les Lettres (Paris, 1955), p. 20n. Gilson's first chapter, "De la Bible à François Villon," deals exclusively with the history of the ubi sunt theme. In my treatment of the theme here, I rely upon Gilson's work very heavily. I have, however, also consulted the following: C. H. Becker, "Ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere," Islamstudien, I (1924), 501 ff.; James W. Bright, "The 'ubi sunt' Formula," MLN, VIII (1893), 94; Frederick Tupper, Jr., "The ubi sunt Formula," ibid., pp. 253-54; Clark S. Northup, "Ubi Sunt Heroes?" MLN, XXVIII (1913), 106-107; Kr. Nyrop, "Note sur une Ballade de Villon," Bulletin de l'Académie royale des Sciences et des Lettres de Danemark,

II (1907), 73-82. Nyrop's article is excellent and furnishes many examples of the theme; Creizenach's (initial of first name not presently available; my verifaxed copy refers to him only as Professor Dr. Creizenach) "Das 'Gaudeamus' und was daran hängt," Verhandlungen der 28 Versammlung der Philologen und Schulmänner (Leipzig, 1872), pp. 203-208.

⁴⁶Op. cit., II, 175.

⁴⁷Trans. Frank Justus Miller, in The Loeb Classical Library (New York, 1926), II, xiii, 9, p. 235.

⁴⁸Synonyma, Pat. Lat., lxxxiii, col. 865.

⁴⁹Quoted from Gilson, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

⁵⁰Gilson, ibid., pp. 31-38, lists the principal works in which this theme occurs.

⁵¹Chambers and Sidgwick, op. cit., pp. 285 and 163-64, respectively.

⁵²Ibid., p. 36; Huizinga, op. cit., p. 140.

⁵³The Complete Works of François Villon, trans. J. U. Nicolson (New York, 1928), I, 195.

⁵⁴Empedocles, lamenting the necessity of being born in various aspects of dying, approaches the theme only slightly: "And I wept and shrieked on beholding the unwonted land [of this life] where are Murder and Wrath, and other species of Fates, and wasting diseases, and putrefaction and fluxes." "On Purifications," trans. Arthur Fairbanks, in The First Philosophers of Greece (London, 1898), ll. 385-88. The reason that the putrefaction theme does not appear in Greek and Roman literature stems ultimately from their attitude toward death. This

difference in the classical and mediaeval attitudes toward death I have explained in the study of mutability. Job's complaint is not a memento mori, to be sure. The theme is incidental to his expression of complete denigration of self and his abhorrence to God, as he sees it.

⁵⁵Margaret Williams, Word-Hoard (London, 1946), p. 175.

⁵⁶Hermann Varnhagen, "Noch einmal zu den spruchen des heiligen Bernhard" [from the Vernon and the Auchinleck MSS], Anglia, III (1880), 285-86.

⁵⁷Migne, op. cit., col. 489.

⁵⁸An Old English Miscellany, ed. Richard Morris, in EETS (London, 1872), 49, 101.

⁵⁹See E. Mâle, L'art religieux à la fin du moyen âge en France (Paris, 1908), pp. 347-437.

⁶⁰See, for example, Huizinga, op. cit., p. 141; Farnham, op. cit., pp. 80 ff.

⁶¹A History of Christian-Latin Poetry from the Beginnings to the Close of the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1953), p. 317.

⁶²In Yorkshire Writers, ed. C. Horstmann (London, 1896), II, 374-75.

CHAPTER II

THE THEME OF MUTABILITY IN CHAUCER'S TRANSLATIONS

Chaucer translated Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae, Innocent III's De Contemptu Mundi, and at least part of Le Roman de la Rose of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. Not only are these among the most representative works of the Middle Ages, but the first two are perhaps the most important of all mediaeval documents in attempting to determine the mediaeval attitude toward mutability and to delineate the various themes of mutability which make up this complex attitude. Le Roman de la Rose, perhaps more widely read even than the philosophical and the theological treatises, contains a surprising amount of mutability material for a love poem and is important in showing that this aspect of the mediaeval mentality was not limited to philosophical or devotional works.

We can conjecture as to why Chaucer translated these particular works. In the case of the treatises of Boethius and Innocent, he must have been attracted by their content, which, as will be seen, is almost exclusively concerned with

various aspects of mutability. As for the Rose, this indeed was the major courtly love document of the Middle Ages and, to be sure, it was this aspect of the book which led Chaucer to begin, at least, its translation. But Chaucer also knew the mutability theme in the Roman de la Rose and he knew it well.¹ While Chaucer's initial attraction for the content of these works, therefore, led him to translate them, it is only natural that they should have greatly influenced his thought; and, in fact, they did, especially the Consolation and the Rose. A close analysis of these works, therefore, will help to clarify the mediaeval attitude toward mutability generally, and will illumine not only Chaucer's sensibility in particular but also the function of this theme in his poetry.

Richard Morris, in the Introduction of his edition of Chaucer's translation of the De Consolatione Philosophiae, says:

No philosopher was so bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of Middle Age writers as Boethius. Take up what writer you will, and you will find not only the sentiments, but the very words of the distinguished old Roman.²

And I might add that no other writer was "so bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh" of Chaucer. Jefferson's book makes this fact abundantly clear. And I might add further that the

concept of mutability is of the very essence of the De Consolatione Philosophiae. Perhaps there is no better description of the work itself than that which the sixteenth-century George Colville wrote on the title page of his translation:

And this booke is in manner of a dialogue or communication betwene two persones, the one is Boecius, and the other is Philosophy, whose disputations and arguments do playnly declare the diversitie of the lyfe active, that consisteth in worldly, temporell, and transitory thynges, and the lyfe contemplatyue, that alwayes dyspyseth the worlde, and all thinges therein, and beholdeth almyghtye God, and all heavenlye thynges.³

Many of the variations of the mutability theme which appeared in classical antiquity recur in Boethius; indeed the Consolation of Philosophy might even be viewed, in some ways, as a synthesis of classical and Christian pessimism. The most dominant aspect of the theme, however, is the mutability of Fortune. After a prosperous and successful career in the government service of Rome, Boethius is now in prison, awaiting his death. Before Lady Philosophy comes to comfort him he cries:

Allas! alas! . . . Whil Fortune, unfeithful, favored me with lyghte goodes, the sorwful houre (that is to seyn, the deth) hadde almoost dreynt my heved. But now, for Fortune cloudy hath chaunged hir deceyvable chere to me-ward, myn unpietous lif draweth along unagreable duellynges.

O ye, my frendes, what, or wherto avaunted ye me to be weleful? For he that hath fallen stood noght in stedefast degre.⁴

Throughout the Consolation of Philosophy, it is the mutability of Fortune which is stressed by Lady Philosophy:

Thou wenest that Fortune be chaunged ayens the;
but thow wenest wrong, yif thou that wene: alway
tho ben hir maneres. Sche hath rather kept, as
to the-ward, hir propre stablenesse in the chaungynge
of hirself. (II, p. 1, 49-54)

The central problem of the book is, in fact, the age-old problem: why do the wicked prosper and the innocent suffer? Job has asked the same question, but Boethius personifies the changing fortunes of men in the "blynde goddesse Fortune" (II, p. 1, 58):

O thou governour, governynge alle thynges by certein ende, why refusestow oonly to governe the werkes of men by duwe manere? Why suffrestow that slydyng Fortune turneth so grete enterchaungynge of thynges; so that anoyous peyne, that scholde duweliche punysche felons, punyssheth innocentz? And folk of wikkid maneres sitten in heie chayeres; and anoyinge folk treden, and that unrightfully, on the nekkes of holi men; and vertu, cleer and schynyng naturely, is hidde in derke derknesses; and the rightful man bereth the blame and the peyne of the feloun; ne the forswerynge, ne the fraude covered and kembd with a fals colour, ne anoieth nat to schrewes? (I, m. 5, 31-45)

There is stableness in the heavens; why is "slydyng Fortune" allowed to rule that part of the earth which is mortal?

O thou, what so evere thou be that knytest alle boondes of thynges, loke on this wrecchide erthes. We men, that ben noght a foul partie, but a fair partie of so greet a werk, we ben turmented in this see of fortune. Thow governour withdraugh and restreyne the ravysschyng flodes, and fastne and ferme thise erthes stable with thilke boonde by

which thou governest the hevene that is so large.
(I, m. 5, 49-58)

And it is here that Chaucer introduces the term "mutabilite" into the English language. Lady Philosophy takes the part of Fortune:

What ryght hastow to pleyne, yif thou hast taken more plenteuously of the gode side (that is to seyn of my riches and prosperites)? And what ek yif Y ne be nat al departed fro the? What eek yif my mutabilite yeveth the ryghtful cause of hope to han yit bettere thynges? Natheles dismaye the nat in thi thought; and thow that art put in the comune realme of alle, desire nat to lyven by thyn oonly propre ryght. (II, p. 2, 76-86)

In contrast to Fortune, "wisdom loketh and mesureth the ende of thynges" (II, p. 1, 85-86); the real defeat of Fortune is accomplished in a stoical "contempt of the world":

Whoso it be that is cleer of vertu, sad and wel ordynat of lyvyng, that hath put under fote the proud weerd and loketh, upright, upon either fortune, he may holden his chere undesconfited. . . . Hope aftir no thyng, ne drede nat; and so schaltow desarmen the ire of thilke unmyghty tiraunt. But whoso that, qwakyng, dredeth or desireth thyng that nys noght stable of his ryght, that man that so dooth hath cast away his scheeld, and is remoeved from his place, and enlaceth hym in the cheyne with which he mai ben drawn. (I, m. 4, 1-22)

If Fortune is herself "mutable," then the goods of fortune are unstable, transitory, and "brutel":

Ofte the see is cleer and calm without moevyng flodes, and ofte the horrible wynd Aquylon moeveth boylyng tempestes, and overwhelveth the see.

Yif the forme of this world is so seeld stable,
and yif it torneth by so manye entrechaungynges,
wiltow thanne trusten in the tumblyng fortune
of men? Wiltow trowen on flyttyng goodes? It
is certeyn and establissched by lawe perdurable,
that nothyng that is engendred nys stedfast ne
stable. (II, m. 3, 13-23)

Not only are life and happiness transitory, but sorrow is
also; in fact, Lady Philosophy might say with St. Teresa of
Avila, "All things are passing, God changes never":

For yif thou therfore wenest thiself nat weleful,
for thynges that tho semeden joyeful ben passed,
ther nys nat why thow sholdest wene thiself a
wrecche; for thynges that semen now sory passen
also. Artow now comen first, a sodeyn gest, into
the schadowe or tabernacle of this lif? Or trow-
estow that any stedfastnesse be in mannes thynges,
whan ofte a swyft hour dissolveth the same man
(that is to seyn, when the soule departeth fro the
body)? For although that selde is ther any feith
that fortunous thynges wollen dwellen, yet natheles
the laste day of a mannes lif is a maner deth to
Fortune, and also to thilke that hath dwelt. And
therfore what wenestow thar rekke, yif thow forleete
hir in deyinge, or elles that sche, Fortune, for-
leete the in fleyng away? (II, p. 3, 75-92)

Again, Philosophy tells Boethius:

Now undirstand heere; al were it so that the yiftes
of Fortune ne were noght brutel ne transitorie, what
is ther in hem that mai be thyn in any tyme, or elles
that is nys fowl, yif that it be considered and lookyd
perfitly? (II, p. 5, 4-8; underscoring my own)

Man's joys are rarely without some sorrow; and the very
knowledge that these joys are transitory stains the pleasure
he derives from them:

The swetnesse of mannes welefulnesse is spraynd with many bitteresses; the whiche welefulnesse although it seme swete and joieful to hym that useth it, yit mai it nat ~~ben~~ withholden that it ne goth away whan it wole. Thanne is it wel seene how wrecchid is the blisfulnesse of mortel thynges, that neyther it dureth perpetuel with hem that every fortune resceyven agreablye or egaly, ne it deliteth nat in al to hem that ben angwyssous. (II, p. 4, 118-27)

In brief, Philosophy says:

O precyous and ryght cleer is the blisfulnesse of mortel rychesses, that, whan thow hast geten it, thanne hastow lorn thi sikernes! (II, p. 5, 185-88)

The only thing permanent and lasting is God and eternity; and reason is the means whereby man overcomes and directs all worldly goods to his final end. Closely bound up with this concept of mutability is the concept of man's mortality, that is, his limitations. Lady Philosophy echoes the language of Job (chs. 38-41) in making this point to Boethius. Note also the identification of "mutabilite" with "flyttinge" or transitoriness.

Now is it thanne wel yseyn how lital and how brotel possessioun thei coveyten that putten the goodes of the body aboven hir owene resoun. For maystow surmounten thise olifauntes in gretnesse or weighte of body? Or maistow ben strengere than the bole? Maystow ben swyftere than the tigre? Byhoold the spaces and the stablenesse and the swyft cours of the hevene, and stynt somtyme to wondren on foule thynges. The whiche hevene certes nys nat rather for thise thynges to ben wondryd upon, than for the resoun by which it is governed. But the schynyng of thi forme

(that is to seyn, the beute of thi body), how swyftly passynge is it, and how transitorie!

Certes it es more flyttyngge than the mutabilite of floures of the somer sesoun. For so as Aristotile telleth, that if that men hadden eyghen of a beeste that highte lynx, so that the lokynge of folk myghte percen thurw the thynges that withstonden it, whoso lokide thanne in the entrayles of the body of Alcibiades, that was ful fair in the superfice withoute, it schulde seme ryght foul. And forthi yif thow semest fair, thy nature ne maketh nat that, but the deceyvaunce of the feblesse of the eighen that loken. But preise the goodes of the body as mochil as evere the lyst, so that thow knowe algatis that, whatso it be (that is to seyn, of the godes of the body) which that thou wondrist uppon, mai ben destroyed or dissolvid by the heete of a fevere of thre dayes. Of alle whiche forseide thynges I mai reducen this schortly in a somme: that thise worldly goodes, whiche that ne mowen nat yeven that they byheeten, ne ben nat parfite by the congregacioun of alle goodis; that they ne ben nat weyes ne pathes that bryngen men to blisfulnesse, ne maken men to ben blisful. (III, p. 8, 23-61)

Closely related to the mutability theme in Boethius and in mediaeval literature generally is the insignificance of mortals and of their accomplishments. After all, there is only a very thin distinction between "futility" and "transitoriness"; and, in fact, viewed from the point of view of eternity, the two become identical. The following is similar to that found in Cicero's Somnium Scipionis, which, through the Commentary of Macrobius, helped to cast a somber gloom over the pleasures of the present:

Certeyn thyng is, as thou hast leerned by the demonstracioun of astronomye, that all the envyrounyngge of

the erthe aboute ne halt but the resoun of a prykke at regard of the gretnesse of hevene; that is to seyn that, yif ther were makyd comparysoun of the erthe to the gretnesse of hevene, men wolde juggen in al that the erthe ne heelde no space. Of the whiche litel regioun of this world, the ferthe partye is enhabited with lyvyng beestes that we knowen, as thou hast thyselfe leerned by Tholome, that proveth it. And yif thou haddest withdrawen and abated in thy thought fro thilke ferthe partie as moche space as the see and the mareys contene and overgoon, and as moche space as the regioun of drowghte overstreccheth (that is to seyn, sandes and desertes), wel unnethe sholde ther duellen a ryght streyte place to the habitacioun of men. And ye thanne, that ben envyrouned and closed withynne the leest prykke of thilke prykke, thynken ye to manyfesten or publisschen your renoun and doon yowr name for to be born forth? But yowr glorie that is so narwe and so streyt ithrungen into so litel bowndes, how mochel conteneth it in largesse and in greet doyng? . . . May thanne the glorie of a synguler Romeyn stretchen thider as the fame of the name of Rome may nat clymben ne passen? (II, p. 7, 22-71)

Lady Philosophy sums up and epitomizes the entire sensibility of the Consolation, which defines, in turn, the sensibility of the Middle Ages, for change is always viewed in the light of, and therefore contrasted with, eternity:

For yif ther were makyd comparysoun of the abydyng of a moment to ten thowsand wynter, for as mochel as bothe two spaces ben endyd, for yit hath the moment som porcioun of it, although it litel be. But natheles thilke selve nowmbre of yeeris, and eek as many yeris as therto mai be multiplyed, ne mai nat certes be comparysoned to the perdurablete that is endlees; for of thinges that han ende may ben makyd comparysoun, but of thynges that ben withouten ende to thynges that han ende may be makid no comparysoun. And forthi is it that, although renome, of as longe tyme as evere the list to thynken, were thought to the

regard of eternyte, that is unstaunchable and infynyt, it ne sholde nat only semen litel, but pleyntliche ryght noght. (II, p. 7, 97-113)

The following passage from the Consolation brings out even more clearly than the former one the fact that, for the mediaeval mentality, the insignificance of time and temporal things was adjudged in direct proportion to the significance of eternal things; in a word, "the perpetual gazing at eternity" constantly re-emphasized the transitoriness and futility of mundane affairs. Lady Philosophy says:

Eternite, thanne, is parfit possessioun and altogidre of lif interminable. And that scheweth more cleerly by the comparysoun or collacioun of temporel things. For alle thing that lyveth in tyme, it is present, and procedith fro preteritz into futures (that is to seyn, fro tyme passed into tyme comynge), ne ther nis nothing establisshed in tyme that mai enbrasen togidre al the space of his lif. For certis yit ne hath it nat taken the tyme of tomorwe, and it hath lost that of yisterday. And certes in the lif of this dai ye ne lyve namore but right as in this moevable and transitorie moment. Thanne thilke thing that suffreth temporel condicioun, although that it nevere bygan to be, ne though it nevere ne cese for to be, as Aristotile demed of the world, and although that the lif of it be strecchid with infinite of tyme; yit algatis nis it no swich thing that men mighten trowen by ryghte that it is eterne. For although that it comprehende and embrace the space of lif infinit, yit algatis ne enbraseth it nat the space of the lif altogidre; for it ne hath nat the futuris that ne ben nat yit, ne it ne hath no lengere the preteritz that ben idoon or ipassed. (V, p. 6, 13-39)

This passage from the Consolation might well have inspired

E. K. Rand's remark: "What is more mediaeval than the contempt of earthly fame, the despite of human joy, the perpetual gazing at eternity, the perpetual memento mori?"⁵ It is this sensibility which Chaucer shared with the Middle Ages and which, as will be made evident in the following chapters, became peculiarly his after he translated the Consolation of Philosophy (about 1377-1381).

Aside from the Fortuna and transitoriness themes just treated, there are two other variations of the mutability theme found in the Consolation. I shall mention them, partly, because Chaucer uses the first and alludes to the other; and partly, to suggest their importance in mediaeval literature as revealed by their appearing in an influential work such as that of Boethius. The one is that of the Golden Age, which, as I have already shown, plays a prominent part in the development of the theme of the decay of the world. In Book II, meter 5, Lady Philosophy says:

Blisful was the firste age of men. They heelden
hem apayed with the metes that the trewe feeldes
broughten forth. They ne destroyeden ne dessey-
vede nat hemself with outrage. They weren wont
lyghtly to slaken hir hungir at even with accornes
of ookes. . . . I wolde that our tymes shold torne
ayen to the oolde maneris! But the anguysschous
love of havynge brenneth in folk more cruely than
the fyer of the mountaigne of Ethna that ay bren-
neth. Allas! what was he that first dalf up the
gobbettes or the weygtes of gold covered undir

erthe and the precyous stones that wolden han be
hydd? He dalf up precious periles. (That is to
seyn, that he that hem first up dalf, he dalf up
a precious peril; for-why, for the preciousnesse
of swich thynq hath many man ben in peril).
(11. 1-40)

The other theme is the ubi sunt theme, the only instance in
fact that appears in the Consolation. In the same book
(II), meter 7, Philosophy is discoursing on the vanity of
fame:

Where wonen now the bones of trewe Fabricius?
What is now Brutus or stierne Caton? The thynne
fame yit lastynge of here idel names is marked
with a fewe lettres. But although that we han
knownen the fayre wordes of the fames of hem, it
is nat yyven to knowen hem that ben dede and
consumpt. Liggeth thanne stille, al outrely un-
knowable, ne fame maketh yow nat knowe. And yif
ye wene to lyve the longer for wynd of yowr mor-
tel name whan o cruel day schal ravyssche yow,
than is the seconde deth duellynge unto yow.
(Glose. The first deeth he clepeth here departynge
of the body and the soule, and the seconde deth he
clepeth as here the styntyng of the renoun of
fame). (11. 17-33)

One may sum up the philosophy of Boethius thus: "The engen-
drynge of alle thinges . . . and alle the progressiouns of
muable nature, and al that moeveth in any manere, taketh his
causes, his ordre, and his forms, of the stablenesse of the
devyne thought" (IV, m. 5, 42-47). The Supreme Good, who
dwells himself "ay stedefast and stable, and yevest alle
othere thynges to ben meved" (III, m. 9, 5-7; see also III,

p. 12, 192-99), created all things out of his own divine goodness; and the end of all things is God himself (III, p. 10, 124-27). Indeed what Boethius emphasizes is that all things seek permanence:

For the purveaunce of God hath yeven to thinges that ben creat of hym this, that is a ful gret cause to lyven and to duren, for which they desiren naturely here lif as longe as evere thei mowen. For which thou mayst not drede be no manere that alle the thinges that ben anywhere, that thei ne requiren naturely the ferme stablenesse of perdurable duellynge, and eek the eschuyng of destruccioun. (III, p. 11, 178-87)

He says further:

Alle thynges seken ayen to hir propre cours, and alle thynges rejoysen hem of hir retornynge ayen to hir nature. Ne noon ordenaunce is bytaken to thynges, but that that hath joyned the endyng to the bygynnyng, and hath makid the cours of it-self stable (that it chaunge not from his propre kynde). (III, m. 2, 39-46)

In fact, those who do not seek God do not even exist for

Boethius:

And in this wise thei ne forleten nat oonly to ben myghti, but thei forleten al outrely in any wise for to been. For thei that forleten the comune fyn of alle thinges that ben, thei forleten also therwithal for to been. (IV, p. 2, 182-86)

For so as I have gadrid and proevid a litil herebyforn that evel is nawght, and so as schrewes mowen oonly but schrewednesses, this conclusion is al cler, that schrewes ne mowen rygth nat, ne han no power. (IV, p. 2, 213-18)

It is this heavenly vision of the eternal Supreme Good, then,

which occasions Boethius' emphasis on the brevity and transitoriness of the things of this life. "For ther nis nothing so late, in so schorte bowndes of this lif, that is long to abyde, nameliche to a corage immortal" (IV, p. 4, 40-43). So strong is this heavenly vision for Boethius, in fact, that any temporal fact which is not related to this Supreme Good does not even exist:

And peraventure it scholde seme to som folk that this were a marveile to seien, that schrewes, whiche that contenen the more partie of men, ne ben nat ne han no beyng; but natheles it is so, and thus stant this thing. (IV, p. 2, 187-91; cf. also IV, p. 3, 88 ff.)

This, the Consolation of Philosophy, is the document which Chaucer translated and used so extensively in his works. It is not my purpose to determine the influence of Boethius on Chaucer--Jefferson has done this most adequately.⁶ But I am attempting to deal with Chaucer's sensibility; and I think that a study of the concepts of mutability in the Consolation might help to explain and to define Chaucer's own attitude toward mutability much more clearly. In fact, what Jefferson writes in this regard well deserves to be quoted here:

How much the Consolation determined Chaucer's own attitude toward life, it is difficult to determine with precision. At the least, it may be said that Boethius and Chaucer were compatible in point of view and that Chaucer found in Boethius, in many ways, a congenial spirit. At the most, it may be said that

Boethius was an influence so profound that he completely determined Chaucer's view of the meaning of life and of the way in which life should be conducted. The truth no doubt lies somewhere between the two extremes, and Boethius probably accentuated and extended views which Chaucer already had temperamentally. Furthermore, the Consolation of Philosophy, as it thus gives expression to a philosophy of life which so much interested Chaucer, presents an opportunity to determine what Chaucer's conception of the ideal philosopher would be. Chaucer's ideal philosopher would be a man who understood and brought into practice the two "points" of the Consolation. First, as the aged Egeus, father of Theseus, he must understand the transmutation of the world from woe to weal and back to woe again, and unheeding worldly joys and woes alike, must stand steadfast, at peace with himself, though the world fall in ruin about him. But he must do more than stand stoically and grimly at bay. He must realize, somewhat like Plato, that there is an ideal good and that this good is unalterable; that, through a study of astronomy, so as to understand the harmony of divine law and to obtain a just perspective of petty worldly concerns, and through gentillesse and through the truth within him, he must try to associate himself with the universal good. When one remembers Chaucer's Astrolabe, Melibeus, and Parson's Tale, his retirement from life poring over old books, his broad and sympathetic view of his fellow men of all degrees and conditions, it is almost possible to believe that Chaucer himself was this kind of philosopher, although, as he himself says, "no man is al trewe, I gesse." (Pp. 165-66)

Another document which is important in determining the mediaeval attitude in regard to mutability is Innocent III's De Contemptu Mundi, which Chaucer translated perhaps between 1386 and 1394. Chaucer's use of this treatise in his poetry is, in fact, only another indication of its wide

influence on mediaeval literature generally.

Innocent's work is entitled De Contemptu Mundi sive De Miseria Conditionis Humanae and is divided into three books.⁷ It is generally a hodgepodge of scriptural quotations grouped together under various subjects (capita or headings), all of which ultimately relate to his general theme. This theme might be indicated by his quotation from Jeremias (xx) in the opening line of the treatise: "Quare de vulva matris egressus sum, ut viderem laborem et dolorem, et consume-
rentur in confusione dies mei?" "Si talia de se locutus est ille," he says, "quem Dominus sanctificavit in utero (Jer. i) qualia loquar ego de me, quem mater mea genuit in peccatis? Heu me, dixerim, mater mea, qui me genuisti, filium amaritudinis et doloris?" (Migne, ccxvii, col. 701). Thus is the general theme indicated of the treatise which Kurtz calls "as thoroughgoing a blackening of man as one can anywhere find" (op. cit., p. 239). And this is perhaps true, for nowhere is man's mortality more horribly set forth than here. Note the following, for example:

Formatus est homo de pulvere, de luto, de cinere: quoque vilis est, de spurcissimo spermate: conceptus in pruritu carnis in fervore libidinis, in fetore luxuriae: quodque deterius est in labe peccati; natus ad laborem, dolorem, timorem: quodque miserius est, ad mortem. (Col. 702)

But the themes of mutability and mortality are closely related; in fact, they often merge into the same concept, and so they do here in the De Contemptu Mundi. In chapter x, entitled De incommodis senectutis et brevitae vitae hominis, he says:

In primordio conditionis humanae noningentis annis et amplius homines vixisse leguntur (Gen. vi), sed paulatim, vita hominis declinante, dixit Dominus ad Noe: "Non permanebit spiritus meus in homine in aeternum, quia caro est. Eruntque dies illius centum viginti annorum" (Gen. vi). Quod intelligi potest tam de termino vitae, quam de spatio poenitendi. Ex tunc enim rarissime leguntur homines plus vixisse, sed cum magis ac magis vita recideretur humana, dictum est a Psalmista: "Dies annorum nostrorum in ipsis septuaginta anni. Si autem in potentatibus octoginta anni, et amplius eorum labor et dolor" (Psal. lxxxix). Nonne autem paucitas dierum meorum finietur brevi tempore? (Job x). "Dies nostri velocius transeunt quam a texente tela succiditur" (Job vii). "Homo natus de muliere brevi vivens tempore repletur multis miseriis. Qui quasi flos egreditur et conteritur, et fugit velut umbra, et nunquam in eodem statu permanet" (Job, xiv). Pauci enim nunc ad quadraginta, paucissimi ad sexaginta annos perveniunt. (Col. 706)

Notice also in this passage the implication of the Golden Age and therefore the theme of the decay of the world.

Chapter xii, De labore mortalium, offers another example of the merging of the mutability and mortality concepts. It is especially interesting for Innocent's definition of time.

"Avis ergo nascitur ad volandum, et homo nascitur ad laborem" (Job v). Cuncti dies ejus laboribus et aerumnis pleni sunt, nec per noctem requiescit mens ejus. Et quid hoc est nisi vanitas? Non est quisquam sine labore sub sole, non est sine defectu sub luna, non est sine vanitate sub tempore. Tempus est mora rerum mutabilium. "Vanitas vanitatum. Inquit Ecclesiastes (Cap. 1), et omnia vanitas." O quam varia sunt studia hominum, quam diversa sunt exercitia. Unus est tamen omnium finis, et idem effectus, labor et afflictio spiritus. "Occupatio magna creata est omnibus hominibus, et jugum grave super filios Adam, a die exitus de ventre matris eorum, usque in diem sepulturae in matrem omnium" (Eccli. x1). (Col. 706-707)

The coupling together of the concepts, "non est sine defectu sub luna, non est sine vanitate sub tempore. Tempus est mora rerum mutabilium" is significant. It has been pointed out in Chapter I that the region beneath the moon was considered the realm of mortality and, therefore, whatever is sublunar is "non sine defectu." Now whatever is sublunar is "sub tempore," and therefore "non sine vanitate." Thus the Aristotelian statement that whatever is beneath the moon is mutable. Innocent follows this with "Tempus est mora rerum mutabilium": time is the delay of all mutable things. It is interesting to note that, in contrast to Boethius, Innocent looks upon time (here, at any rate) as something static. It is somewhat of an inversion of the concept of mutability as we have seen it expressed by other authors.

But the intensity of the transitoriness of earthly things is still implied; it is as if he would say that "time is the delay (or temporary stay) of all changeable things."

In chapter xxii, Innocent speaks of the De brevi laetitia hominis:

Quis unquam [sic] vel unicum diem totum duxit in sua delectatione jucundum, quem in aliqua parte diei reatus conscientiae, vel impetus irae, vel motus concupiscentiae non turbaverit? Quem livor invidiae vel ardor avaritiae, vel tumor superbiae non vexaverit? quem aliqua jactura vel offensa, vel passio non commoverit? quem denique visus, vel auditus, vel actus aliquis non offenderit? Rara avis in terris nigroque simillima cygno. Audi super hoc sententiam Sapientis: "A mane usque ad vesperam immutabitur tempus" (Eccli. xviii).--"Cogitationes variae sibi succedunt, et mens rapitur in diversa" (Job xx).--"Tenent tympanum et citharam, et gaudent ad sonitum organi, ducunt in bonis dies suos, et in puncto ad inferna descendunt" (Job xxi). (Col. 713)

In the chapter following this one (chapter xxiii), Innocent speaks of De inopinato dolore. Note the close similarity in the words of Innocent and the ever-recurring theme of Chaucer, "from woe to weal and back to woe again."

Semper enim mundanae [al. humanae] laetitiae tristitia repentina succedit. Et quod incipit a gaudio desinit in [sic] moerore. Mundana quippe felicitas multis amaritudinibus est respersa. Noverat hoc qui dixerat: "Risus dolore miscebitur, et extrema gaudii luctus occupat" (Prov. xiv). Experti sunt hoc liberi Job, qui cum comederent et biberent vinum in domo fratris sui primogeniti, repente vehemens ventus irruit a regione deserti, et concussit quatuor angulos domus, quae corruens universos oppressit (Job i). Merito ergo pater

aiebat: "Versa est in luctum cithara mea et organum meum in vocem flentium" (Job xxx).--
 "Melius est enim ire ad domum luctus, quam ad domum convivii" (Eccle. vi). Attende salubre consilium:
 "In die bonorum non immemor sis malorum" (Eccle. ii).
 --"Memorare novissima tua, et in aeternum non peccabis" (Eccle. viii). (Col. 713)

This is an excellent example of the complete blending of the mortality and the mutability themes; in this passage it is difficult to distinguish the two. Nor, incidentally, do I know of a more explicit statement of the mediaeval concept of time: as linear rather than cyclical. It is not my purpose here to point out the influence of Innocent on Chaucer, but I cannot resist using two passages from Chaucer to show that the essence of the mediaeval consciousness is expressed by Innocent when he says: "nihil est vita mortalis, nisi mors vivens." In the Reeve's Prologue, the Reeve says:

For sikerly, whan I was bore, anon
 Deeth drough the tappe of lyf and leet it gon;
 And ever si the hath so the tappe yronne
 Til that almoost al empty is the tonne.
 (A 3891-94)

In the Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale the Host says:

Lordynges, the tyme wasteth nyght and day,
 And steleth from us, what pryvely slepynge,
 And what thurgh negligence in oure wakyng,
 As dooth the streem that turneth nevere agayn,
 Descendynge fro the montaigne into playn.
 (B¹ 20-24)

Certainly the immediacy of time was uppermost in the mediaeval

consciousness, and usually this immediacy was informed by the ever-present consciousness of death.

In one way or another the concepts of the transitoriness of life or of the mutability of fortune permeate Innocent's treatise. Note, for example, chapter xxvii, De subitis infortuniis:

Subito cum non suspicatur, infortunium accidit, calamitas irruit, morbus invadit, mors intercipit, quam [al. quia] nullus evadit. Ergo "ne glorieris in crastinum, ignorans quid superventura pariat dies" (Prov. xxvii).--"Nescit homo finem suum: sed sicut pisces capiuntur hamo et sicut aves comprehenduntur laqueo, sic capiuntur homines in tempore malo, cum eis extemplo supervenerit" (Eccle. ix). (Col. 716)

In Book II, chapter xvi, he speaks De incertitudine divitiarum; in chapter xxix, De brevi et misera vita magnatum. He speaks De fucatione colorum [al. oculorum] in chapter xl, and says:

Absit autem ut adulterinus color comparabilis sit nativo. Quinimo cum facies adulterino colore fucatur, os abominabili fetore corrumpitur. "Universa vanitas omnis homo vivens" (Psal. xxxviii). Quid enim vanius quam pectere crines, planare caesariem, tingere genas, ungere faciem, producere supercilia? Quando quidem "fallax sit gratia; et vana sit pulchritudo" (Prov. xxxi).--"Omnis caro fenum, et omnis gloria ejus quasi flos agri" (Isa. xl): quoniam "tanquam fenum velociter arescit" (Psal. xxxvi). . . . Scriptum est enim: "Homo cum morietur, non accipiet haec omnia, neque simul cum eo descendet gloria ejus" (Psal. xlviii). (Cols. 733-34)

One can readily see, therefore, that the concept of mutability underlies and furnishes the raison d'être of the contempt of the world. The world is contemptible because it is not abiding and death is the preeminent proof of this fact; at all times we see all things hastening to their death.

There is another motif of the mutability theme which figures prominently in Innocent's treatise: the theme of putrefaction. I mention this not because this element in Innocent's work influenced Chaucer--Chaucer never uses the theme of putrefaction--but because this element in Innocent's De Contemptu Mundi is one of the landmarks in "vermifluous" literature. Benjamin P. Kurtz is almost humorous, and certainly correct, when he says that:

In the first, second, and twenty-first chapters of Book I and the first and second of Book III, the deacon piles up his vermifluous learning. One need hunt no further in the Old and New Testaments for passages on worms. All the Old Testament worms are here. (Op. cit., p. 239)

Chapter i (Book III), De putredine cadaverum, is so recapitulatory of the putrefaction images contained in the entire treatise, that I feel justified in quoting it entirely; notice, incidentally, how the mutability theme (mutability in its stricter sense, as the transitory and perishable nature of things) of the first part very easily and naturally glides

into the more hideous theme of putrefaction.

"Exibit spiritus ejus, et revertetur in terram suam, in illa die peribunt omnes cogitationes eorum" (Psal. cxlv). O quot et quanta mortales de mundanae provisionis incertitudine cogitant, sed sub repentinae mortis articulo repente cuncta quae cogitaverant, evanescent. "Sicut umbra cum declinat ablati sunt, et excussi sunt sicut locustae" (Psal. cviii). Exibit ergo spiritus ejus, non voluntarius, sed invitus, quia cum dolore dimittet quae cum amore possedit, ac velit, nolit, constitutus est ei terminus, qui praeteriri non poterit (Job xiv), in quo terra revertetur in terram. Scriptum est enim: Terra es, et in terram ibis (Gen. iii). Naturale siquidem est, ut materiatum in materiam resolvatur. "Auferet ergo spiritum eorum et deficient, et in pulverem suum revertentur" (Psal. ciii).--"Cum autem morietur homo, haereditabit bestias, serpentes et vermes" (Eccli. xix).--"Omnes enim in pulvere dormient, et vermes operient eos" (Job xxi).--"Sicut vestimentum sic comedet eos vermis, et sicut lanam sic devorabit eos tineam" (Isa. li). --"Quasi putredo consumendus est, et quasi vestimentum quod comeditur a tineam" (Job xiii).--"Putredini dixi ait Job: Pater meus es, mater mea, et soror mea vermibus" (Job xvii).--"Homo putredo et filius hominis" (Job xxv). --Quam turpis pater, quam vilis mater, quam abominabilis soror! Conceptus est enim homo de sanguine per ardorem libidinis putrefacto, cujus tandem libidinis cadaveri quasi funebres vermes assistant. Vivus generavit pediculos et lumbricos, mortuus generabit vermes et muscas; vivus produxit stercus et vomitum, mortuus producet putredinem et fetorem; vivus hominem unicum impinguavit, mortuus vermes plurimos impinguabit. Quid ergo foetidius humano cadavere? quid horribilius homine mortuo? Cui gratissimus erat amplexus in vita, molestus etiam erit aspectus in morte. Quid ergo prosunt divitiae? quid epulae? quid deliciae? quid honores? Divitiae non liberabunt a morte, epulae non defendent a morte, nec deliciae a verme, honores non eripient a fetore. Qui modo sedebat gloriosus in throno, modo jacet despectus in tumulo; qui modo fulgebat ornatus in aula, modo sordet nudus in tumba; qui modo vescebatur deliciis in coenaculo,

modo consumitur a vermibus in sepulcro. (Cols. 735-37)

Indeed this is a black picture of man. But one must be careful about accepting unqualifiedly Kurtz's remarks that the Latin texts on the contempt of the world are themselves enough to earn for the twelfth century the title of "the savage twelfth"; and that "no Manichean, no bitterest pessimist or most perverted decadent has ever defiled the life of man so horribly and indecently" (pp. 239-40). It is often difficult for us who live in a post-Rousseau world to have perfect sympathy with the mediaeval consciousness. One must remember that the Contemptus Mundi was really a devotional exercise; it attempted to inspire men to right-living and to the ultimate salvation of their souls; the last part of this chapter quoted from Innocent indicates its rhetorical intent. Secondly, one must look at the entire picture. Innocent upheld the dignity of man, a Christian dignity, based upon man's ideal relationship with God and his neighbor. "'Anima iusti sedes Dei,' quia sedet Deus in eo per gratiam," says Innocent in Book II, chapter xliii (col. 736). In the mediaeval sensibility, man was nothing if he did not seek the Summum Bonum through virtue; we saw that Boethius even denied that the vicious had "being." There was nothing

inconsistent therefore for the mediaeval man to speak of "worms' food" and "the seat of grace" in almost the same breath. Basically it is the "hoc mundus" and the "alter mundus" which we saw in the Consolation of Philosophy. The one passes away and the other is eternal. It is therefore anachronistic for John L. Lowes to call Innocent's De Contemptu "fiercely misanthropic."⁸ Willard Farnham's statement makes much more sense:

We should perceive, I think, that in its religious aspects Contempt of the World was true devotion, practiced quite naturally by many intelligent medieval men who found it good at times and bad if indulged in fanatically. One who was not a sincerely ascetic monk was probably very realistic about the matter. He knew full well that he had to spend much of his life pursuing the things of the world, but he believed more firmly than we do now that thereby he jeopardized his soul, and he balanced his sense of values by a form of meditation which reviled his ordinary pursuits. He did not spend all his time praying; neither did he spend all his time in such meditation. If this is so, it is gratuitous on our part to "defend" Innocent III and Chaucer in this connection by seeking to find in them an ideal consistency. (Op. cit., pp. 45-46)

It is natural and appropriate to find mutability in Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy and in Innocent's De Contemptu Mundi, for these are a philosophical and a religious treatise, respectively. But the mutability theme is also prominent in the greatest courtly-love poem of the Middle Ages, Le Roman de la Rose. That Chaucer translated at least

part of this long poem (it is over 22,000 lines) we know from the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women. He translated it, most probably, in the very earliest part of his literary career.⁹ The Romance of the Rose is "one of the great germinal books of the Middle Ages"¹⁰ and "remains Chaucer's primary literary source . . ."¹¹ C. S. Lewis remarks that "as a germinal book during these centuries it ranks second to none except the Bible and the Consolation of Philosophy."¹² Certainly one might determine much about mediaeval consciousness and sensibility from a thorough study of such an important work. And in regard to Chaucer, J. L. Lowes' statement that "the Roman de la Rose was one of the half-dozen books most closely woven into the very texture of his mind and art" (op. cit., p. 60), is certainly true.

In Chapter II of The Romance of the Rose, the Lover describes the different figures which he sees painted along the garden wall. Among these is Old Age, who is described in a kind of declarative aspect of the interrogative ubi sunt convention:

Faded her once bright lustrous eye;
 Wrinkled the cheeks once soft and smooth;
 And those once pink-shell ears, forsooth,
 Now pendent hung; her pearl-like teeth
 Alas! had long since left their sheath.¹³

This somewhat naturally occasions a digression on Time:

Time speedeth over night and day,
 No rest he taketh nor delay
 Of briefest movement makes, but steals
 So warily along, man feels
 His going nought, but fondly deems
 Time standeth still; but while he dreams,
 Half-waked, Time's foot hath passed, I trow,
 For none can say that time is--NOW!
 Ask thou some learned clerk, while he
 Maketh response, the time shall be
 Gone and departed three times o'er,
 For Time aye passeth, but no more
 Returneth: e'en as water flows
 For ever onward, but ne'er goes
 Back to its source. No thing can 'dure
 Against the force of time, though sure
 As adamant or iron. Time
 Each thing devoureth when its prime
 Is reached. 'Tis Time that maketh grow
 All new-born things, and Time doth show
 How all things change, and wear and waste;
 'Tis he that hath our fathers chased
 From off the earth. Of mighty kings
 and emperors the dirge he sings,
 And all, through Time must pass away,
 For he 'tis marks our dooming day.
 (ll. 367-92)

This passage makes it clear that time and change (mutability) and decay are inextricably woven together, if indeed these concepts are not actually identical, in the mediaeval consciousness. F. N. Robinson, in his note to a similar passage of Chaucer's Introduction to The Man of Law's Tale (B¹ 20-31), cites this passage of the Romance of the Rose along with some others of the classical period and says: "These observations on the passage of time, often with the comparison to the river, were commonplace or even proverbial."¹⁴ The

facts that this passage is a digression and that this concept was "commonplace or even proverbial" show, I think, to what extent mutability was rooted in the mediaeval consciousness.

Guillaume de Lorris has much to say about the transitory and capricious nature of love, but there are no other passages in his section of the Romance of the Rose which might significantly contribute to the understanding of the mediaeval sensibility in regard to mutability. This is, of course, as it should be. Guillaume's poem is exclusively a love poem; the poem is executed in a highly artistic manner and there are therefore remarkably few digressions. This is certainly not the case with the 18,000 lines of Jean de Meun. His section of the poem is "practically nil" (Lowes, p. 65) so far as the action is concerned; C. S. Lewis, in fact, numbers ten digressions (most of them varying from one to four thousand lines) in this section (op. cit., pp. 138 ff.). In these digressions De Meun discusses at length almost all the subjects which might be of interest to the mediaeval man; Lowes says that all the elements of the Middle Ages are there "in something of their own warring chaos" (op. cit., p. 67). And for C. S. Lewis, this "explains why the Romance is the typical poem of the Middle Ages in a sense in which the Comedy is not--typical in its richness and variety, and

typical also in its radical vices" (op. cit., p. 155). It is therefore not surprising to find that much of De Meun's matter is pertinent to the theme of mutability.

Near the first part of Jean de Meun's section of the Romance of the Rose, Reason gives the Lover a lecture on his folly. In the process Reason describes Eld, who had wasted her youth in sin:

Who all her years of vigour spent
In folly; now doth she repent
Her wasted preterite, and would fain
By painful penance seek to gain
Future forgiveness of the sin
Committed long ago, and win
Sweet heaven thereby, and thus redeem
Those days, that now so worthless seem
When youth and all its joyance drew
Her feet from virtue's paths, and slew
Remembrance of how quickly pass
The glorious hours of youth; alas!
Too late she sees how brief a time
Endure those days of golden prime.
(ll. 4811-24)

Time, therefore, is something very precious: it is a period of trial wherein man, through a virtuous life, merits heaven; and through a life of vice, on the other hand, merits hell. Time is brief and fleeting because it is always viewed in the shadow of eternity; and it is indeed irrevocable. The consciousness of the immediacy of time is perceivable throughout this whole discourse of Reason, who says:

sad thy fate
 Would prove, if all thy youth should be
 Consumed in Love's wild revelry,
 And thou shouldst all too late behold
 Thy life laid waste. If thou so bold
 And strong art found that thou canst cast
 And break Love's bonds, thou then time past
 Mayst mourn, but canst recover never.
 (11. 4900-07)

That love which the lover is seeking is carnal; he should not "let that love inmesh/ His soul, whose trammels wake the flesh" (11. 4883-84). One's life is wasted if it is not spent in the pursuit of virtue and, ultimately, the Summum Bonum. Even "if gaunt famine face him, he/ Welcomes his end right manfully" (11. 5323-24); for death "grants heaven in change for earth's dull sod" (1. 5328).

Pythagoras hath said the same
 Within that noble book men name
 "The Golden Verses," fair and bright
 They shine throughout the ages' night.
 "When of thy body thou art quit,
 Forthwith to heaven thy soul shall flit,
 And freed from human grossness be
 Absorbed within the Deity."
 Wretched the fool who dreams that this
 Poor earth our only city is.
 Let one demand of some wise clerk,
 Well versed in that most noble work
 "Of Consolation," 'foretime writ
 By great Boethius, for in it
 Are stored and hidden most profound
 And learned lessons: 'twould redound
 Greatly to that man's praise who should
 Translate that book with masterhood.
 (11. 5329-46)

Non habemus hic manentem civitatem: this is the spirit which

informs this long, rambling digression of Reason, as it is the spirit which also informs the Consolation of Philosophy. So strong is this vision of the Summum Bonum, in fact, for De Meun, that Reason concludes with Lady Philosophy: "The plain corollary is then,/ That less than nought are evil men" (ll. 6699-6700). If it was this passage which prompted Chaucer to translate the work of Boethius, as Skeat thinks but which can never be proven, is it not likely that it was a sensibility akin to that of Boethius which led him to a further and so thorough an inquiry?

De Meun's concept of Fortune and of external goods is the same as that of Boethius: "External goods have no more worth/ Than some poor horse's outworn girth" (ll. 5645-46); and no man "can own throughout a long life's span / The value of a garden leek" (l. 5648). Beauty is "a thing/ Unstable, frail, and perishing/ As flowerets that bedeck the lawn,/ Faded at eve, though blown at dawn" (ll. 8737-40). Examples of and statements about the mutability of Fortune are scattered plentifully throughout the entire poem. Even the Rose, which the Lover seeks, is a gift of Fortune: "Forsake/ Thy cruel God of Love, and make/ No count of Fortune and her wheel/ (Not worth a prune is she)" (ll. 6171-74); this love "doth wane/ Or wax with Fortune . . . as doth the moon/ Whose

brightness dims and fades . . ." (ll. 5083-86). Reason's well-known discussion of Fortune, however, occurs in this first digression and occupies approximately 1,100 lines (ll. 6171-7280). Suffice it to say that all the conventional aspects of Fortune are here: her mutability, her blindness, her snares, her wheel, and numerous examples of great men who have been in turn raised up and betrayed by her. Finally, the attitudes of Boethius and De Meun toward earthly happiness are identical: "No man such great happiness/ Can boast him, but that some distress/ Shall come to dash his cup of joy" (ll. 7215-17), says Reason. In short, I venture to say that there is no author in the Middle Ages (with the exception possibly of Chaucer, as will be shown later) who typifies the influence of the Consolation of Philosophy better than Jean de Meun. I have mentioned here only a few of De Meun's borrowings from Boethius.¹⁵

De Meun also implies the decay-of-the-world theme when he discusses the Golden Age: "How pleasant were earth's simpler ways/ In our progenitors' first days!" (ll. 8767-68), the Friend tells the Lover. In the Golden Age men lived simply, and "the fruitful earth no need to ear/ Had they, it foisoned 'neath God's care" (ll. 8799-8800). There were no seasons then, but "one unvarying tide of spring" (l. 8821);

there was no seigniorage, no jealousy, and typically De Meun, the evil institution of marriage had not yet been devised. But, alas! Dan Jupiter "changed all things from good to bad,/ And bad to worse" (ll. 21041-42).

Into four parts the eternal spring
 He clove, and made the rolling year
 To vary as the times came near
 Of spring's delight and summer's heat,
 And autumn's bounteousness replete
 With fruits, and winter's bitter cold,
 When men seek house and flee the wold.
 But the unending spring no more
 Men revelled in as heretofore
 And soon the silver age, alas!
 Declined to that of baser brass.
 And ever as time went, I trow,
 Mankind fell lower and more low,
 Till in the iron age at last
 His lot, fulfilled of woe, is cast . . .
 (ll. 21044-62)

This section is not merely conventional because it appears in a context which contrasts this fallen age with a new Golden Age (Paradise), which Genius promises to those who follow Nature's commands. This concept of the Five Ages of Man is indeed, as has been pointed out in previous sections of this chapter, another aspect of the concept of mutability; for it views change as aging deterioration, degeneration and, for the Christian (as opposed to some of the ancients who held to a theory of world-cycles), gradual extinction.

The theme of mutability, moreover, becomes prominent

when Nature enters at line 16655. The barons had made an oath to support Venus and Cupid in their assault on the castle wherein Fair-Welcome is imprisoned. The author then tells how this made Nature happy, who "into her workshop entered straight,/ Where swinketh she both rathe and late,/ To forge such pieces as may be/ Used for the continuity/ Of life" (ll. 16649-53). Here follows a long account of the life-and-death race and of Nature's ceaseless attempt to preserve the species:

for she doth mould things so
That ne'er shall any species know
The power of death, but as one dies
Forthwith another may arise
To fill his place. In vain doth death
With hurrying footsteps spend his breath;
So closely Nature followeth him . . .
(ll. 16653-59)¹⁶

This can be viewed as the theme of mutability, properly speaking, rather than the theme of mortality because the emphasis here is upon generation rather than upon death; on the continuity rather than on the cessation of the different species of life; at least, on the recurrent polarity, the systole and the diastole of existence. On the surface this might seem similar to Ovid's (Pythagoras') doctrine of change as set forth in the Metamorphoses:

Nothing, I say, the form it has can hold:
Inventive nature fashions new from old.
(See p. 18, supra)

But De Meun's doctrine of change is something entirely different.¹⁷ For Pythagoras, "nought is lost the cosmos through:/ Things merely change and take an aspect new." Nature, however, works night and day to preserve the species; she "abhors and hates Death's envious mood" (l. 16770) and laments the loss of the lives of the individuals of the species; for unlike Pythagoras' doctrine De Meun's holds that the individual undergoes a true death and death is not merely a change of aspect. Nature thinks of the ensuing battle and death in general; De Meun then writes:

Then busy Nature, whose desire
Is ever to keep bright the fire
Of life in all her works, raised high
Her voice and wept so plaintively . . .
(ll. 16917-20)

When Nature confesses to Genius (the god of reproduction), her priest, she speaks with benign approval of the harmony of the heavens, the planets, and the elements; then she says:

But those who closely look will see
That howsoever good may be
The harmony, from day to day
The sap of life must waste away,
Till Death's sure step will lastly come
By nature's course to bear men home . . .
(ll. 17783-88)

She realizes indeed, and she calls upon Plato as witness to the fact, that however great her power of generation, she deals but with mutable stuff:

Nature before the Almighty power
 Of God hath but a passing hour,
 He as in lightning flash doth see
 Time past, time present, time to be.
 (11. 19901-05)

She is God's minister but she has no power over man's immortal and incorruptible part:

For nought there is by Nature made,
 But what must in due season fade
 And perish, whatso care thereto
 She gives, but whatsoe'er is due
 To God's right hand is pure, and clear
 Of all defect, and hath no peer,
 Nor ever can corruption see,
 Since made 'tis incorruptibly.
 (11. 19917-24)

Thus, even though De Meun is concerned here primarily with the generative power and the fecundity of Nature, this is, nevertheless, as good a statement of the mediaeval concept of mutability--the transitoriness of life and the inevitability of death--as can be found anywhere in mediaeval literature. The main difference between this particular digression and most of the other treatments of the theme in mediaeval literature is that this passage treats the theme impersonally and therefore makes no attempt to reflect human sentiment in regard to mutability.

What is more important to the poem, however, and more important in discovering the core of mediaeval consciousness, is the speech of Genius to Venus, Cupid, and his barons, whose

cause Nature is supporting. Nature had deputized Genius to tell them to increase the race and to pay homage to love (ll. 20223-26), and this he does at great length (ll. 20353-21545): "Bend all your powers to multiply/ The human race, and so defy/ The work of Atropos, though she/ Strive hard to win the mastery" (ll. 20659-62), is the gist of what he has to say in this regard. But he also tells them to strive to lead a virtuous life and to bow before God, Nature's master; "and he I trow/ Your heart's door against fear will shut/ When Atropos your thread shall cut" (ll. 20741-50). Genius then sets out to describe at length (ll. 20787-21545, with brief interruptions) the Heavenly Paradise and its splendor which is beyond comparison, what "no thought of man could hold in view,/ Nor tongue give utterance to" (ll. 21239-40). In fact, "from the lips of Genius we learn for the first time that the Garden of Love and Delight is, after all, only the imitation of a different garden; and not only a copy, but that misleading kind of copy which the philosophers call Schein rather than Erscheinung" (Lewis, p. 151).

For whoso of that garden fair,
Closed with the little wicket, (where
The Lover saw by happy chance
Sir Mirth and Pleasure lead the dance,)
Should make comparison with this
Bright spot I tell of, would, ywis,
Err greatly, for no mortal sight

Hath e'er beheld such radiant light
 As shines therein; it were, forsooth,
 Fable to pledge 'gainst spotless truth.
 (ll. 21137-46)

And just as the Garden of Love (an Earthly Paradise, ll. 650 ff.) has such hideous figures as Eld, Vilanye, and Papelardie carved upon its outer wall, so too would this Heavenly Paradise, were one to venture there:

Mais qui dehors ce parc querrait,
 Touz figurez i trouverrait
 Enfer e trestouz les deables,
 Mout laiz e mout espoentables,
 E touz defauz e touz outrages
 Qui font en enfer leur estages,
 E Cerberus, qui tout enserre;
 S'i trouverrait toute la terre
 O ses richeces ancienes,
 E toutes choses terrienes;
 E verrait proprement la mer,
 E touz peissons qui ont amer,
 E trestoutes choses marines,
 Eves douces, troubles e fines,
 E les choses granz e menues
 Es eves douces contenues;
 E l'air e touz ses oisillons
 E mouschetes e papillons,
 E tout quanque par l'air resone;
 E le feu qui touz avirone
 Les meubles e les tenemenz
 De touz les autres elemenz.
 S'i verrait toutes les esteles
 Cleres e reluisanz e beles,
 Seient erranz, seient fichiees,
 En leur esperes estachiees.
 Qui la serait toutes ces choses
 Verrait de ce bel parc forcloses
 Ausinc apertement pourtraites
 Com proprement aperent faites.
 (ll. 20305-34)¹⁸

Thus, says C. S. Lewis,

On the wall of the "good park," as we should expect, are the sins and the devils: but a reader who has not the taste for this sort of thing will learn with surprise that we find there also the earth and the stars, and in fact the whole material universe. But Jean de Meun is right. He is talking of the realissimum, of the Centre, of that which lies beyond the "sensuous curtain": and to that, not only in hell and sin and courtly love, but the world and all that is in it, and the visible heaven, are but painted things--appearances on the outside of the wall whose inside no one has seen. What the wall shows from without are, in fine, phenomena. . . . This is the outer face of the wall, the side we know. (Op. cit., pp. 152-53)

Whoever passes through the gates of this Heavenly Paradise, then, will be beyond the reach of time, of the world, of phenomena, of mutability; and it is always in terms of mutability and permanence that De Meun views the two gardens:

Nor record how Time speeds I wot,
Is kept in that all-blissful spot.
For day endures, yet nothing it
Of future knows or preterite,
For, in good truth, the tenses three
Are ordered so that they may be
All present, which can never die
Into the past, nor open lie
As future--'tis one sphere-like day,
Which can nor fade nor pass away,
Preterite, present, future, all
Into one blissful moment fall,
Which wasteth not nor passeth by,
But beams through far eternity.
(11. 20865-78)

But no matter how beautiful this Garden of Love is, it is not abiding because it is of the world, phenomena:

Fair sirs, but vain imaginings
 Were these fair sights and sounds, I trow,
 A vain and fleeting worldly show
 Which soon must perish, for on all
 That joyous crew dim death must fall
 Ere long, and, dance and dancers spent,
 An end be of their merriment;
 Since things corruptible amain
 Must into dust return again.

(ll. 21214-22)

And it is this garden of the Heavenly Paradise which we have been seeking all along; the Garden of Love, which Cupid would have us seek, will fade away. It is this vision of eternity, finally, which makes the world and love and the gifts of Fortune seem so insignificant to the mediaeval consciousness. Whether this was Jean de Meun's final view of love or not really makes little difference: I suspect that his "formlessness" is a much surer guide in discovering the mediaeval sensibility than we might think. The fact remains of De Meun's clearly-seen and deeply-felt distinction between the infinite and the finite. This is the poem that was bequeathed to Geoffrey Chaucer; and this is the poem which he, at least in part, translated. It is this mentality, finally, this dichotomy between the infinite and the finite, the permanent and the temporal, so clearly expressed in these works which Chaucer translated, which we shall now find dominant in Chaucer's poetry.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

¹See D. S. Fansler, Chaucer and the Roman de la Rose (New York, 1914), pp. 179-80; 205-14; 223.

²Chaucer's Translation of Boethius' "De Consolatione Philosophiae" in EETS, Extra Series, No. 5 (London, 1868).

³Ed. by Ernest Belfort Bax (London, 1897), Tudor Library, V.

⁴I, m. 1, 20-32. Citations from Chaucer's translation of the Consolation in my text are to The Complete Works, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1957).

⁵"Mediaeval Gloom and Mediaeval Uniformity," Speculum, I (1926), 253.

⁶B. L. Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius (Princeton, 1917).

⁷Migne, Pat. lat., t. 217, col. 701-46.

⁸Geoffrey Chaucer (Oxford, 1934), p. 80.

⁹Most probably Chaucer translated only 1705 lines of this poem, but A. Brusendorff in The Chaucer Tradition (London, 1925), pp. 308 ff., argues that Chaucer translated the entire work as well as the existing fragments. For problems as to Chaucer's translation of the poem and the probable date, see F. N. Robinson, ed., The Complete Works, 2d ed. (Boston, 1957), pp. 872-73; W. W. Skeat, ed., The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2d ed. (Oxford, 1899), I, 1-14.

¹⁰Lowes, op. cit., p. 67.

¹¹John Speirs, Chaucer the Maker (London, 1954), p. 35.

¹²C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (New York, 1958), p. 157.

¹³The Romance of the Rose, trans. F. S. Ellis (London, 1940), II, 360 ff. Since it is generally agreed that Chaucer translated only part of the incomplete Middle English version of the Roman, all quotations are given from this modern translation. The corresponding sections from the Old French text are given in Appendix II.

¹⁴Op. cit., p. 690.

¹⁵For the influence of Boethius on De Meun, see Ernest Langlois, Origines et Sources du Roman de la Rose (Paris, 1891), pp. 93-96; 136-39; and 185 ff.

¹⁶C. S. Lewis says about this Genius-Nature passage (nearly five thousand lines with numerous digressions): "In its earlier phases this unwieldy passage is nothing less than a triumphal hymn in honour of generation and of Nature's beauty and energy at large. It has really nothing to do with courtly love" (op. cit., p. 149).

¹⁷Cf. Le Roman de la Rose, ed. Ernest Langlois (Paris, 1922), IV, ll. 15891 ff., and Notes, pp. 296 ff. The sources for most of this section are De Planctu Naturae, Breve breviarium de Dono Dei, and the Summa perfectionis magisterii. Apparently Ovid does not in any way influence this Nature-Genius passage; see Langlois' Origines et Sources du Roman de la Rose, pp. 119-27.

¹⁸Langlois, ed., op. cit., V. I used the edition of Langlois here because Ellis' translation is not so clear as it might have been. In the other instances, however, where I have

quoted Ellis in this paper, I have checked the original and have found Ellis adequate.

CHAPTER III

THE SHORTER POEMS

The extent to which the mutability theme occupies the shorter poems of Chaucer is indeed surprising. The problem here, however, is in determining the extent of Chaucer's originality in these generally conventional pieces. Relatively little scholarly attention has been given to them, but I think it can be determined that Chaucer, even from the very beginning of his writings, was vitally concerned with the mutability theme.

The Complaint of Mars, perhaps the finest in this group of poems, affords a clear-cut illustration of this fact. Here Chaucer skillfully combines mythological and astrological elements in a poem clearly in the Valentine-, the aubade-, and the complaint-traditions. Most of the critics, however, have been so concerned with the personal allegorical interpretations of the poem that they have entirely neglected its artistic brilliance. Others have dismissed it as merely "conventional," and have said little more about it. Only

one critic, Gardiner Stillwell, has significantly discussed the poem as a work of art;¹ he examines the Mars by comparing it with its analogue, the Ovide moralisé, and other Valentine poems, especially Graunson's Songe saint Valentin. "Not only in the Proem," he says, "but in the Story and Complaint as well, the general movement is one of deliberate descent from an aristocratic dream-world to sober truth" (p. 81). Furthermore, he writes:

His use of the literary type--the complaint--and of the conventions of courtly love is likewise highly original. His Complaint unto Pity and Complaint to his Lady are, on the whole, conventional accounts of lovers' woes; Mars is not. The hero is indeed, up to a point, the typical lover experiencing woe because of his sovereign lady, but he is no mere embodiment of any such stale convention. In the Complaint proper as in the whole poem, Chaucer rocks back and forth between conventions and contradictions or enrichments of conventions. (P. 74)

Stillwell's study enables us to approach the mutability passage in the Mars with much more assurance. At the arrival of Phebus (the Sun), Venus had been forced to flee to the mansion of Mercury. This occasions Mars' complaint, the third tern of which is the following:

To what fyn made the God that sit so hye,
Benethen him, love other companye,
And streyneth folk to love, malgre her hed?
And then her joy, for oght I can espye,
Ne lasteth not the twynkelyng of an ye,
And somme han never joy til they be ded.
What meneth this? What is this mystihed?

Wherto constreyneth he his folk so faste
 Thing to desyre, but hit shulde laste?

And thogh he made a lover love a thing,
 And maketh hit seme stedfast and during,
 Yet putteth he in hyt such mysaventure
 That reste mys ther non in his yeving.
 And that is wonder, that so juste a kyng
 Doth such hardnesse to his creature.
 Thus, whether love breke or elles dure,
 Algates he that hath with love to done
 Hath ofter wo then changed ys the mone.

Hit semeth he hath to lovers enmyte,
 And lyk a fissher, as men alday may se,
 Baiteth hys angle-hok with som plesaunce,
 Til many a fissh ys wod til that he be
 Sased therwith; and then at erst hath he
 Al his desir, and therwith al myschaunce;
 And thogh the lyne breke, he hath penaunce;
 For with the hok he wounded is so sore
 That he his wages hath for evermore.

(ll. 218-44)

Here, as elsewhere in Chaucer's works, the mutability and the mortality themes are so closely related that one might easily see that the two ideas were never far apart in the poet's own mind. The significance of this tern becomes clear when we remember that in the Mars, as in the Knight's Tale, mythology and astrology are inextricably united. Mars and Venus, as planets, had to come together and they also had to be caught by Phoebus. It is a question here of fate, just as in the Troilus and in the Knight's Tale. Mars and Venus, therefore, were destined to be together only a very short time and were also destined to be separated. The two ideas which blend

here, then, are the joy which "ne lasteth not the twynkelyng of an ye," and man's inability to control his own sorry situation. About this and the following terns Stillwell says: "In tern III and in tern IV (the brooch of Thebes) Chaucer abandons all pretense of writing a typical love-complaint, and introduces philosophical probing of the most general possible import" (p. 86). Mars' philosophical statements are much like those of Criseyde's in books II and III of the Troilus, where she says: "For either joies comen nought yfeere,/ Or elles no wight hath hem alwey here" (III, 818-19), and in love always "som cloude is over that sonne" (II, 781). But Mars probes much deeper than does Criseyde: he questions the very providence of God. Like Troilus, Mars is aware that he is constrained to love; in fact, in the Troilus Chaucer clearly states that to love is a law of nature (I, 219 ff.). Why then, says Mars, did God make love so transitory? Even when it seems "stedfast and during," it is, nevertheless, full of vicissitude.

This philosophical generalization in tern III becomes exemplified in the story of the brooch of Thebes in tern IV (from the Thebaid of Statius, ii, 265 ff.). This brooch, exquisitely wrought and extremely desirable, made its coveter sorrowful until he possessed it; when one possessed it he was

haunted with constant dread; and when he had lost it, "Then had he double wo and passioun/ For he so feir a tresor had forgo" (ll. 255-56). This was not due to the brooch, but to the cunning maker who contrived that all who possessed it should suffer. Thus, says Mars:

So fareth hyt by lovers and by me;
 For thogh my lady have so gret beaute
 That I was mad til I had gete her grace,
 She was not cause of myn adversite,
 But he that wroghte her, also mot I the,
 That putte such a beaute in her face,
 That made me coveyten and purchase
 Myn oun deth; him wite I that I dye,
 And myn unwit, that ever I clamb so hye.
 (ll. 263-71)

Skeat glosses lines 270-71 as, "For my death I blame Him, and my own folly for being so ambitious" (I, p. 504). At no other time in his works does Chaucer allow one of his characters to speak so directly in questioning--indeed to deny--the justice of God. Troilus blames Fortune constantly and Criseyde questions Jove in regard to the suffering of the innocent (III, 1016-22), but Mars blasphemes.² Certainly, then, such reasoning on the part of Mars, inserted by Chaucer in the middle of a love-complaint, betrays Chaucer's deep interest in the mutability theme. Stillwell points this out in the conclusion to his article:

To his Valentine's Day audience, then,
 the unpredictable Chaucer expresses an attitude

toward young lovers very much like that of the Knight's Tale or the Troilus: it is now joy, now sorrow, always fascination to see their busynesse, and at the same time they are amusing or pathetic or both together in basing their lives on so unstable a foundation. This attitude Chaucer expresses with remarkable felicity. The astrologized and moralized Ovid (if involved), the aubade, the complaint, the Valentine-tradition, and the conventions of courtly love form an interesting background against which the poet's personality has its intensely individual being. (Pp. 88-89)

Stillwell's study convincingly establishes Chaucer's interest in the mutability of love, an interest, certainly, which found its expression in philosophical speculation that actually reversed the purpose of the very conventions he was using.

Another of Chaucer's shorter poems which evidences this interest in mutability is his balade Fortune, which actually consists of three balades and an envoy, and which some of the manuscripts entitle, Balades de vilage (no doubt an error for visage) sanz peinture (referring to "the face of Fortune, or else the face of a supposed friend," Skeat, I, 543). In the first balade, Le Pleintif (the complainant) states that adversity has taught him "to knowen frend fro fo in thy [Fortune's] mirour," and he recognizes that Fortune has no power over "him that over himself hath the maystrye." The refrain of each of the three stanzas is: "For fynally,

Fortune, I thee defye!" In the second balade, Fortune responds to the Pleintif: "No man is wrecched, but himself it wene,/ And he that hath himself hath suffisaunce." Indeed, why should you complain about me, says Fortune; have I not shown you "that were in ignoraunce" the difference between "Frend of effect, and frend of countenaunce"? "Thou born art in my regne of variaunce," the fickle goddess continues, and "Aboute the wheel with other most thou dryve." Your anchor still holds, she says, "and yit thou mayst arrayve/ Ther bountee berth the keye of my substaunce." My teachings, in fact, are much more valuable than the price of your suffering from my hands. "And eek thou hast thy beste frend alyve" is the refrain to this balade. In the final balade, the poet and Fortune each speak; the gist of the argument is that what we "blinde bestes" call Fortune is really the righteous will of God:

Lo, th'execucion of the majestee
 That all purveyeth of his rightwysnesse,
 That same thing "Fortune" clepen ye,
 Ye blinde bestes, ful of lewednesse!
 The hevene hath propretee of sikernesse,
 This world hath ever resteles travayle;
 Thy laste day is ende of myn intresse:
 In general, this reule may nat fayle.

(11. 65-72)

In the envoy, Fortune asks the Princes to relieve the complainant of his pain or "Preyeth his beste frend, of his noblesse,/"

That to som betere estat he may atteyne."

The specific occasion or date of this balade need not concern us here. What I should like to point out in this poem, however, is the particular way in which Chaucer handles the mutability theme and the originality or degree of conviction with which he handles it. B. L. Jefferson remarks that Chaucer "in the main was interested in the picturesque side of Fortune and in similes descriptive of her mutability" (p. 56). This poem, however, says Jefferson, combines (1) the complaint against Fortune, (2) the defense of Fortune by herself, and (3) the deeper significance of Fortune (p. 57). The first two of these elements are obvious in the above outline of the poem. What I should like to emphasize in this study, however, is the extent to which mutability had become a part of Chaucer's sensibility; in this regard, Jefferson's statements about the deeper significance of Fortune in the balade are extremely apropos:

The poem, in its deeper significance, would seem to indicate a thorough assimilation of the Boethian Philosophy. The resemblances to the Consolation are not verbal. They, rather, are conclusions which would result from a thoughtful reading of that work. . . . Sentiments akin to those found in the passages above [see lines 11-15; 17-20; 26; 65-71 in the poem] are found in the Consolation and the Roman. But the point to be noted is that Chaucer's expression of them is largely his own. They had become a part of him, as the familiarity and dexterity with which he

uses them serve to show. . . . In a nutshell, it contains much of the teaching of the Consolation, the turmoil of the world, the serenity of heaven, and the opportunity of men to escape from one to the other. (Pp. 58-60)

R. K. Root also recognizes Chaucer's sincerity in this poem: "The thoughts expressed in Fortune are noble thoughts; and they are nobly spoken forth, not only with art, but with conviction."³ The more one reads the poem, the more striking is the validity of these critics' statements. Chaucer recognizes and accepts in this poem what, in fact, he recognizes and accepts in all of his poetry: the transitoriness and the vicissitudes of this world, and that element in man which time and vicissitude may not touch. Just as Troilus looked down from the eighth sphere, beyond the reach of Fortune, and "fully gan despise/ This wrecched world," the Pleintif in this poem, still within Fortune's "regne of variaunce," begins his complaint:

This wrecched worldes transmutacioun,
As wele or wo, now povre and now honour,
Withouten ordre or wys discrecioun
Governed is by Fortunes errour.
(ll. 1-4)

This fact, however, Chaucer accepts: the imagery which Fortune uses in her defense is so natural and commonplace that she leaves the poet little room to deny that she is usurping her rights; it is substantially the same arguments that

But O Fortune, executrice of wyrdes,
 O influences of this hevenes hye!
 Soth is, that under God ye ben oure hierdes,
 Though to us bestes ben the causes wrie.
 (III, 617-20)

Not only is the expression in this stanza of Fortune (ll. 65-72) Chaucer's own, but the idea of this stanza and of the whole poem penetrates his thought and ramifies throughout all his works.

Man, however, can defy Fortune and escape her mutability and vicissitudes. Socrates defied Fortune, for he "knewe wel the deceit of hir colour," and he therefore stood serene amidst vicissitude. Chaucer himself in this poem defies Fortune and knows that Fortune has no control over "him that over himself hath the maystrye" (l. 14). As has been pointed out, in the second balade Fortune responds to the Pleintif:

Now seestow cleer, that were in ignoraunce.
 Yit halt thyn ancre, and yit thou mayst arryve
 Ther bountee berth the keye of my substaunce.
 (ll. 37-39)

In the Consolation, Lady Philosophy tells Boethius:

"And forthy drye thi teeris, for yit nys nat every
 fortune al hateful to the-ward, ne over-greet tempest
 hath nat yit fallen upon the, whan that thyn ancre
 clyven faste, that neither wolen suffren the counfort
 of this tyme present ne the hope of tyme comyng to
 passen ne to faylen."

(II, p. 4, 51-57)

This advice of Lady Philosophy might be glossed thus: "You can escape Fortune and put yourself out of her reach if you will not give yourself to the pleasures of the present time or allow the hope of the future to disappoint you." In a word, Lady Philosophy recognizes, as does Fortune in this poem, that to concentrate on virtue and to ignore Time, its pleasures as well as its vicissitudes, is to conquer Fortune in this world. This is, in fact, to bring eternity to earth. The last stanza of the third Ballad is an appropriate climax to the entire poem:

The hevene hath propretee of sikernessee

 Thy laste day is ende of myn intresse.
 (ll. 69, 71)

One can escape Fortune in this world only through virtue; one can escape Fortune entirely only in eternity, only beyond the sphere of the moon. Chaucer's incidental, perhaps even unconscious, allusion to the Consolation in the expression, "Yit halt thyn ancre," indicates the extent to which the philosophy of Boethius had penetrated his thought. The influence of other authors, certainly, is apparent in the poem,⁵ but this influence is general and indirect. J. L. Lowes best describes Chaucer's Fortune in relation to his sources:

Jean de Meun, Boethius, and Dante [In that case Deschamps too! . . .] are present--the heart of

their teaching grasped and assimilated in Chaucer's own thought, and fused in a new and individual expression by his ripened art. There is here no question of originality. Few passages in Chaucer--unless it be the Fortune balade itself--show with greater clearness his consummate gift of gathering together and embodying in a new unity the disjecta membra of the dominant beliefs and opinions of his day. To overlook that in any study of external influences on Chaucer is to take the chaff and leave the corn.⁶

To these words of Professor Lowes I can only add: What is received is received according to the manner of the receiver, and Chaucer's Fortune is integrated artistically, perhaps, because it is the work of an integrated conviction. Certainly this poem and Truth are the closest that Chaucer ever comes in his works to speaking in propria persona.

Truth or Balade de Bon Conseyl is similar to Fortune: in the latter poem Chaucer defies Fortune and her mutability; in the former he counsels a certain Vache to flee from the world, which is controlled by Fortune and is therefore full of vicissitudes. Like Fortune, too, Truth has no specific source; the influence of Boethius is everywhere apparent, but the poem does not follow any particular passages of the Consolation very closely.⁷ R. K. Root represents most of the critics in his high regard for this poem and in his recognition of its originality:

The balade of Truth is the best answer one may give to the charge that Chaucer was incapable of

"high seriousness." Though suggested in part by Boethius, the poem is essentially original, and expresses, I think, the substance of Chaucer's criticism of life.⁸

The poem is addressed, in fact, to a would-be reformer, but it has universal significance in that throughout the entire poem Chaucer stresses this dichotomy: the tranquility of soul which comes from the knowledge of truth and the practice of virtue on the one hand, and a worldliness which necessarily places one under the rule of Fortune and subject therefore to her vicissitudes on the other. The poem is a plea for detachment and the contemplative life.

Chaucer begins the poem by saying, "Flee fro the prees, and dwelle with sothfastnesse." B. L. Jefferson explains prees as "an expressive word implying the hoarding, hating, envy, vain struggle for position, failure, lack of steadfastness--in brief all the false felicity which enthralls men and makes them beasts" (p. 108).⁹ Indeed, as the poem brings out, the prees is everything which is not sothfastnesse. Ambition is subject to mutability, ". . . climbing [hath] tikelnesse," and good-fortune always deceives, ". . . and wele blent overal." Therefore, the poet writes, "Suffyce unto thy good, though it be smal"; and then:

Reule wel thyself, that other folk canst rede;
And trouthe thee shal deliver, it is no drede.
(ll. 6-7)

Skeat glosses line 6 as: "Thou who canst advise others, rule thyself" (I, 551). It is reasonable to suppose that Chaucer must have been influenced here by the following text in the Consolation:

Yif it so be that thow art myghty over thyself (that is to seyn, by tranquillite of thi soule), than hastow thyng in thi power that thow noldest nevere leesen, ne Fortune may nat bynynen it the. (II, p. 4, 134-38)

Certainly this idea lies at the very heart of the poem. The poet, in fact, tells Vache:

Tempest thee noght al croked to redresse,
In trust of hir that turneth as a bal:
Gret reste stant in litel besnesse.
 (11. 8-10)

Even agitating oneself in the work of reformation is subjecting oneself to the mutability of Fortune. We have seen (p. 129) how Chaucer contrasts "reste" and vicissitude and how often he uses the word in connection with Fortune. Worldly activity, whether it be for the common or one's personal good, is subject to Fortune: "This world hath ever restles travayle," says Fortune to the Pleintif. In short, the only way to overcome the world is to condemn the world. In the third stanza of the poem, Chaucer writes:

That thee is sent, recyve in buxumnesse;
 The wrastling for this world axeth a fal.
 Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernesse:
 Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!

Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al;
 Hold the heye wey, and lat thy gost thee lede;
 And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede.
 (ll. 15-21)

This is detachment from the world, the De Contemptu Mundi theme pure and simple. Jefferson is right when he says that "Truth sums up in a nut shell the teaching of the first three books of the Consolation" (p. 109). But the poem, Truth, is unmistakably Christian: "trouthe" is virtue, surely, but it is also a personal, loving God. The poem swells to this climax:

Therefore, thou Vache, leve thyn old wrecchednesse;
 Unto the world leve now to be thral;
 Crye him mercy, that of his hy goodnesse
 Made thee of noght, and in especial
 Draw unto him, and pray in general
 For thee, and eek for other, hevenlich mede,
 And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede.
 (ll. 22-28)

Here, just as in the epilogue to the Troilus, is the idea that only in God can man find permanence and escape the mutability of this world. Just as Troilus' "lighte goost" escaped Fortune by ascending to the eighth sphere, so Vache can escape Fortune in so far as he ceases to be a "thral" to the world. The dichotomy between the mutability of this world and the permanence of the spiritual world permeates this entire poem. In this dichotomy which constitutes the basic theme of the poem, Truth is, in fact, similar to Fortune.¹⁰

Another poem which evidences Chaucer's interest in mutability is Lak of Stedfastnesse, the companion piece to Truth. It is also akin to The Former Age in that it indirectly touches upon another mutability theme, the Golden Age. In the first stanza, Chaucer writes:

Somtyme the world was so stedfast and stable
 That mannes word was obligacioun:
 And now it is so fals and deceivable
 That word and deed, as in conclusioun,
 Ben nothing lyk, for turned up-so-down
 Is al this world for mede and wilfulnesse,
 That al is lost for lak of stedfastnesse.
 (ll. 1-7)

The Golden Age theme, however, is not emphasized; the focal point of the poem is the imperfect state of affairs, brought about chiefly by man's covetousness, during the reign of King Richard. The envoy, in fact, is addressed to the king.

In the first stanza, then, Chaucer recognizes that the world is no longer "stedfast and stable," that it is "turned up-so-down." In the next stanza, he asks: "What maketh this world to be so variable/ But lust that folk have in dissensioun?" In a word, the world is so changeable because of man's "wilful wrecchednesse." At this time, the poet says in the third stanza:

Trouthe is put down, resoun is holden fable;
 Vertu hath now no dominacioun;
 Pitee exyled, no man is merciabe;
 Through covetyse is blent discrecioun.

The world hath mad a permutacioun
 Fro right to wrong, fro trouthe to fikelnesse,
 That al is lost for lak of stedfastnesse.
 (11. 15-21)

Mars had lamented the transitoriness of love and of happiness and the many vicissitudes which attend love even if it "seme stedfast and during." In Fortune, the Pleintif recognizes that he is under Fortune's "regne of variaunce," but knows also that he can overcome the fickle goddess if he "over himself hath the maystrye!" In brief, virtue conquers Fortune in this world; and in the next world Fortune has no reign whatever: her influence stops beyond the sphere of the moon. The same ideas are found in Truth, but expressed more fully and directly. One escapes the mutability and vicissitudes of the world in so far as he condemns the world and recognizes that his true home is not here but in heaven. Lak of Stedfastnesse expresses essentially the same idea. To what Mars had complained about, Fortune, Truth, and Lak of Stedfastnesse supply the answer.

The basic theme of Stedfastnesse is the contrast between the "stedfast and stable" Golden Age and the "variable" world, a world of "fikelnesse," under Richard II. At the basis of this decline from the Golden Age is man's refusal to follow truth, reason, and virtue: "Trouthe is put down, resoun is holden fable;/ Vertu hath now no dominacioun."

virtue, then "al is lost for lak of stedfastnesse."

Stedfastnesse is, I think, essentially original. Skeat and Jefferson assert that the general idea for the poem was taken from the Consolation, Book II, Metre 8, the well-known metre about the bond of love. Haldeen Braddy is right, however, when he sees little in common between the poem and the Boethian passage:

Both do discuss mutability, but this is about all. Besides, the examples of mutability are not the same, and there are no verbal parallels between the two.¹¹

Braddy, on the other hand, follows Brusendorff in seeing Deschamps as the most likely source for the poem.¹² Brusendorff singles out three of Deschamps' balades as similar to Chaucer's poem.¹³ Especially striking, he notes, is the refrain of balade 234 (Oeuvres II, 63 f., on Prudent Economy): Tout se destruit et par default de garde. Braddy's study in this regard is even more detailed than is that of Brusendorff; he points out that "all three poems by Deschamps not only discuss evil conditions at court but also enumerate the characteristics of an unsteadfast age" (p. 483), and that, like Chaucer's poem, balade 234 is also addressed to the sovereign (Charles VI of France). All this is true and most probably Chaucer knew these poems.¹⁴ The fact is, however, that while

Deschamps' poems and Chaucer's Stedfastnesse are similar in their broad outlines, the actual content and detail of the poems are vastly different. Of Deschamps' three balades, perhaps the following passage affords the closest parallel to Chaucer's poem. Deschamps is speaking about the governance of unwise lords:

Je voy a tout changer condicion,
Et que chascuns de sa regle se part.
Li sers viennent en dominacion,
Seignourie des seigneurs so depart,
Lasche hardi, et li hardi couart,
Li saige foul, et li foul se font saige,
Et li donneur veulent tout mettre a part:
Dont puet venir au jour d'ui tel usaige?
(ll. 1-8)

From this passage it is clear that Deschamps is concerned with the social and economic conditions of the times; Chaucer's concern is primarily a moral one. Suffice it to say that in the three balades of Deschamps, neither the Golden Age nor man's word as obligation, truth, reason, virtue, or pity is ever mentioned. The relationship between Chaucer's and Deschamps' poems is, in short, as Braddy says: "No one of these French balades affords an exact model, but each contains suggestive parallels" (p. 485). It seems to me, however, that these parallels are such that Deschamps' poems might not seriously be considered as sources for Chaucer's poem. One thing is clear: Chaucer's poem is original (and

Boethian) in so far as he contrasts truth, reason, and virtue on the one hand, and mutability, "permutacioun," and "fikelnesse" on the other. In this the poem is essentially similar to Truth. These four poems, then, Mars, Fortune, Truth and Stedfastnesse, of all the shorter poems, constitute the most substantial evidence of Chaucer's interest in mutability. A few passages are scattered throughout some of the other shorter poems.¹⁵

Brusendorff accurately describes The Former Age (in the Hh MS. the poem concludes: "Finit Etas prima: Chaucers,") when he says: "In its present stage the piece is little more than a cento of echoes from the descriptions of the primeval state of human innocence in Ovid, Boethius, and Jean de Meun."¹⁶ The poem recalls the peaceable, sweet, and "blisful lyf" of the Golden Age, when man's food grew without his labor and he was well-satisfied with what he ate; when flesh was not eaten and no one as yet knew how to distinguish true from false coins; when ships did not yet sail and merchants could not fetch "outlandish ware"; when, indeed, there were no wars: why should there be wars? "Ther lay no profit, ther was no richesse." Tyrants go after money, not poverty. People were of one heart in the Golden Age, and "everich of hem his feith to other kepte." The people were "lambish,"

had no vices, and lived together in perfect harmony. At that time, there were "no pryde, non envye, non avaryce,/ no lord, no taylage by no tyrannye," and "Humblesse and pees" filled the earth. But the present age is far from the Golden Age:

Allas, alas! now may men wepe and crye!
 For in oure dayes nis but covetyse,
 Doublesesse, and tresoun, and envye,
 Poyson, manslauhtre, and mordre in sondry
 wyse.

(ll. 60-63)

The tendency is to dismiss The Former Age as a mere adaptation of Boethius and other sources; to dismiss it as a conglomeration of conventional notions culled from much of the Golden Age-literature that Chaucer knew. This, I think, should not be the case. It is therefore useful to remind ourselves of B. L. Jefferson's remarks in indicating Chaucer's interest in The Former Age. First, Chaucer filled in the outline of the poem, taken from Boethius, "with details gathered from a surprisingly large number of sources, some of them also describing the primitive age" (p. 90; see note 16 of this chapter). Second, Chaucer attempted "to modernize it by his various additions, and hence to make it more applicable in his own day" (p. 91). Third--certainly the most important--"the point most emphasized, the lack of faith in men, corresponds to the chief point of a very serious poem of

Chaucer, Lack of Steadfastness, a poem of counsel addressed to King Richard II" (p. 91). Furthermore, Chaucer's particularity and detail in the last twelve lines of the poem serve to emphasize his special interest, definitely evident in this poem when compared with his sources, in man's relationship to man. "Lack of Steadfastness," says Jefferson, "is an expansion of just this theme"; the two poems are "the same in spirit" (p. 92). I might add that only a pedant would insist that Chaucer was indulging in this mere literary exercise while Langland was agonizing over this troubled age.¹⁷

This study of the shorter poems has made clear Chaucer's interest in mutability. The long philosophical digression in the Mars reveals his abiding preoccupation with the transitoriness of human love and happiness. In Fortune, Chaucer uses a poetical figment to symbolize the misfortunes and vicissitudes which man is always subject to in this world. In Truth, on the other hand, he emphasizes the realm over which Fortune has no control: in personal virtue or truth in this world and in man's union with Divine Truth in the next. The dichotomy of mutability and of permanence is the theme of these two poems, as it is, in fact, of Stedfastnesse. Truth, however, introduces another mutability motif in the works of Chaucer: the De Contemptu Mundi theme. In this

poem, Chaucer tells Vache that this world "nis but wilder-
nesse"; "Flee fro the prees," he counsels him, "Know thy
contree." In Stedfastnesse Chaucer introduces another muta-
bility motif, the decay of the world. The theme is implied
but it constitutes the background for the entire poem. In
The Former Age, the theme is treated directly: Chaucer de-
picts in great detail the perfect and harmonious state of
the Golden Age, and then laments the conditions of his own
age, "Allas, allas! now may men wepe and crye!" It is not
enough to say that these ideas were "conventional" or
"commonplace"; the fact is that to Chaucer they were intense-
ly personal and he expressed them with sincerity and convic-
tion. Exactly half of the shorter poems (eleven of the
twenty-two including Anelida and Arcite) contain a suggestion
of, if indeed their themes are not substantially concerned
with, mutability.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

¹"Convention and Individuality in Chaucer's Complaint of Mars," PQ, XXXV (1956), 69-89.

²Blasphemy, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, occurs first, "when something unfitting is affirmed of God; second . . . when something fitting is denied of him; and . . . third, when something proper to God is ascribed to a creature." Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York, 1947. Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 13. A.1.

³The Poetry of Chaucer revised ed. (Gloucester, Mass., 1957), p. 71.

⁴See Skeat's note to this passage, I, p. 546, for some idea of how thoroughly Chaucer had assimilated the philosophy of Boethius. Skeat transposes and rearranges extracts from the Consolation to reproduce a passage strikingly similar to that of Chaucer's.

⁵See B. L. Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius (Princeton, 1917), pp. 57-60, 134-35; for the possible influence of a double balade of Deschamps, Aage Brusendorff, op. cit., pp. 242-44; for the possible influence of Dante, H. R. Patch, "Chaucer and Lady Fortune," MLR, XXII (1927), 377-88; for the influence of the Roman, see Skeat's notes to Fortune, I, 543-47.

⁶"Chaucer and Dante's 'Convivio,'" MP, XIII (1915), 27.

⁷"No stronger evidence of the lasting influence of the Consolation of Philosophy upon Chaucer could be shown than

that it is the dominating influence of this poem. It shows that the Consolation had entered into the very fibre of his thought. The Consolation is not a source of the poem in the usual sense. Chaucer went to no particular passage or passages of the Consolation for the immediate purpose of its composition." Jefferson, pp. 108-109. Certainly there are also Biblical influences in the poem. Also, Aage Brunsendorff, op. cit., pp. 251-52, prints two other balades of the type, one in English and one in French, the latter resembling Chaucer's poem in some of its phrases. But from this no conclusions can be reached in regard to this poem as a source.

⁸The Poetry of Chaucer, p. 73. B. L. Jefferson, p. 108, says that "the poem has always been regarded as unusual. Shirley, with no other evidence apparently than its unusualness, decided that it must have been written by Chaucer on his death bed, and in this conclusion he was followed by no less a scholar than ten Brink." Brunsendorff, op. cit., pp. 249-51, 274, seems still to uphold Shirley's statement, the findings of Miss Rickert in regard to Sir Philip la Vache notwithstanding.

⁹Cf. Robinson's note on prees, where he points out that the word is probably used here in reference "to the ambitious throng of the Court." Most probably this is true, but this fact would not invalidate Jefferson's gloss; the poem itself makes it everywhere clear that prees also means the world subject to Fortune.

¹⁰There is nothing merely conventional about Truth. True, the ideas expressed in the poem were "commonplace," but this is not to deny the poem's sincerity. Too often do we allow our scholarly compulsion to categorize, to assign "fixed" ideas to "fixed" periods, to blind us to the fact that poetry is the creation of an individual, not of a period. There can be no question about the sincerity of this poem: this was perhaps Shirley's only evidence for believing that Chaucer wrote it on his deathbed. If, certainly, one can learn something about an author's sensibility from his works, then I think this poem and the epilogue to the Troilus, more so than any other of Chaucer's works, might reveal it.

¹¹"The Date of Chaucer's Lak of Stedfastnesse," JEGP, XXXVI (1937), 482. Braddy points out that Root and Robinson doubt the close resemblance of Stedfastnesse to the Consolation and that French "scouted the whole theory." P. 482. Root thinks that the poem is "essentially original." The Poetry of Chaucer, p. 75.

¹²Braddy, in fact, calls attention to another poem of Deschamps (Oeuvres completes, SATF [Paris, 1893], VIII, 77-78) which might also be considered a source for Chaucer's poem (p. 484). Admittedly, parts of this poem are closer to Chaucer's than the three poems pointed out as a source by Brusendorff, but there is no question of mutability in the poem. In his book, Chaucer and the French Poet Graunson (Baton Rouge, 1947), pp. 67 ff., Braddy points out that the authorship of this poem (Balade de Sens) is now attributed to Graunson. Braddy's position about this poem as a source for Stedfastnesse is substantially the same as he had expressed earlier.

¹³No. 31 (Contre le temps present); no. 209 (Comment tout change sa condicion); and no. 234 (Tout se destruit et par default de garde), Oeuvres I, 113 f.; II, 31 f.; II, 63 f., respectively. See Brusendorff, op. cit., p. 487.

¹⁴See Braddy's article, op. cit., pp. 486-87, and Brusendorff, op. cit., pp. 489 ff.

¹⁵In Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scoqan, for example, we find: "But al shal passe that men prose or ryme;/ Take every man hys turn, as for his tyme" (ll. 41-42). In Anelida and Arcite (which is mentioned here since I shall not find occasion to deal with it in the following chapter, "The Minor Poems") the poet refers to an old story,

That elde, which that al can frete and byte,
As hit hath freten mony a noble storie,
Hath nigh devoured out of memorie.

(ll. 12-14)

For a similar expression, see Troilus, II, 22-28, and H. M. Ayers' comment (on the latter passage), RR, X (1919), pp. 13-14, where he compares these lines to Seneca's Epistles,

114, 13; 36, 7, and says: "Chaucer obviously is not copying these passages; he is not repeating commonplaces; he is giving artistic expression to a point of view, not the ordinary point of view of the Middle Ages, to which he has thought out his way" (p. 14).

Furthermore, not only are truth and steadfastness contrasted with Fortune and vicissitude, as we have seen, but truth and steadfastness are often contrasted with human deception, to indicate a changeable or fickle heart. In Womanly Noblesse (ll. 2, 32) and The Complaint of Venus (l. 5), for example, truth and steadfastness represent a virtuous fidelity as opposed to a fickle heart (in the latter, l. 5 is Chaucer's addition to his source). For this same contrast, see also Lenvoy de Chaucer a Bukton; Against Women Unconstant (especially l. 15, "Ye might be shryned, for your brotelnesse"; the underscored word is one of Chaucer's favorite words to indicate transitoriness); and Anelida and Arcite, esp. ll. 310-14, where God (Truth) and truth of man are associated (see Jefferson, op. cit., pp. 104 ff., for a discussion of this and similar passages). Admittedly, some of these passages are merely conventional and others are not in a serious context, e.g., the lines from Scogan. But there does emerge from the frequency and consistency with which Chaucer uses these concepts a definite and clear pattern, which unmistakably indicates his interest in mutability. See further, Anelida and Arcite, ll. 238-46, for the destiny motif.

¹⁶For a detailed account of Chaucer's sources for this poem, see Skeat, I, 539-42; B. L. Jefferson, op. cit., p. 134. As Jefferson himself notes (p. 90), the sources for this poem are surprisingly numerous. Boethius, of course, is the principal source: approximately 20 of the poem's 63 lines are a free verse translation of Book II, Metre 5, of the Consolation. With this metre as an outline, Chaucer filled in the details from Ovid's Metamorphoses, the Roman de la Rose, John of Salisbury's Policraticus or St. Jerome's Epistle against Jovinian, and very probably from the Fourth Eclogue of Vergil.

¹⁷See Frederick J. Furnivall, Trial-Forewords To My "Parallel-Text Edition of Chaucer's Minor Poems" For the Chaucer Society, Second Series (London, 1871), VI, 97, who

cites lines 60-63 of this poem, compares them with the corresponding lines in the Consolation, and takes them to indicate "Chaucer's bad opinion of his own time."

CHAPTER IV

THE MINOR POEMS

THE BOOK OF THE DUCHESS

Chaucer's sense of mutability and mortality is evident even in his youth. It is surprising that his first original work of any length, The Book of the Duchess (1369), should so fully evidence a sensibility of the mortal condition of man and a resignation to this mortality.

The Book of the Duchess is an elegy, written for John of Gaunt upon the occasion of the death of his first wife, Blanche. As such, the Ceyx and Alcione episode with which Chaucer prefaces the elegy proper is very appropriate. Alcione's sorrow for the sudden loss of her husband is a fitting counterpart of the sorrow of the duke for the unexpected loss of his wife. Chaucer's sources for this episode are Ovid's Metamorphoses (Book XI) and Guillaume de Machaut's Dit de la Fontaine Amoureuse, the latter of which he followed rather closely. Chaucer makes a significant addition to

these sources, however, and one which is profitable to this study in showing the poet's interest in the transitoriness of life and of happiness.

In the story, Alcione prays to her goddess Juno to let her know in a dream whether Ceyx is alive or dead. Juno answers her prayers: Morpheus takes the form of the drowned body of Ceyx and appears to Alcione in her dream. The following excerpts will make Chaucer's source-changes immediately evident. Ovid's account runs thus:

"Do you recognize your Ceyx, O most wretched wife? or is my face changed in death? Look on me! You will know me then and find in place of husband your husband's shade. No help, Alcione, have your prayers brought to me. For stormy Auster caught my ship on the Aegean sea and, tossing her in his fierce blasts, wrecked her there. My lips, calling vainly upon your name, drank in the waves. And this tale no uncertain messenger brings to you, nor do you hear it in the words of vague report; but I myself, wrecked as you see me, tell you of my fate. Get you up, then, and weep for me; put on your mourning garments and let me not go unlamented to the cheerless land of shades."¹

The following is Machaut's version, based on Ovid's:

"Dear companion, see here Ceys, for whom thou hast so lost joy and delight that nothing pleases thee (t'abellit). See how I have no colour, joy, or spirit that accompanies me. Look on me, and call me to thy mind. Think not, fair one, that I complain in vain: look at my hair, look at my grizzled beard; look at my dress, which shows true signs of my death."²

Chaucer omits many of the details of these versions; his Ceyx is, in fact, concerned primarily with Alcione's resignation and acceptance of his own death.

"My swete wyf,
 Awake! let by your sorwful lyf!
 For in your sorwe there lyth no red.
 For, certes, swete, I nam but ded;
 Ye shul me never on lyve yse.
 But, goode swete herte, that ye
 Bury my body, for such a tyde
 Ye mowe hyt fynde the see besyde;
 And farewel, swete, my worldes blysse!
I praye God youre sorwe lysse.
To lytel while oure blysse lasteth!"
 (11. 201-11)

The underscored lines are, obviously, Chaucer's own. These lines occasioned Kittredge's well-known remarks with regard to Chaucer's awareness of mortality even when young (Chaucer and His Poetry, pp. 71-72). Furthermore, in comparing Chaucer's version of this passage with the versions of Ovid and Machaut, we find that his intentions are clear. There is no self-pity in Chaucer's Ceyx; he tells Alcione to abandon her sorrow: there is no remedy for it, for he is already dead. Ovid's Ceyx, on the other hand, tells his wife to weep for him, to put on her mourning garments and not to let his death go unlamented. Machaut's Ceyx exudes self-pity and goes into much detail in order to convince Alcione of his death. Chaucer's Ceyx is matter-of-fact,

has completely accepted his own death and prays that God will help Alcione to do the same. This realization of the evanescence of life and of happiness and the acceptance of this fact of mortality are not only parts of Chaucer's basic outlook generally, but are operative, subtly and indirectly, throughout the poem.

In the elegy proper, the Dreamer happens upon the Man in Black, who tells him, "Y am sorwe, and sorwe ys y" (l. 597), and then enumerates at great length how Fortune's mutability has affected him:

My song ys turned to pleynynge,
 And al my laughtre to wepynge,
 My glade thoghtes to hevynesse;
 In travayle ys myn ydelnesse
 And eke my reste; my wele is woo,
 My good ys harm, and evermoo
 In wrathe ys turned my pleyng
 And my delyt into sorwyng.
 Myn hele ys turned into seknesse,
 In drede ys al my sykernesse;
 To derke ys turned al my lyght,
 My wyt ys foly, my day ys nyght,
 My love ys hate, my slep wakyng,
 My myrthe and meles ys fastyng,
 My countenaunce ys nycete,
 And al abaved, where so I be;
 My pees, in pledyng and in werre.
 Allas! how myghte I fare werre?
 My boldnesse ys turned to shame.
 For fals Fortune hath pleyd a game
 Atte ches with me, allas the while!
 (ll. 599-619)

This passage might have been suggested by a similar passage

in Machaut's Le Jugement Dou Roy De Behaingne, which in turn might have been based on Reason's description of the mixed nature of love to the lover in the Romance of the Rose.³ The significant points that I should like to make, however, are these: first, Chaucer's use of Fortune and the chess game at precisely this point, amid the long enumeration of the contrary effects of the Knight's loss, clearly indicates, in my opinion, the poet's intention to portray the mutability of love and of happiness.⁴ Second, this fact is substantiated by a similar idea which Chaucer used in the Troilus. In Troilus' letter to Criseyde, he writes:

Myn eyen two, in veyn with which I se,
Of sorwful teris salte arn woxen welles;
My song, in pleynte of myn adversitee;
My good, in harm; myn ese ek woxen helle is;
My joie, in wo; I kan sey yow naught ellis,
But torned is, for which my lif I warie,
Everich joie or ese in his contrarie.
(V, 1373-79)

Chaucer's comment on this letter to Criseyde is: "But Troilus, thow maist now, est or west,/ Pipe in an ivy lef, if that the lest!/ Thus goth the world" (V, 1432-34); Troilus is an exemplum of Fortune's mutability. It is clear, therefore, that these enumerations in both poems are meant to intensify the transitoriness of earthly love and happiness.

This fact is made even more explicit in the long tirade of the Man in Black against Fortune (ll. 618-86), which

occupies the exact center of the poem. Coming as it does at this point the abstract discussion of Fortune connects, at least tenuously, the mutability theme of the Ceyx-Alcione episode and the Man in Black's final and explicit revelation to the Dreamer of the loss of his lady by death. The Knight's tirade is composed chiefly of most of the conventional ideas with regard to Fortune during, and prior to, this period. It is significant to note the numerous sources that Chaucer used for this passage and that this interest in Fortune is prior to his translation of, perhaps his reading of, Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy.⁵ I might suggest, parenthetically, that the sense of mutability which Chaucer betrays in this poem is perhaps what finally led him to translate the Consolation. At any rate, it can not be maintained that Chaucer's reliance upon various sources for this tirade of the Man in Black detracts from his interest in Fortune and in the subject of mutability generally. Chaucer's use of this tirade is, in fact, ingenious: artistically, this passage not only emphasizes the mutability theme but also contains, in a sense, the resignation-motif, which was established at the beginning of the poem by the dead Ceyx's words to his wife Alcione.

In attempting to solve the apparent inconsistencies

in the Dreamer's knowledge of the lady's death, Kittredge has pointed out that the Dreamer knows all along that the lady is dead but that he wishes "to afford the knight the only help in his power--the comfort of pouring his sad story into compassionate ears" (p. 52).⁶ Whether or not this is true (the facts do seem to support this interpretation), certainly the Man in Black does achieve some sort of resignation by speaking out his sorrow, especially in his tirade against Fortune. More than this, however, the tirade itself functions as a poetical resolution to the losses expressed throughout the poem.

At this point Fortune is portrayed, as she is elsewhere in the works of Chaucer, as the force of mutability in this world: "That ys broght up, she set al doun." Here, however, Fortune does not have the cosmic dimensions which are apparent in some of Chaucer's later works, such as the Troilus, for example. Clearly the philosophical implications of Boethius' Fortune have not yet influenced Chaucer. In this poem, the emphasis is more on the physical appearance and on the traitorous nature of the wicked goddess: "ever laughynge/ With oon eye, and that other wepynge," or she is as a "scorpioun," and is a "false thef." From this portrait, however, emerges the impression of Fortune's

inevitability, as when the Man in Black says:

"I shulde have pleyd the bet at ches,
and kept my fers the bet therby.
And thogh wherto? for trewely
I holde that wyssh nat worth a stree!
Hyt had be never the bet for me."
(ll. 668-72)

And for a moment, at least, the Knight seems almost reconciled to Fortune's action:

"And eke she ys the lasse to blame;
Myself I wolde have do the same,
Before God, hadde I ben as she;
She oghte the more excused be."
(ll. 675-78)

Indeed the Knight's very recognition of the mutability and power of Fortune is, finally, an explanation for, if not a partial resignation to, his loss. Certainly the image of Fortune-at-chess helps to relieve the pathos of the Knight's sorrow. After this point of the poem, he begins to recall his youthful devotion to Love and temporarily forgets his loss in the vivid description of the virtues and excellence of his lady. The poem ends, rather abruptly, with the unmistakable revelation of his loss:

"She ys ded!" "Nay!" "Yis, be my trouthe!"
"Is that your los? Be God, hyt is routhe!"
(ll. 1309-10)

What, indeed, remains to be said? The poet had said it in the Ceyx-Alcione episode, in the rhetorical elaboration

of contraries which exemplified Fortune's mutability, in the Knight's long tirade against Fortune; indeed, he has said it in the prolonged portrait of the Knight's sorrow: "To little whil oure blisse lasteth." What can be said now but, in effect, "What a pity, such is mortality." Kittredge finds in the mood of the poem a "vaguely troubled pensiveness." "The mind is purged," he says,

not by the tragedy of life, with its pity and terror,
but by a sense of the sadness which pervades its
beauty and joy. Ours is a pleasant world of birds and
flowers and green trees and running streams, and life
in such a world is gracious and desirable, and nothing
is so good as tender and faithful love, which is its
own reward. But the glory of it all is for a
moment. (P. 71)⁷

Critics who feel that the poem ends too abruptly perhaps overlook the fact that this very abruptness expresses the inevitability which has been implied throughout the poem: the inevitability of death, of loss, of sorrow. What else could a man of Chaucer's sensibility say but, "Be God, hyt ys routhe!"?

THE HOUSE OF FAME

Of all Chaucer's poems, The House of Fame presents perhaps the most dramatic evidence of his interest in mutability. For this poem purports to be about love and love's

tidings, yet approximately one-third of it is about Fame, the fickle goddess of renown. At least two critics think that the motivation of the poem is the subject of fame,⁸ but W. O. Sypher perhaps comes closer to revealing the true nature of the poem:

The motive of the dream--that is, the motive of the poem,--is . . . that of a journey to the House of Fame, where Chaucer may learn about Love--it is the reward which a love-poet is to receive for his services to Love and to Love's servants.⁹

In the first book the poet dreams that he is "withyn a temple ymad of glas." Most of this book is taken up with an outline of the earlier portion of Virgil's Aeneid. Book Two is concerned with the journey to the House of Fame. Even in this poem Chaucer shows a fascination for the geographical limitation of this world in which we live. About his view from the air while in the claws of the eagle, the poet writes:

But thus sone in a while he
Was flowen fro the ground so hye
That al the world, as to myn yē,
No more semed than a prikke.
(ll. 904-907)

In Book Three Chaucer describes Fame's abode. Fame's house stands atop a steep hill of ice, "a feble fundament/ To bilden on a place hye," says Chaucer. The mutability of fame is suggested in the poet's description of the southern side of this rock of ice:

Tho sawgh I al the half ygrave
 With famous folkes names fele,
 That had iben in mochel wele,
 And her fames wide yblowe.
 But wel unnethes koude I knowe
 Any lettres for to rede
 Hir names by; for, out of drede,
 They were almost ofthowed so
 That of the lettres oon or two
 Was molte away of every name,
 So unfamous was woxe hir fame.
 But men seyn, "What may ever laste?"
 (ll. 1136-47)

On the northern side of the hill of ice, the names were preserved as if they had just been written there, for this side was shaded by the castle which stood atop the hill. This image is an apt symbol of fame's transitoriness and the accidental manner in which one's fame is often preserved. The image is even more significant, especially since Chaucer apparently had no specific source for it.¹¹

Next, Chaucer describes the exterior of the House of Fame ("Al was of ston of beryle,/ Bothe the castel and the tour . . . Withouten peces or joynynge.") and the vast crowd of musicians, jugglers, sorcerers, and magicians in the niches round about the castle.¹² In describing Fame's house, Chaucer is consistent with the nature of Fame herself: he mused long on the walls of beryl,

That shoone ful lyghter than a glas
 And made wel more than hit was
 To semen every thing, ywis,

And kynde thyng of Fames is . . .
(11 . 1289-92)

Likewise, the castle-gate, so well carved that there was no other like it, "was be aventure/ Iwrought, as often as be cure." He then enters the castle and hears the heralds to the goddess Fame. The inside of the castle, he says, "was plated half a foote thikke/ Of gold," and set with gems. Then he describes the goddess Fame ("But Lord! the perry and the richesse/ I saugh sittynge on this godesse!") and the various inhabitants of her dwelling: Josephus, Homer, Lollius, Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, Claudian--indeed, "What shulde y more telle of this?" he exclaims, and then proceeds to tell of the nine companies who come to plead their cases before the goddess of Fame.

Without presenting a detailed enumeration of Chaucer's portrayal of these nine companies before the goddess, suffice it to say that he spends 357 lines, approximately one-seventh of the entire poem, to show that Fame is just as arbitrary and purposeless with the distribution of her gifts as is Fortune:

Right as her suster, dame Fortune,
Ys wont to serven in comune.
(11. 1547-48)

About this scene Kittredge says that:

Chaucer's plan is a model of schematic precision. All men have some request to make of Fame, and the whole world comes to her throne, in nine separate companies. The treatment they receive exhausts the possibilities of arbitrary freakishness.¹³

When Chaucer had seen this spectacle, he met a bystander who asked him if he had "come hider to han fame?" Chaucer's answer is significant because it shows that this long digression on Fame as renown has not obscured the purpose of his journey:

"Nay, for sothe, frend," quod y;
 "I cam noght hyder, graunt mercy,
 For no such cause, by my hed! . . .
 I wot myself best how y stonde
 That wyl y tellen the,
 The cause why y stonde here:
 Somme newe tydynges for to lere,
 Somme newe thinges, y not what,
 Tydynges, other this or that,
 Of love, or suche thynges glade."
 (11. 1873-75; 1878; 1884-89)

The poet expressly says that the tidings which he had learned at the House of Fame are not the tidings which he had come to hear:

"For wel y wiste ever yit,
 Sith that first y hadde wit,
 That somme folk han desired fame
 Diversly, and loos, and name."
 (11. 1897-1900)

With this, the guide takes the poet to the House of Rumor. This large wicker cage, sixty miles in length, is the gathering house for all the rumors in the world. In fact,

Chaucer spends seventeen lines classifying them. The house itself is built of

tymber of no strengthe,
Yet hit is founded to endure
While that hit lyst to Aventure,
That is the moder of tydynges . . .
(ll. 1980-83)

Once in the house, the poet is astonished at the huge collection of people, roaming in and out. He sees tidings go from mouth to mouth, "encresing ever moo,/ As fyr ys wont to quyke and go/ From a spark spronge amys," and he also sees true and false tidings compounded to make "oo tydynge." From the House of Rumor, these tidings go to Fame to receive their destiny:

Thus out at holes gunne wringe
Every tydynge streght to Fame,
And she gan yeven ech hys name,
After hir disposicioun.
And yaf hem eke duracioun,
Somme to wexe and wane sone,
As doth the faire white mone,
And let hem goon.
(ll. 2110-17)

Finally, at the end of the poem, Chaucer hears a great noise in the corner of the hall, where men are talking of love-tidings. Every one runs there, crying out, "What thing is that?" They step on each other's heels trying to find out what is going on. Then the poet says:

Atte laste y saugh a man,

Which that y [nevene] nat ne kan;
 But he semed for to be
 A man of gret auctorite. . . .
 (11. 2155-58)

And thus the poem ends. This outline serves to point up two things: (1) Chaucer's detailed description of Fame and her abode and, (2) the disproportionately large amount of space given over to the goddess and her abode in a poem obviously meant to be about love (777 of the poem's 2158 lines).

W. O. Sypherd has amply shown that Chaucer's Fame and her abode is "so composite that one naturally despairs of finding an actual source or sources for this imaginative portrayal."¹⁴ Three influences, he says, are seen in Chaucer's composition of Fame and her abode. The rock of ice with its two sides is due to the influence of Fortune, as is of course the capriciousness with which Fame distributes her gifts. The aspect of Fame as an enthroned goddess deciding the fate of suppliants betrays the influence of the goddess Love (p. 128). The final influence is that of Boethius: the close connection in the Consolation between fame (worldly renown) and the vicissitudes of Fortune is present throughout Chaucer's handling of the Fame material (p. 122). The study of H. R. Patch, furthermore, confirms these influences on Chaucer's conception of his goddess Fame.¹⁵ Especially

pertinent to the study of Chaucer's interest in the mutability theme, however, is Sypherd's observation--now rather obvious but partly because of his thorough study--that:

For Chaucer, the goddess of Fame evidently had a much greater interest than for other mediaeval poets. . . . [he] atoned for their neglect by creating in this goddess of Fame one of the most powerful deities of this fanciful realm of gods and goddesses. (P. 105)

It is, finally, Chaucer's fascination with Fame and the consequent digression devoted to the goddess and her abode which constitutes a major source (not to mention the unfinished state of the poem) of the disparate interpretations of The House of Fame.

Much could be said about the many and various interpretations of this poem.¹⁶ Two, however, are especially relevant to this study: that of Paull F. Baum and that of Paul G. Ruggiers (op. cit.). These critics see the subject of fame as the initial motivation of the poem. Baum thinks that "Chaucer must have began [sic] with the idea of a poem on Fame, in the manner of the French love-vision handled lightly, not to say facetiously" (p. 252). Chaucer's choice of the Aeneid, which he summarizes in the first book of the poem as a love story, supplied him with Virgil's description of Fame and the Dido episode supplied him with the example of

a false lover. The poem is in order, continues Baum, to line 778, but here, Chaucer was obliged to digress because Fame has two aspects, that of renown and that of rumor. Thus the disproportion and the length of Chaucer's "lytel laste book." In spite of this lack of proportion, however, Baum sees "sufficient unity" in the poem. Chaucer, he thinks, had reached his climax in the poem and, having proved his point, perhaps did not feel the need to go further; for,

he represents at the outset that he is in search of news--news of the actual quotidian affairs of love such as are not to be found in his books. He goes to the place where all of the news of the world is concentrated. He finds all fame a travesty, renown fickle, and rumor a mockery. The ultimate tidings of love from the man of authority would have inevitably been a similar disappointment and disillusion. He returns to his books, with the conclusion that in love, if not in all life, the poetic dream is preferable to the earthly reality. This was his lore and his prow (Pp. 255-56)

For Ruggiers, the unity of The House of Fame is founded on the fact that the functions of Fame, Fortune, and Venus are so similar that there results "a conflation of their activities and the effects of their power over men" (p. 18). Thus he is able to show an organic connection between Books I and III of the poem:

There is in Chaucer's epitome of the Aeneid, with its emphasis upon the story of Dido and Aeneas a sufficient foreshadowing of his theme to warrant the long so-called digression of the third book

where Chaucer relates the method by which Fame distributes her dubious favors. For his purpose the unhappy catastrophe of love is the work of a divinity whose name might easily be Fortune, or Fame, or Venus; their roles are interdependent; they operate in similar circumstances. (P. 20)

The long account of Fame's caprice throughout the third book, then, is not to be considered a digression but the central theme of the poem, if we consider that Dido and Aeneas are part of the human condition and that their relationship is at the mercy of the composite activities of Love, Fame, and Fortune. Thus, Ruggiers emphasizes:

It is my persuasion that the third book says what Chaucer intends it to say, that Fame and her influence, like that of her sister Fortune, is ever present as a conditioning factor in men's lives, and that men should fasten their hopes on something more stable, over and above this capricious power. (P. 25)

In Book III, then, Chaucer absorbs the love elements into the total framework of the poem, enhances Fame by subjecting rumor to her caprice and, throughout, while attempting to stay within the scope of the love-vision, broadens it "to include more direct observation, more invention and detail" (p. 27). Ruggiers thinks that in this poem, as in the Knight's Tale, Boethius might have supplied Chaucer's man of authority with a suitable ending, "incorporating the theme of the untrustworthy fortunes of love into the larger picture

of the instability of fame in general, a pronouncement voicing the conviction that only disillusion must result from an abuse of the passions and folly of trusting the inconstant goddess" (p. 28).

Ruggiers' interpretation is ingenious. The meaning which he sees in the poem, however, is not the meaning which the reader experiences from the poem--for these reasons: Dido's complaint, directed against wicked Fame (ll. 345-62), constitutes but a small portion of the entire episode; furthermore, it is Fame as rumor, rather than as reputation, which is stressed. Second, while it is certain that the goddess of Love influenced Chaucer's conception of Fame, there is no indication in Chaucer's third book, especially in Fame's actions toward her suppliants (or in the suppliants' requests), that she retains the qualities of Venus;¹⁷ in a word, the love elements are insignificant, if, in fact, they do not disappear entirely at this point of the poem. The interpretation of Baum, on the other hand, is largely conjectural. These interpretations must be taken into account, however, in any study which attempts to discuss the function of the mutability theme in Chaucer's poetry; at least they seriously recognize this element in Chaucer's poetic sensibility. If, however, Baum's interpretation is

largely conjectural, he does, with Sypherd, contend that the Fame-as-renown material is a disproportionate digression. And, in view of the fact that the final interpretation of The House of Fame will never be written, since it is unfinished, this is perhaps all that can, with certainty, be said about it. This digression, to be sure, and the vivid detail which Chaucer employs to portray Fame and her abode is significantly indicative of his interest in mutability. For even if the mutability of love, of fortune, and of fame is not artistically unified in this poem (as Ruggiers would have it), it is nevertheless present.

—THE PARLIAMENT OF FOWLS

The mutability theme in the first part of The Parliament of Fowls has provoked most of the recent criticism on the poem. The problem has been to reconcile "Tullyus of the Drem of Scipioun," which Chaucer summarizes in forty-nine lines (ll. 36-84), with the dream-vision which follows, specifically the Garden of Love and the debate. Some attention to the ways in which the critics have attempted to reconcile these two parts of the poem and to their comments as to Chaucer and mutability generally will, I think, very effectually illumine Chaucer's use of the theme, not only

in this poem, but in his other works.

Chaucer begins the poem with a sententia which he adapted from the Aphorisms (I, i) of Hippocrates:

The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,
Th'assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge,
The dredful joye, alwey that slit so yerne:
Al this mene I by Love . . .
(11. 1-4)

"A very un-Hippocratic" use of the aphorism, as Kemp Malone notes;¹⁸ without attaching too much significance to this passage, I do think it exemplifies how ready to hand the mutability theme was for Chaucer. Here he applies the aphorism very deftly to love, by way of introduction to denying any knowledge about Love (sic in text).

"Nat yoore agon," however, it happened that he read a book, "a certeyn thing to lerne," presumably about love; this book was entitled "Tullyus of the Drem of Scipioun," and thus he begins to "seyn the greete": Africanus the Elder appeared to his grandson, Africanus the Younger, in a dream. Among the stars, high over Carthage, the old man told the younger that only he who loved the "commune profyt" would come into the blissful place, "there joye is that last withouten ende." He told him that "oure present worldes lyves space/ Nis but a maner deth," and that the righteous folk will go to heaven after they die. Then the elder man showed

his grandson "the lytel erthe that here is,/ At regard of the hevenes quantite"; and bade him "syn erthe was so lyte,/ And ful of torment and of harde grace,/ That he ne shulde hym in the world delyte." After the Platonic year is up, in fact, "al shulde out of mynde/ That in this world is don of al mankynde." Then Africanus the Younger asked the elder man how he might come to this eternal blessedness. He was told to recognize, first of all, his own immortality and always to work and instruct busily for the "commune profit"; then he might come into this state of perfect bliss. "But breakers of the lawe," says the elder man, "and likerous folk" shall whirl about the earth in pain after their death until they are forgiven; only then may they enter paradise.

It is the Contemptus Mundi view expressed throughout Chaucer's entire summary of the Dream, specifically, for example, in the elder's words to the younger that "he ne shulde hym in the world delyte" (Chaucer emphasizes this by adding to his source that this little world is "ful of torment and of harde grace"),¹⁹ that those critics who wish to see a thematic unity in the Parliament attempt to reconcile with a poem written in honor of St. Valentine.

Bertrand H. Bronson was the first to argue significantly for an artistic unity in the poem.²⁰ The solution,

he says, is in Chaucer's ironic attitude toward his subject of love, a "slyly humorous attitude" (p. 204) which he has assumed from the very beginning of the poem. The connections between the two parts of the poem are many but subtle: Chaucer ironically professes to know nothing about love except what he has learned out of books; then in the Somnium follows "a devastating criticism of the lover's philosophy" (p. 204); he makes Africanus "his dubious guide to the realms of love through the portals which recall the gates of Hell" (p. 204); at the gates of the Garden of Love Chaucer again denies his affinity for love; in the invocation to Cytherea, Chaucer has "his tongue in his cheek when he calls on Venus as his inspiration and aid" (p. 205; Bronson interprets north-north-west to mean "hardly at all"; in fact, "the beginning of the Parlement of Foules is, indisputably, far from being conceived under the inspiration of the goddess of love" (p. 208).

As for the Garden of Love, Bronson compares Chaucer's with his source, the Teseida, and finds that Chaucer's Venus is much less sensual than Boccaccio's. Chaucer "has, in fact, nearly stripped her of her glamour" (p. 209). The argument of the birds is a double-edged satire against the unreality of the idealists of courtly love, and the sometimes-contemptible realists who make up the rest of the parliament. "But,

Chaucer (a great master of irony) seems to say, let us be as sane as we can. But, again, it is joy to see downright madness!" (p. 219). Then the vision ends and Chaucer goes to other books so that someday he might "read something that will cause him to dream a really profitable dream, not one of these things in which all is left at sixes and sevens and nothing is decided. . . . the wheel has come round to its starting point, and the poem is done" (p. 220). Thus, for Bronson, Chaucer's irony flickers throughout the poem from beginning to end, so that while the poem is ostensibly written in praise of Venus and Love, it is, in reality, qualified throughout by the awareness of the more somber mood of

Scipio's Dream:

The dilemma here curiously adumbrates the epilogue of the Troilus and Criseyde, suggesting a connection more than casual between the two poems. . . . The deeper parallel, in both, lies in the juxtaposition of the same two apparently irreconcilable attitudes. The difference is merely one of pitch and of consequent modification of artistic treatment. In the more serious work, such value and meaning have been given to the human attitude that the poem will easily bear the full weight of the contrasting moral. In the lighter piece, the contrast can only be suggested. In either, no one can doubt that the dualism was real enough in Chaucer's thought, and that he saw no facile resolution of it. (Pp. 199-202)

R. C. Goffin's study is based only upon an analysis of the first ninety-one lines of the poem.²¹ Chaucer, he thinks,

following upon the hint in the beginning of the Roman de la Rose, looked into Macrobius' Commentary to find an appropriate opening for his dream-vision (a certeyn thing to lerne simply means, he says, "literary material"): "He will examine (or has examined 'not yore agon') its pertinence to his story--one of love, and of very earthly love" (p. 495). But Chaucer did not find what he was looking for and, having given an epitome of the Somnium, says:

And to my bedde I gan me for to dresse,
 Fulfild of thought and besy hevinesse;
 For bothe I hadde thing which that I nolde,
 And eek I ne hadde that thing that I wolde.
 (ll. 88-91)

Surely the meaning is clear, says Goffin; Chaucer had discovered the true paradise of bliss but not the earthly paradise for which he looked: "he has still to find that 'thing' which is to prefigure his poem of worldly vanity" (p. 496). This antithesis, however, is "peculiarly apposite" at this part of the poem: Not only did Chaucer fail to find what he was looking for in the Somnium, but the high vision of perfection which he found there subsequently makes all love poetry "mere earthly 'delight' . . . if not 'lechery'" (p. 497). Thus Chaucer, as a love poet, must forever stand frustrated before this high vision of perfection. Goffin does not attempt, as does Bronson, to reconcile the two parts of

the poem, but concludes that

the meaning comes by way of contrast. The antithesis set up between the heavenly paradise of the Somnium and the earthly paradise of the Rose is not solved. To fulfil his purpose Chaucer must humanize the bleak asceticism of Scipio's dream. And the final resolution of this antithesis, so strikingly pictured in its opposing outlines in the Parlement, abstract moral theory on the one hand and vital human art on the other, though it was presaged in the Troilus, was never fully achieved in Chaucer's mind till he came to write the Canterbury Tales. (P. 499)

Accepting Goffin's interpretation (of the first ninety-one lines of the poem) that Chaucer had found in Macrobius only that "thing" which he did not want and had not found the "thing" which he had sought, R. M. Lumiansky analyzes the whole poem and concludes that the unifying theme is "Chaucer's unsuccessful search for a way of reconciling true and false felicity."²² He suggests that the "newe science" in Chaucer's lines (Out of olde bokes . . . Cometh al this newe science that men lere.") refers to the new emphasis which the Lollards were placing on the instability of worldly pleasures; and that Chaucer, perhaps, went to the old book of Macrobius in search of a counter-argument to defend his writings on love. Lumiansky argues, from lines 109-12 of the poem, that Chaucer expects Africanus to point out a means of reconciliation of his dilemma during the dream. The theme of Chaucer's unsuccessful search is seen, furthermore, in his

doubts before the gates of the park; in his momentary abandonment to the beauty of the park but his sudden recall of his search upon encountering the allegorical creatures who represent earthly joys; and in "his failure to accord the love poet's usual high and detailed praise to Venus; and his rapidity in turning from Venus to Nature, the recognized agent of God" (p. 87). Finally, he says, the formel's request for a year's respite is definitely not a compliment to Venus; in fact, her unwillingness to serve "Venus ne Cupid" yet might well represent Chaucer's own point of view. Thus the dilemma of salvation and of writing love poetry, or true and false felicity, is not solved; Chaucer therefore goes back to his books, hoping some day to find the answer. But, says Lumiansky, he never did. Thus:

The philosophical content of the Parlement indicates an earlier undecided state of the attitude later more decisively presented in the Retracciouns. . . . One might suggest also that the epilogue to Troilus and Criseyde should be considered as an expression of a similar attitude. (Pp. 88-89)

The most elaborate interpretation yet attempted of this poem, however, is that of J. A. W. Bennett,²³ whose arguments are essentially these: the Somnium establishes "the implied dichotomy between passionate love and the common weal" (p. 34); "likerous folk" in the Dream, in fact, should

be interpreted as in accordance with Alain's De Planctu Naturae, those who hinder "the perpetuation of the species and the operation of the principle of plenitude" (p. 42); the double inscriptions on the gate, furthermore, emphasize this dichotomy found in the Somnium. Bennett argues that Chaucer contrasts the Garden of Love and the allegorical personifications, especially in the Temple of Venus. In the Garden Chaucer is depicting Nature "at her loveliest" (p. 72), and in her "abundance" (p. 74), in short as "a Christian Elysium" (p. 78). Having compared Chaucer's personifications with those of Boccaccio, Bennett, in complete opposition to Bronson, finds Chaucer's depiction "more sultry, more sinister, and at the same time more voluptuous" (p. 92). The conclusion of all this is that the Garden is identified with Nature, who as the viceregent of God, presides over the parliament, the richly various scale of creatures, and counsels them to choose their mates. The basic contrast in the poem, therefore, is between the principle of plenitude, which leads to chaste love in marriage, and Venus-worship, which does not, but which brings "swich payne and wo as Loves folk endure'" (p. 105). Chaucer's acceptance of this doctrine of plenitude, moreover, is "the only possible way of putting in its proper place the view of the body as the

prison of the soul, to which Cicero's Somnium gives classic expression" (p. 13). And, thus, in The Parliament of Fowls, Chaucer

moves almost imperceptibly towards a position that comes nearest to being explicit in Theseus' noble conclusion to the Knight's Tale, and in the firmly measured exordium of the Franklin's. (P. 13)

The various attitudes toward Chaucer's use of the Somnium, exemplified in these resumé's of four interpretations of The Parliament of Fowls,²⁴ speak strongly to suggest the need of a clearer understanding of Chaucer's use of the mutability theme; indeed the attempts of these critics to relate this poem with others in the works of Chaucer (as the excerpts at the end of each resumé have indicated) suggests the need for a total assessment of the mutability theme in Chaucer's works generally. For certainly these interpretations of The Parliament of Fowls distort, if they do not wholly misrepresent, the poem. Without attempting here to refute these interpretations in detail,²⁵ suffice it to say that all but one--Goffin does not attempt to interpret the dream-vision--must completely distort the nature and purpose of the Garden of Love in the poem to make their interpretations convincing. So, too, must they misrepresent the bird-parliament; thus Lumiansky sees in the formel's unwillingness to serve "Venus

ne Cupid" for the nonce a reflection of Chaucer's own point of view. Bronson, in speaking of Chaucer and the love vision, even goes so far as to say that "it is clear enough that the subject and the genre were radically uncongenial to his temperament" (p. 197). It is time to reconsider Chaucer's poem.

Dorothy Bethurum, I think, of all the critics, most accurately indicates the essential nature of the Parliament:

Whatever other facets this poem may have, it is essentially a love poem, and it is about fertility and generation. It is a Valentine, not only adorned with, but written about, doves, cupids, and flowers. And being so centered, it is the most voluptuous poem Chaucer ever wrote. . . . If the piece is a love poem, then the Garden of Love is its very center, for the Garden supplies not merely a geographical but a psychological setting, as was its purpose in the Roman de la Rose and in all its numerous progeny. . . . The Garden of Love condenses, as is the useful virtue of allegory, the whole amorous experience into a few stanzas. Read sympathetically and imaginatively it provides a realistic account of what love involved and places the "pletynge" of the birds against a rich psychological background. It offers, like the Temple of Venus in the Knight's Tale, "all the circumstances Of love, which I rekned and rekne shal" (KT., ll. 1932-33), but the account here is more vivid. Furthermore, the Garden gives the significatio of the poem, and this theme is developed by debate in the Parliament that follows.²⁶

To be sure, these remarks of Miss Bethurum represent the impression which the unbiased reader receives from the poem.

Nor is he even slightly aware that Chaucer's Venus is "nearly

stripped . . . of her glamour."²⁷ This study has shown, I think, inductively,²⁸ that there neither is, nor can there be, a reconciliation of the Somnium with the Garden of Love and the debate.

The reason for this is explained more fully in the "Conclusion" to this study, wherein this poem is discussed in relation to the mutability theme as it functions and appears throughout Chaucer's works generally. Suffice it to say here, however, that the Contemptus Mundi expression and courtly love are irrevocably incompatible; the attitudes are in fact contradictory. Bronson recognizes this when he says: "The deeper parallel, in both [the Parliament and the Troilus] lies in the juxtaposition of the same two apparently irreconcilable attitudes" (supra, p. 173). Perhaps this is the reason for his insistence on Chaucer's irony rather than upon the philosophical content of the Dream, unlike Lumiansky and Bennett. Nevertheless, Bronson does call the Somnium "a devastating criticism of the lover's philosophy" (supra, p. 172) and one cannot but suspect that this had no small bearing upon his distortion of the Garden of Love.²⁹ As will be seen in the study of the Troilus, the Contemptus Mundi theme of the epilogue, wherein Chaucer expressly tells the "yonge, freshe folks" to avoid worldly love and to love God, is in

direct contradiction to his praise of love and of love's power throughout the poem. What I am saying is that the Somnium and the Garden of Love (and the debate) were separate and contradictory realms in the mediaeval mind; and since a reconciliation of the two was impossible, the mediaeval man did not look upon their "resolution" as a possibility, and a fortiori as a crisis.

Aside from the fact that Lumiansky tries to wring his interpretation (Chaucer's unsuccessful search for the reconciliation of true and false felicity) from the poem, I find his thesis basically questionable. He thinks that the Parliament might indicate "an earlier undecided state of the attitude later more decisively presented in the Retracciouns" and in the epilogue to the Troilus (supra, p. 176). If Chaucer ever experienced this dilemma--and I doubt if the translator of Innocent III's De Contemptu Mundi and of the Roman de la Rose ever did--certainly he would not ruin a good love poem to symbolize his own personal crisis. In short, it seems to me that the Retracciouns and the epilogue of the Troilus should stand as proof that the mediaeval mind, specifically Chaucer's, never viewed love poetry and salvation as a dilemma: the mediaeval poet went right on writing love poetry and then he wrote retractions and epilogues.

"Shal I nat love, in cas if that me leste?" asks Criseyde,
 "What, par dieux! I am nought religious" (II, 758-59).

Perhaps what has motivated the critics more than anything else to look for an organic relationship between the Somnium and the dream vision in the Parliament is the fact that the Ceyx-Alcione episode is related, at least tenuously, to the dream vision in the Book of the Duchess.³⁰ Thus, the value, ultimately, I think, in recognizing the Somnium for what it is, a Contemptus Mundi expression, and the Garden of Love and the debate for what they are, descendants of the Roman de la Rose, and in recognizing their irrevocable dichotomy. Such is not the case in The Book of the Duchess, where the transitory theme of the introductory episode which, if not organically incorporated into the structure of the dream vision, is at least visibly consonant with the Man in Black's tirade against Fortune and finally with the loss of his lady. This is so because the primary focus of the poem is the elegy, the loss; and the transitory theme is always compatible with the courtly love theme, whereas the Contemptus Mundi theme is not. The one stems from a natural point of view, the other, from the supernatural. If the critics would see the incompatibility of the Contemptus Mundi and the courtly love themes, they might begin to appreciate Chaucer's simple,

conventional device of reading a book, itself about a dream, to introduce his love vision (wherein he found his guide, Africanus) and awakening at a beautiful roundel to resume his reading.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

¹Miller, op. cit., II, 653-64.

²Translated by Furnivall (from the French, in Ten Brink's Studien, pp. 198-203), op. cit., p. 45.

³See Robinson's note to these lines. The following are the lines from Machaut's poem:

Lasse, dolente! Or est bien a rebours;
Car mes douceurs sont dolereus labours,
Et mes joies sont ameres dolours,
Et mi penser,
En qui mes cuers se soloit deliter
Et doucement de tous maus conforter,
Sont et seront dolent, triste et amer;
En obscurete
Seront mi jour, plein de maleurte,
Et mi espoir sans nulle seurte,
Et ma douceur sera dure durte.
(ll. 177-87. Oeuvres SATF, I, 64)

The lines from The Romance of the Rose are too long to quote here. See Chaucer's translation, ll. 4703-50. Note that while these works might have suggested these contraries to Chaucer, his lines (ll. 599-619) are to a great extent original.

⁴Lines 618-86 are taken up with the Man in Black's tirade against Fortune. See Robinson's notes to these lines for Chaucer's sources at this point. It is significant that Machaut does not combine the Fortune-motif with the contraries at lines 177-87 of his Le Jugement Dou Roy De Behaingne. This combination is original with Chaucer in this poem.

⁵See Robinson's note to this passage; also B. L. Jefferson, op. cit., pp. 55-57 and 133.

⁶Kemp Malone does not agree with Kittredge, but thinks that "here Chaucer deliberately sacrificed the virtue of consistency to gain the greater virtue of dramatic irony." Chapters on Chaucer (Baltimore, 1951), pp. 38 f.

⁷For similar studies of mutability in this poem see: Bertrand H. Bronson, "The Book of the Duchess Re-opened," PMLA, LXVII (1952), 863-81, especially pp. 880-81; and Dorothy Bethurum, "Chaucer's Point of View as Narrator in the Love Poems," PMLA, LXXIV (1959), 513. I am indebted to Bronson's article for the idea of resignation which I have found so strongly in this poem but I have treated it more thoroughly and a bit differently than he did. Bethurum's discussion is brief but excellent. She not only grasps the true spirit of the Book of the Duchess, but of Chaucer's mentality generally:

As has been often pointed out, irony plays over the whole poem, but the crowning irony is that at the end neither Knight nor Dreamer has his lady. Golden lads and girls all must/ As chimney sweepers come to dust. Death overtakes even the successful lover. Chaucer has promised this in the prologue when Ceyx says to Alcyone at the end of her dream, "To litel whil our blisse lasteth." This line is not in Ovid, and, as Kittredge noted, this awareness of mortality Chaucer had even when young. It constitutes his principal, though not the only, realistic criticism of the dream of love he has described. It is made possible by the position he has taken as narrator.

What is also made possible by his role is some sort of acceptance of death. It is never made explicit, and indeed the proffer of pious advice about being superior to Fortune is satirized by the very naivete of the Dreamer, and the reality of the Knight's grief emphasized by its being beyond the reach of this fatuous talk. Nevertheless, the presence of the simple-minded Dreamer and his ready, if uneloquent, sympathy when he finally does learn the truth binds together the May garden and the reality of love with its ultimate loss in a mutable world, and the reader is presented with

the other side of the Garden of Love, which, though it may be painfully difficult to accept, is also in Nature's plan. (P. 513)

⁸See the articles of Paull F. Baum, "Chaucer's 'The House of Fame,'" ELH, VIII (1941), 248-56; and Paul G. Ruggiers, "The Unity of Chaucer's House of Fame," SP, L (1953), 16-29.

⁹Studies in Chaucer's Hous of Fame. Chaucer Society Publications, Second Series, No. 39 (1907), p. 15. To substantiate this statement, Sypherd cites lines 606-98; 1885-89; 2131-54; and Prologue to the Legend, ll. 415-17, B version.

¹⁰See also Boethius, II, p. 7, 17; Troilus, V, 1814-16; and Parliament of Fowls, ll. 57-58.

¹¹See W. O. Sypherd, op. cit., pp. 118 ff., where he connects the rock of ice with the goddess of Fortune, and says that "the material itself probably goes back to La Panthere d'Amours of Nicole de Margival"; the connection comes from "a strong influence on Chaucer's whole portrayal of the goddess of Fame and her 'place' from the qualities and attributes which had become attached to the goddess of Fortune." Also, A. C. Garrett, "Studies on Chaucer's Hous of Fame," Harvard Studies and Notes, V (1897), 157 ff. Garrett thinks that the ultimate source for Chaucer's hill of ice is the "Glasberg" of German folk-lore.

¹²In the process of this enumeration, Chaucer says:

There saught I sitte in other sees,
Pleyinge upon sondry glees,
Which that I kan not nevene,
Of whiche I nyl as now not ryme,
For ese of yow, and los of tyme,
For tyme ylost, this knownen ye,
Be no way may recovered be.
(ll. 1251-58)

This is, most probably, conventional and proverbial; but the

fact that it was a ready tag for Chaucer is at least to be considered. See Troilus, II, 1739; IV, 1283; and for a similar expression, III, 615; Knight's Tale, ll. 2636; Intro. to MLT, ll. 20-32.

¹³Op. cit., pp. 94-95. The sister-relationship of Fortune and Fame is apparently Chaucer's own.

¹⁴Op. cit., p. 117. The general idea of the poem was suggested by Virgil (Aeneid, iv, 173-97) and Ovid (Metamorphoses, xii, 39-63). Chaucer is indebted to Ovid chiefly for the House of Rumor, the account of which he follows very closely; the position of Fame's abode (ll. 713-15); and the place of Fame's dwelling on a high mountain-top. To Virgil he is indebted chiefly for Fame's changing size (ll. 1368-76) and her hideous appearance (ll. 1381-92). To both he is indebted for his conception of Fame as rumor, but to his classical sources, he adds the idea of Fame as renown and Ovid's Palace of Fame becomes subordinate to the goddess of Chaucer's invention. For the influence of Dante, see the articles cited by Robinson, particularly that of A. Rambeau, "Chaucer's 'House of Fame' in Seinem Verhältniss zu Dante's 'Divina Commedia,'" Englische Studien, III (1880), 209-68.

¹⁵The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), pp. 96 and 112.

¹⁶For an excellent survey of the important scholarship on The House of Fame to 1934, see Bertrand H. Bronson, "Chaucer's Hous of Fame: Another Hypothesis," University of California Publications in English, III, No. 4 (1934), 171-92. Bronson himself argues, from the internal evidence of the poem as he sees it, that the only possible tidings that the man of authority might tell would be adverse tidings; that some false lover would be implicated. Because he is surely to be prominent, Chaucer finished the poem (of this Bronson has not the slightest doubt) but did not circulate the conclusion. This interpretation, he says, is in keeping with the ironic spirit of the poem. I present this as just one example of the various interpretations of the poem now under consideration.

¹⁷Only two companies of the petitioners, the sixth and seventh, mention love at all, and they desire fame "as wel of love as other thyng" (l. 1739).

¹⁸Op. cit., p. 66.

¹⁹For a somewhat similar idea, when Chaucer again refers to the sorrows of mortality, see House of Fame, ll. 406-407.

²⁰"In Appreciation of Chaucer's Parlement of Foules," University of California Publications in English, III (1935), 193-224.

²¹"Heaven and Earth in the 'Parlement of Foules,'" MLR, XXXI (1936), 493-99.

²²"Chaucer's Parlement of Foules: A Philosophical Interpretation," RES, XXIV (1948), 81-89.

²³The Parlement of Foules: An Interpretation (Oxford, 1957). Bennett deals primarily in terms of literary topoi; he attempts to illumine certain passages in the Parliament by the light of other passages in the works of Chaucer; he "fills in" certain lines and passages with meanings which "must have been" in Chaucer's associative memory at the time he wrote the poem, loosely related scenes or passages from De Planctu Naturae or the Divina Commedia, for example. Indeed, Bennett does not see a definable meaning taking form throughout the poem; rather, he sees the meaning taking shape in reverberating suggestions, associations, and in "the ambiguity we have found in this poem at every turn" (see pages 27, 66, 72, 79, 98, and 103, for Bennett's insistence on the ambiguity in the poem).

²⁴See Robert E. Thackaberry, "Chaucer's The Parlement of Foules: A Re-Interpretation," An unpublished thesis (Ph.D.), State University of Iowa (1937), who argues for an artistic unity of the poem: he emphasizes the "common profit" as

stated in the Somnium, and the contrasting warring classes as depicted in the debate, "in which no one was concerned for the good of all" (p. 39; see this and the following page for an excellent summary of Thackaberry's thesis). Thackaberry's thesis is thinly documented but excellent for his close analysis of the poem; Charles A. Owen, Jr., "The Role of the Narrator in the 'Parlement of Foules,'" College English, XIV (1953), 264-69. Owen's interpretation is just as ingenious as Bronson's but not so convincing: the dream vision is Chaucer's sub-conscious indulgence or "release" from the idealism of the Somnium, "the victory of impulse and passion, frustrated though they be, over the idealism suggested by his reading" (p. 267). Owen's criticism makes good reading until he starts talking about the Garden of Love as "wish fulfilment," at which point one suspects that he is reading Freud, not Chaucer (see page 266); Charles O. McDonald, "An Interpretation of Chaucer's Parlement of Foules," Speculum, XXX (1955), 444-57). With the exception of Bronson's, perhaps this article is most worthy of attention. McDonald's thesis, the same thesis which Bennett develops with multifarious and dubious detail, is that the "common profit" mentioned in the Somnium is connected to the dream vision in the "ironic humor and mild satire of courtly love" (p. 450), and finds its meaning in Nature's holding all lovers, "courtly and otherwise, to 'common profit,' that is, to marriage and to multiplication of the race" (p. 454). McDonald even anticipates Bennett in pointing out the contrast between the paradisaical garden and the sensual allegorical figures, in the portrayal of which "the common personifications of the French courtly tradition are put to shame and merely tolerated" (p. 450).

²⁵The main points with which I disagree in Bronson's interpretation have been touched upon in the text. Goffin's interpretation is interesting but highly conjectural: lines 90-91, upon which he bases so much of his argument, do not necessarily refer to the poet's reading. As for Chaucer's looking into the Commentary for "literary material," this seems a bit doubtful. Both Chaucer and his Valentine audience knew the Commentary, and certainly his audience would not be convinced by Chaucer's looking to Macrobius for love material, unless, of course, Chaucer meant to be ironical; and Goffin doesn't mention this as a possibility. The weakness of Lumiansky's thesis might best be seen in his arguments

in regard to the dreamer in the Garden of Love and the Temple of Venus. The dreamer's temporary forgetting of his search at the sight of the Garden and his sudden remembrance of it at the sight of the allegorical figures, who represent worldly pleasures--this is hardly convincing. Lumiansky is least convincing when he says that Chaucer is uncomfortable in the Temple of Venus, because he has love poems on his conscience; and having completed his tour of the park, Chaucer "feels a bit ashamed for having to some extent enjoyed such sights. Therefore he walks a short distance for the purpose 'myselfen to solace'" (p. 88). For a discussion of Bennett's book, see Theodore Silverstein, "Chaucer's Modest and Homely Poem: The Parlement," MP, LVI (1959), 270-76.

²⁶Dorothy Bethurum, "The Center of the Parlement of Foules," Essays in Honor of Walter Clyde Curry (Nashville, 1954), pp. 40-41. See also, Robert Worth Frank, Jr., "Structure and Meaning in the 'Parlement of Foules,'" PMLA, LXXI (1956), 530-39, who sees three separate sections to the Parliament, each expressing three different attitudes toward love: the moralistic, the literary, and the realistic, in the Somnium, the garden, and the debate, respectively. While it is true that Frank overemphasizes the "realism" at the expense of courtly love in the bird parliament, his study is especially useful in showing that the Somnium is in no way related to the rest of the poem.

²⁷Bronson's argument from Chaucer's source is not valid, it seems to me. Chaucer's readers do not read the Parliament against his source, and Bronson does not show that Chaucer's Venus is asensual. In fact, Robert Pratt, who is an authority in this matter, says about Chaucer's translation of the Teseida at this juncture, "To sum up, the slight changes from the Teseida seem mostly a perfunctory by-product of the process of transferring to the Parliament the pictorial and sensuous beauty of Boccaccio's description." "Chaucer's Use of the Teseida," PMLA, LXII (1947), 607.

²⁸Wolfgang Clemen, Der Junge Chaucer, Kölner Anglistische Arbeiten (Bochum-Langendreer, 1938), pp. 168-72, argues, from mediaeval literary convention, that the Somnium provides the

lore mingled with the lust of the poem, and that it provides a serious contrast before the gay play begins. He says, however, that: "It cannot be shown that the Christian elements in the Somnium might be more closely related to the main part of the tale. They are rather to be considered as serious tones contrasting with the merry and earthly world of the envisioned love-paradise and as a pointing upward to the more lofty eternal matters before the pleasant and gay drama begins. . . . This transition from the pious earnestness of the introduction to the atmosphere of bird-song and love-allegory is of an abruptness difficult for us to conceive. Abrupt, however, only for us, not for the Middle Ages" (p. 170; translation my own); see Dorothy Bethurum, op. cit., pp. 48-49, for a similar expression of this idea. W. O. Sypherd, op. cit., p. 23, says that the Somnium in the Parlement of Foules has no particular significance. "It is merely the book which interests Chaucer at the time and which he is eager to tell about." Also, see G. L. Kittredge, op. cit., p. 60. Thus, inductively and on the authority of scholars who have thoroughly studied the dream-vision conventions and the Middle Ages generally, we can conclude safely that the Somnium did not function in Chaucer's poem, but is there because it interested him at the time.

²⁹Bronson later revises his opinion somewhat in regard to the Somnium's use in the Parliament. See "The Parlement of Foules Revisited," ELH, XV (1948), 258, where he says, ". . . it seems undeniable that Chaucer was exhibiting the tours de force of a virtuoso, utilizing whatever lay nearest to hand, compelling it into service." He says that the Somnium might even be a product of revision of the poem; see p. 259.

³⁰Thus argues Thackaberry: "Unless, however, there is in the Parlement of Foules a direct and organic connection between the material which Chaucer records from his reading and the dream proper, this more mature poem is structurally inferior to the earlier Book of the Duchess. For in that poem the introductory reading is closely related to the rest of the work. . . . To suppose, then, that Chaucer made use of material which was also fitting to the dream in that far superior piece of writing, the Parlement of Foules, is not unreasonable." (Op. cit., p. 8)

CHAPTER V

TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

The mutability theme of the Troilus has long been recognized. In his Troy Book, John Lydgate writes:

And in this wise Troylus first be-gan
To be a seruaunt, my maister telleth thus,
Til he was holpe aftir of Pandarus,
Thorugh whos comferte & mediacioun
(As in his boke is maked mencion)
With great labour firste he cam to grace.
And so contuneth by certeyn yeres space,
Til Fortune gan up-on hym frowne,
That she from hym mvst goon oute of towne
Al sodeynly, and neuer hym after se.
Lo! here the ende of worldly brotilnes,
Of fleshy lust, lo! here thunstabilnes,
Lo! here the double variacioun
Of wor[ldly] [*sic*] blisse and transmutacioun:
This day in myrthe & in wo to-morwe!
For ay the fyn, alas! of Ioie is sorwe.¹

R. C. Goffin says that "the whole of the Troilus may . . . be justifiably viewed as an epic tragedy of the essential transitoriness of earthly love."² Neville Coghill writes, "One might say, using fourteenth-century terminology, that Chaucer saw in Boccaccio's tale of Troilus an exemplum of the Boethian philosophies of tragedy and free will."³ Root thinks that "in the fickleness and falsehood of Criseyde, a

woman so lovely, so sweet and gracious, so much to be desired, he [Chaucer] sees the type of mutability, of the transitoriness and fallacy of earthly happiness."⁴ Of all the critics who have dealt with this subject, however, only two have done so with any degree of thoroughness, B. L. Jefferson and Willard Farnham. Having pointed out the themes of fortune and transitoriness in the poem, and having indicated all the passages relative to these themes, Jefferson concludes:

Indeed so philosophical a poem is Troilus, so much does it abound in Boethian passages, so much does it illustrate the truth of the Boethian teaching, that it is possible even to suppose that Chaucer translated the Consolation for the express purpose that Troilus might be the better interpreted; at any rate, the two works go hand in hand.⁵

Farnham views the Troilus as a De Casu tragedy, with all the mediaeval machinery common to the De Casibus type; Criseyde is "simply a worldly possession of Troilus". Like wealth or a crown she takes wings and leaves him."⁶ In the hands of Chaucer, he says, "the business of courtly love. . . has its aspect of sad vanity which can be viewed with truly detached spirit" (ibid., p. 140).

It would be difficult to add materially to the studies of Jefferson and Farnham, for, after all, one of the basic facts about the Troilus is its Boethian philosophy. I should

like, however, in this chapter to review this criticism and to add some of my own; I hope thereby to clarify the various themes of mutability which run throughout the poem and to show how conscious Chaucer was of the mutability theme in it.

Kittredge was the first to point out the significance of Chaucer's changes from Boccaccio to implicate his tragic lovers in the doom of Troy. He saw that the fate of the lovers was inextricably interwoven and intensified by the impending doom of Troy. "They are, in fact, caught in the wheels of that resistless mechanism which the gods have set in motion for the ruin of the Trojan race."⁷ It is unnecessary to go into all of Chaucer's source-changes to prove this point. One example, however, will be useful to show how seriously Chaucer felt about Troy and Fortune. Boccaccio simply says:

Things went on between the Trojans and Greeks ever
and anon as in time of war. At times the Trojans
came forth from their city doughtily against the
Greeks and oftentimes, if the story erreth not,
the Greeks advanced valiantly even to the moats,
pillaging on every side, firing and destroying
castles and towns.⁸

Chaucer, on the other hand, leaves no doubt in regard to the element of Fortune in this war:

The thynges fellen, as they don of werre,
Bitwixen hem of Troie and Grekes ofte;
For som day boughten they of Troie it derre,

And eft the Grekes founden nothing softe
 The folk of Troie; and thus Fortune on lofte,
 And under eft, gan hem to whielen bothe
 Aftir hir cours, ay whil that thei were wrothe.
 (I, 134-40)

The treason of Antenor (IV, 197-210) and the death of Hector (V, 1541-54), neither of which appears in Il Filostrato, also occasion Chaucer's apostrophizing the fate of Troy.⁹ Into this background Chaucer has woven his De Casu tragedy.

Chaucer states his theme in the very beginning of the poem:

The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,
 That was the kyng Priamus sone of Troye,
 In lovyng, how his adventures fellen
 Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie,
 My purpos is.
 (I, 1-5)

Whereas Boccaccio makes nothing of Troilus' being a king's son, Chaucer makes much of it (Farnham, p. 142). Just before Troilo is to fall in love with Cressida, Boccaccio writes:

O blindness of mundane minds! How often follow effects all contrary to our intentions! Troilus now railleth at the weaknesses and anxious loves of other people without a thought of what heaven hasteneth to bring upon him, whom Love transfixed more than any other before he left the temple. (I, 25)

Chaucer turns this one stanza of Boccaccio's into three, and in the first he inserts the image of a fall:

O blynde world, O blynde entencioun!

How often falleth al the effect contraire
 Of surquidrie and foul presumpcioun;
 For kaught is proud, and kaught is debonaire.
 This Troilus is clomben on the staire,
 And litel weneth that he moot descenden;
 But alday faileth thing that fooles wenden.

(I, 211-17)

Then follows the image of proud Bayard who realizes that he is but a horse after all and must endure "horses lawe." Troilus too, therefore, must endure "the lawe of kynde"; "So ferde it by this fierse and proud knyght." Chaucer is here doing no more than speaking of Troilus' being made subject to love, but, says Farnham, "We know from the beginning of the poem the more serious fall that is in store for Troilus, and now we may guess that his pride in princely rank and his ignorance of the world's power over all mankind will soften that fall no more than this" (p. 143). He says, furthermore:

So Troilus falls into his first woe and proceeds out of it to his greatest joy. Like many of the more carefully plotted stories in the De Casibus, Chaucer's Troilus has a peak of good fortune very near the middle of the action, marked with moralizing upon Fortune's mutability. Here, in some degree, Chaucer follows the Filostrato, which, even though it was not written especially to expose and anatomize the mutability of the world, yet as a love poem could rail at Fortune with plenty of precedent. (P. 143)

In the Filostrato, Cressida, after the most superficial and conventional objections (II, 134-43), finally succumbs to

Pandaro's request that Troilo come secretly to her home at night. Chaucer handles this affair quite differently. He has Criseyde come to Pandarus' house for dinner (III, 604 ff.), unaware of, if not completely unsuspecting, Troilus' presence there. As she is about to leave with her retinue, there comes a cloudburst which forces her to spend the night with her uncle. At this point, Chaucer says:

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.
 (III, 617-23)

Troilus and Criseyde consummate their love and spend many more nights together. At the end of this third book Boccaccio says simply:

But for a short time lasted this happiness, thanks to envious fortune, which in this world remaineth not stable. It turned toward him its bitter face, by a new chance, as it happeneth, and turning everything upside down, took from him the sweet fruits of Cressida, and changed his happy love into woeful mourning. (III, 94)

This single stanza from Il Filostrato, Chaucer spins into a prohemium for his fourth book, not only giving the idea much more importance but also setting the tone for what is to follow in the entire book:

But al to litel, weylaway the whyle,
 Lasteth swich joie, ythonked be Fortune,
 That semeth trewest whan she wol bygyle,
 And kan to fooles so hire song entune,
 That she hem hent and blent, traitour commune!
 And whan a wight is from hire whiel ythrowe,
 Than laugheth she, and maketh hym the mowe.

From Troilus she gan hire brighte face
 Away to writhe, and tok of hym non heede,
 But caste hym clene out of his lady grace,
 And on hire whiel she sette up Diomede;
 For which right now myn herte gynneth blede,
 And now my penne, alas! with which I write,
 Quaketh for drede of what I moste endite.

(IV, 1-14)

The poet then invokes Mars and the Furies to help him show fully Troilus' loss of love and of life. In this book, Chaucer inserts the long passage of Troilus concerning fate and free will, which, incidentally, does not appear in the first draft of the poem. In his despair, Troilus concludes that there is no such thing as free will and that he is the victim of fate. Shortly thereafter, Criseyde departs for the Greek camp, never to return. In the final book, Chaucer inserts a passage not found in Il Filostrato:

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

(V, 1541-47)

What Willard Farnham says about this passage sums up, in brief,

much of his criticism of the Troilus:

If we were looking for one stanza in the poem which should express essentially both the conventional nature of the tragic philosophy in the Troilus and the unique spirit with which Chaucer surrounds that philosophy, giving it a setting like nothing in Boccaccio's De Casibus or any other book of his time, this stanza might well be the one to choose. It begins in stately terms with a picture of the conventional De Casibus figure of Fortune, behind whom stands the omniscient and omnipotent divinity of Boethius and, more particularly, of Dante, delegating to her care the mysterious flux of worldly change which somehow serves his purpose. But it concludes with a couplet which is Chaucer and Chaucer alone--the elfish Chaucer, the ironically detached Chaucer, the wisely balanced Chaucer, the Arnoldian Chaucer lacking in sustained high seriousness, whichever we elect to call him. Into this picture of Fate in all its epic grandeur the poet casts the figure of Troy being plucked of its gay feathers like any barnyard fowl. Here is that well-known instinct of Chaucer to discount his own heroics whenever he finds himself getting caught by them, an instinct, however, which is never so light-minded as completely to destroy profound emotions previously aroused. Probably nothing in small compass could better represent the almost indescribable mingling of sad sooth and smiling irony, of heroic elevation and homely shrewdness, which is the seriocomic spirit of the Troilus. (P. 151)

To be sure, the Troilus is a De Casu tragedy. It is not necessary, for this study, to go into the problem of free will and determinism in the poem. Jefferson and Curry have pointed out all the relevant passages which evidence the attitude of Troilus, but arrive at different conclusions.¹⁰ Suffice it to say here that Troilus, in a moment of despair (IV, 54), arrives at his conclusion of determinism; his railings at

Fortune throughout the poem are conventional and do not necessarily reflect Chaucer's philosophy of life; much of the problem, in fact, has to do with the conventions of courtly love: Troilus, as a courtly lover, was unable to resist the divine influence of love.¹¹ Troilus, in actuality, acts as though he has free will, and the other characters in the poem never even question the fact that man lacks it. Regardless of what attitude one takes toward the problem, however, he must reckon with a passage such as this. Before Troilus is to meet with Criseyde, he says:

"O fatal sustren, which, er any cloth
 Me shapen was, my destine me sponne,
 So helpeth to this werk that is bygonne!"
 (III, 733-35)

Who are they going to help, Fortune or Troilus? To see the heart of the Troilus and also Chaucer's vision in the poem, one must pierce through the Fortune machinery of the conventional De Casibus tragedy. If one does this, he will find, I think, that Chaucer's main preoccupation in the Troilus was with the problem of mutability; that Troilus' fall resulted from his complete and irrevocable attachment to Criseyde, ultimately, as Root and Farnham say, just "another worldly possession,"¹² who, as we learn from the epilogue, has turned Troilus away from the only stable happiness, Jesus Christ. It has not been pointed out before that the

"bedroom scene," which I shall call it for lack of a better phrase, foreshadows this idea in the epilogue.

If one compares the bedroom scene of Il Filostrato (III, 27-52) with that of the Troilus (III, 1191-1533), he will find that Chaucer heightens the happiness of the lovers considerably; in fact, he equates it with the perfect happiness of heaven. Boccaccio says:

Long would it be to recount the joy and impossible to tell the delight they took together when they came there. . . . O sweet and much-desired night, what wert thou to the two joyful lovers! If the knowledge that all the poets once possessed were given me, I should be unable to describe it. Let him who was ever before so much favored by Love as they, take thought of it, and he will know in part their delight. (III, 31, 33)

Chaucer writes:

Of hire delit, or joies oon the leeste,
Were impossible to my wit to seye;
But juggeth ye that han ben at the feste
Of swich gladnesse, if that hem liste pleye!
I kan namore, but thus thise ilke tweye,
That nyght, bitwixen drede and sikernesse,
Felten in love the grete worthynesse.

O blisful nyght, of hem so longe isought,
How blithe unto hem bothe two thow weere!
Why nad I swich oon with my soule ybought,
Ye, or the leeste joie that was theere?
Away, thow foule daunger and thow feere,
And let hem in this hevене blisse dwelle,
That is so heigh that al ne kan I telle!
(III, 1310-23)¹³

It is significant that in these two lines (underscored)

Chaucer actually refers to the joy of the lovers as "hevene blisse," and that he remarks that their joy is so high that he cannot even tell of it. In the lines which follow (1338-65), Chaucer adheres very closely to Il Filostrato. In the works of both authors the lovers cannot believe that their experience is real: ". . . lo, this was hir mooste feere,/ That all this thyng but nyce dremes were"; furthermore, Troilus says:

"O deere herte, may it be
That it be soth, that ye ben in this place?"
"Yee, herte myn, God thank I of his grace,"
Quod Criseyde, and therwithal hym kiste.
That where his spirit was, for joie he nyste.
(III, 1347-51)

This line (underscored) is Chaucer's addition to Il Filostrato and, I think, a possible allusion to Second Corinthians, where St. Paul, in ecstasy, is brought up into paradise:

I know a man in Christ above fourteen years ago
(whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body,
I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up to the
third heaven.

And I know such a man (whether in the body, or
out of the body, I know not: God knoweth):

That he was caught up into paradise and heard
secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter.
(xii, 2-4)

In Chaucer's inability to tell of the lovers' perfect joy, one might even see an allusion to St. Paul's inability to utter the secrets of paradise. Without doubt, this passage from Second Corinthians was ready to hand for Chaucer. In

the House of Fame, when the eagle was carrying him beyond the clouds toward the Galaxie, Chaucer "gan wexen in a were," and exclaims:

"Y wot wel y am here;
But wher in body or in gost
I not, ywys; but God, thou wost!"
(ll. 979-82)

Chaucer's whole presentation of this love scene, where neither of the lovers is able to comprehend the reality of their presence together, has the ring of ecstasy about it; Chaucer's biblical allusion here is extremely appropriate to the context and consistent with his emphasis upon the lovers' "celestial" happiness throughout the love scenes generally. He continues this image-pattern in his references to the lovers' joy, after Criseyde's address to "rakle nyght" and Troilus' "aube."

In Il Filostrato (III, 42), the lovers hear the cocks crow and are sorrowful because of their impending separation. Boccaccio then writes the following stanza:

When Cressida heard them crow she said in sorrow:
"O my love now is it time to arise, if we wish to
conceal our desire. But I wish to embrace thee a
little, my love, before thou arisest, that I may
feel less grief at thy departure. Do thou em-
brace me, my sweet life." (III, 43)

Chaucer incorporates this idea into a single stanza and then adds, without a hint from Boccaccio, Criseyde's address to swift Night:

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

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

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

(III, 1422-42)

Criseyde's address to Night particularly and, to a certent extent, Troilus' dawn-song (ll. 1450-70, merely suggested by Boccaccio) serve not only to intensify the sorrow of the lovers' parting, but these lengthy additions of Chaucer's serve also to point up (1) the illusory nature of this "heavenly bliss," which they themselves were unable to comprehend fully, and (2) the transitoriness of such "perfit joie" (l. 1379). Indeed, Chaucer's emphasis on the harsh reality of the dawn, which forces the lovers apart, is a brilliant contrast to the ecstasy which the Night had granted

This passeth al that herte may bythynke.
(III, 1681-94)

In these lines (underscored), Chaucer can be talking about nothing short of the happiness of heaven.¹⁴ It is clear, therefore, that unlike Boccaccio's rendering of these love scenes, Chaucer's account both implicitly and explicitly equates the happiness of the lovers with the happiness of heaven. While Boccaccio's account sometimes achieves the effects of ecstasy, only once is the comparison of the two types of happinesses mentioned (or even suggested). In Troilo's recounting to Pandaro the experience of the first night with Cressida, he says: "Thou hast, my friend, taken me from hell to usher me into paradise, as sure as I do live" (III, 56). This expression, however, is highly conventional in the language of courtly love and is also appropriate to Troilo's typified characterization throughout the entire Filostrato. Boccaccio's account, in fact, is extremely sensual, even gross;¹⁵ Chaucer's elimination of these elements is not only consonant with his usual habit of avoiding the sensual, but it also enables him to sustain the imagery and theme of heavenly bliss.

What, finally, is the significance of this imagery in relation to the whole poem, and especially the epilogue? At

the risk of laboring the obvious, it must be recognized that this celestial imagery does not invalidate the fact that Chaucer's love poetry at this point is "some of the greatest erotic poetry of the world."¹⁶ On the contrary, what could be more erotic than to celebrate the flesh in terms of the beatific vision, if it is artistically successful? My point is simply this: to the mediaeval mind, of which Boethius is the archetype, the action of Troilus (and of Criseyde) would be complete attachment to a worldly possession and, consequently, complete abandonment of God. Thus Chaucer, in the epilogue, says: "Swich fyn hath, lo, this Troilus for love!" and thus Troilus, from the eighth sphere, could condemn all our work that follows after the "blynde lust." As is evident, therefore, in this section under consideration, could Chaucer better have been, at one and the same time, the poet of courtly love and also the mediaeval man thoroughly saturated with the philosophy of Boethius?¹⁷

That Chaucer actually intended this heavenly imagery throughout the love scenes as an implied criticism or commentary of the lovers' actions is impossible to prove. It is clear, however, from what follows in the poem, that Troilus is at the highest point on the wheel of Fortune. Troilus had abandoned himself to Fortune from the very beginning of

the poem. In the love scenes, however, Chaucer spares nothing to tell the reader that Troilus' abandonment has become complete, irrevocable, and in view of the De Casu tradition, even blasphemous. Precisely at this point in a De Casu tragedy begins the fall.

In Il Filostrato, when Troilo comes back to Pandaro to report his success with Cressida, Pandaro simply counsels him to be prudent and wise in order not to lose the joy which he had gained. In the Troilus, Pandarus gives the same advice, but adds:

"For of fortunes sharp adversitee
The worste kynde of infortune is this,
A man to han ben in prosperitee,
And it remembren, whan it passed is.
Th'art wis ynough, forthi do nat amys;
Be naught to rakel, theigh thou sitte warme;
For if thou be, certeyn, it wol the harme.

"Thow art at ese, and hold the wel therinne;
For also seur as reed is every fir,
As gret a craft is kepe wel as wyne.
Bridle alwey wel thi speche and thi desir,
For worldly joie halt nought but by a wir.
That preveth wel it brest al day so ofte;
Forthi nede is to werken with it softe."

(III, 1625-38)

Proverbial as much of this advice is, it does function as a choric comment on the action which is to come and draws attention to the mutability theme as it operates throughout the poem. That this Boethian concept occurs just at this point is indicative of the way in which Chaucer fashioned

the Troilus to the De Casu tradition; it is to be noted, certainly, that this advice about fortune comes from the same Pandarus who regards fortune so slightly throughout the rest of the poem (e.g., I, 841-47; IV, 600-602).

Just before the poet tells of the lovers' second meeting, he writes:

Soon after this, for that Fortune is wolde,
Icomen was the blisful tyme swete
That Troilus was warned that he sholde
There he was erst, Criseyde his lady mete.
(III, 1667-70)

After he describes this second meeting in all the terms of "perfect felicite," he says:

And many a nyght they wroughte in this
manere.
And thus Fortune a tyme ledde in ioie
Criseyde, and ek this kynges sone of Troie.
(III, 1713-15)

These two passages are also Chaucer's addition to Il Filostrato. He added these passages, following upon the love scene, and removed Boccaccio's final stanza of Book III to the prohemium of his own fourth book. These additions not only serve to point up the De Casu theme, but they also emphasize the illusory nature of the lovers' "heavenly blisse." For the lovers' "heavenly blisse" is but transitory, and this, too, points to the epilogue.

This, then, the De Casu theme, is one theme of

mutability which prevails in the Troilus. In its broadest outlines, the Troilus fits the De Casibus tradition accurately. A king's son, at the point of his highest pleasure suddenly falls victim of Fortune. It must be remembered however, that Chaucer is portraying this theme dramatically. By allying the courtly love conventions, specifically the irresistibility of the God of Love, with Fortune, even from the very beginning of the poem, Chaucer achieves the same effects, but dramatically, as if he were simply relating, de casu, the arbitrary rise and fall of a great man on the wheel of Fortune. Troilus himself sees his life as ruled by Fortune, and the numerous Fortune passages in the poem make it abundantly clear that it is. "Have I the nought honoured al my lyve,/ As thow wel woost, above the goddes alle?" (IV, 267-68), he asks Fortune. That is, indeed, the very source of his fall. Regardless of the evidence which one might gather to support the fact that Chaucer intended to portray in Troilus a character thoroughly determined in his actions, the whole meaning and drift of the poem is against this conclusion. It must be admitted that Chaucer is teetering between the conventional De Casibus tragedy, wherein character has no relation to the fall, and the type of tragedy, perfected in Greek and Shakespearean drama, which grows out of character. This gives the poem a certain

amount of complexity, and, it must be admitted, of confusion also. But as long as one is able to identify the confusing elements in this complicated poem, he is on the right track. The elements therefore are these: first, the mediaeval De Casibus of Fortune and the apparent arbitrary rise-and-fall of a nobleman; second, at least an implied criticism of Troilus which is made explicit in the epilogue. I have shown, I think, conclusively that Troilus, when he was highest on the wheel of Fortune, abandoned himself completely to Love. Chaucer describes this abandonment in terms of celestial ecstasy which, in the mediaeval framework, and, certainly in the mind of a poet so thoroughly saturated with the philosophy of Boethius, implies a perversion of values. Given these facts, it seems to me, certainly, that Chaucer is working toward the tragedy that issues from character. Call it a cultural tragedy, if you wish; or a spiritual tragedy, if, by these terms is meant a tragedy which issues from the spiritual beliefs of a people or an epoch. That the Fortune machinery was inadequate to fully embrace this type of tragedy, I will admit. Perhaps this is why Chaucer felt it necessary to provide an epilogue for his poem. Farnham says that Chaucer "refines the telling of De Casibus tragedy by showing at length the pitiful grasp which a man can keep upon

this world of illusion even after convincing demonstration of its vanity has been given him" (p. 149).

Another mutability theme in the Troilus is the transitoriness of earthly happiness, expressed chiefly in the speeches of Criseyde. One of the strokes whereby Chaucer achieves Criseyde's complexity is her abiding sensibility that "every joie of worldly thyng mot flee" (III, 828). Boccaccio's Cressida is the "sophisticated Neapolitan lady of pleasure. . . . she is not seduced but seduces herself" (Myrick and Griffin, p. 106). Only twice does she refer to the transitory-theme, and both times it is with the superficiality suitable to her own characterization. (1) When Pandarus is attempting to persuade her to accept Troilus as her lover, he tells her, "Lose no time, consider that old age or death will take away all thy beauty" (II, 54). She replies in a typically commonplace fashion:

"Alas," said Cressida, "thou speakest the truth. Thus do the years little by little bear us forward. The greater number die before the path granted by the celestial fire is completed. But let us now stop thinking of this . . ." (II, 55)

Chaucer keeps the words (II, 54) of Pandarus and turns them into a whole stanza, in which Pandarus himself recognizes them as proverbial. (2) The other instance occurs in her argument with herself about accepting Troilus. She says, "Every hour

my youth takes flight. Am I to lose it so miserably?" (II, 70). The fact that Chaucer uses neither of these passages from Il Filostrato is perhaps indicative of the depth of outlook which he intended for his own heroine.

In Il Filostrato, Cressida replies to Pandarus, when he attempted to have her accept Troilus:

"I would have thought, Pandarus, if I had ever fallen into such folly that Troilus had ever come into my desire, that thou wouldst have beaten me, not merely restrained me, as one who should seek my honor. O God help me! What will others do now that thou strivest to make me follow the precepts of Love?" (II, 48)

At this point Chaucer reveals that Criseyde is easily given to disillusionment. He turns this stanza of Boccaccio's into two stanzas, wherein Criseyde says:

"Allas, for wo! Why nere I deed?
For of this world the feyth is al agoon.
Allas! what sholden straunge to me doon,
When he, that for my beste frend I wende,
Ret me to love, and sholde it me defende?
.
This false world, allas! who may it leve?"
(II, 409-15, 420)

Chaucer's changes in his source here are evident and sure. First, these changes establish a point of view which is to characterize Criseyde throughout the entire poem: her inability to view the world or happiness as anything but unstable and transitory. Second, Chaucer's version makes more

evident the close and affable relationship which exists between Criseyde and her uncle: he is her best and most trustworthy friend. That she should use the word "straunge" here seems to imply her complete dependence upon, and her attachment to, her uncle to the exclusion of anyone else. This suggests immediately, what is obvious throughout the poem, that Criseyde's ruling passion is fear. C. S. Lewis writes:

Fortunately Chaucer has so emphasized the ruling passion of his heroine, that we cannot mistake it. It is Fear--fear of loneliness, of old age, of death, of love, and of hostility; of everything, indeed, that can be feared. And from this Fear springs the only positive passion which can be permanent in such a nature; the pitiable longing, more childlike than womanly, for protection, for some strong and stable thing that will hide her away and take the burden from her shoulders. . . . Her playful and trusting affection for her uncle Pandarus, on which so much of her story hangs, is, of course, but one more form of the desire for protection. . . . Women of her kind have always some male relative to stand between them and the terrifying world of affairs. (*Op. cit.*, pp. 185-86)

Lewis' insight into Criseyde is truly evidenced at every turn in the poem. That she should constantly see the world as false and happiness as transitory is, certainly, simply another aspect of her ruling passion of fear: her fearful and insecure nature leads her to seek perfect and permanent happiness, but she is forever conscious that "nothing of the

world (and she knows nothing else) is abiding" (Jefferson, p. 129).

This close relationship of Criseyde's fearfulness and her consciousness of the transitoriness of all worldly happiness is borne out even more clearly in another episode of the Troilus. In Il Filostrato, Cressida also debates with herself about loving Troilo. The debate is, of course, quite superficial and is heavily unbalanced by Cressida's vanity and her prospects of sensuous fulfilment. After she thinks over the favorable points for her loving of Troilo, she turns her thoughts in the opposite direction and muses:

"What dost thou propose to do, wretched one?
Knowest thou not how bad is the life that one
liveth with one's lover when passion languisheth,
for there must ever be in it continuance of woes,
of sighs, and grieving, with jealousy added,
which is far worse than wretched death?" (II, 75)

She hesitates further about her love for Troilo because he is of a much higher rank than she, and his love therefore will probably not last. But even if it were to last a long time, she continues, she has no guarantee that their love will be concealed. Once it is discovered she will lose her excellent reputation (II, 76-77).

In the Troilus, on the other hand, this scene is handled much more convincingly. From one sentence in Boccaccio, Chaucer spins a complete stanza, reminiscent of Boethius:

But right as when the sonne shyneth brighte
 In March, that chaungeth ofte tyme his face,
 And that a cloude is put with wynd to flighte,
 Which oversprat the sonne as for a space,
 A cloudy thought gan thorough hire soule pace,
 That overspradde hire brighte thoughtes alle,
 So that for feere almost she gan to falle.

(II, 764-70)¹⁸

Perhaps this stanza, more than any other in the entire poem, best characterizes Criseyde's complex point of view. All her bright thoughts are forever shadowed by the realization of the mixed nature of earthly happiness and by the fact that it is, finally, transitory. Why should she accept a lover and lose her "sikernesse"? May she not see in other folk who love "hire dredful joye, hire constreinte, and hire payne"? She continues to philosophize about love (which Boccaccio's heroine does not do):

"For love is yet the mooste stormy lyf,
 Right of hymself, that evere was begonne;
 For evere som mystrust or nice strif
 Ther is in love, som cloude is over that sonne."

(II, 778-81)¹⁹

Her self-interest, furthermore, is mixed with the generalized reflection that men in general are untrue (l. 786), that once their pleasure ceases their love ceases (ll. 787-88). She even questions the very existence of love:

"How ofte tyme hath it yknowen be,
 The tresoun that to wommen hath ben do!
 To what fyn is swich love I kan nat see,
 Or wher bycometh it, when it is ago.

Ther is no wight that woot, I trowe so,
 Where it bycometh; lo, no wight on it sporneth:
 That erst was nothing, into nought it torneth."
 (II, 792-98)

This soliloquy of Criseyde shows the depth and complexity which Chaucer sees in his heroine. The soliloquy begins, as has been seen, with Criseyde's hesitancy to give up her emotional "sikernessee" and to accept the "dredfull joye" of love, where always "som cloude is over that sonne." From this, her own personal hesitancy, she then proceeds further with the more general reflection that all men are untrue; and, finally, she questions the very nature of love itself: it comes from nothing and it returns to nothing; "lo, no wight on it sporneth." Criseyde's doubts have been so philosophical that Chaucer had to insert the Antigone episode (not in Il Filostrato) to motivate convincingly her continuing interest in Troilus.

This attitude of Criseyde toward love and happiness is made even more evident in Book III. Pandarus had invited his niece to his home for dinner but the rain made it impossible for her to leave. In an effort to bring Criseyde and Troilus together, Pandarus concocted the accusation of her love for Horaste. Criseyde launches into a long digression from Boethius on felicity, just as does Troilus in the following book of the poem on providence and free will. Again, she

longs for death: "for now lyve I to longe!" (l. 805), and then:

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

"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 mot ben oon of tweye.
Now if he woot it nought, how may he seye
That he hath verray joie and selynesse
That is of ignoraunce ay in darknesse?

"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,
Then semeth it that joie is worth ful lite.

"Wherefore I wol diffyne in this matere,
That trewely, for aught I kan espie,
Ther is no verray weele in this world heere."

(III, 813-36)

This soliloquy is comparable to Troilus' soliloquy on free will and providence in Book IV (ll. 958-1085). Both are taken almost entirely from Boethius. Both keep the "clerkish" dialogue, completely out of character for either Troilus or Criseyde. Both give in rather abstract form the predominant philosophical attitudes which are dramatically evident in

the rest of the poem: Troilus, at every turn of the action, considers himself to be in the hands of Fortune,²⁰ and Criseyde, at many crucial points of the action, reflects upon the transitoriness of earthly love and happiness. Both might have been omitted without affecting the action in the poem. This leads us to suspect--in fact the evidence is very clear --that Chaucer used these digressions from Boethius not only to characterize Troilus and Criseyde more fully, but also to point up the two main themes which run through the poem: the De Casu and the transitory themes, two aspects of the mutability theme.²¹

It might be mentioned at this point, parenthetically, that these contrasting speeches of Troilus and Criseyde find a parallel in two other speeches wherein their philosophical attitudes are also revealed in terms of what appears to be clearly reminiscent of the memento mori theme. After Troilus finds out that Criseyde is to be exchanged for Antenor, he says in his complaint:

"O ye loveris, that heigh upon the whiel
Ben set of Fortune, in good aventure,
God leve that ye fynde ay love of stiel,
And longe mote youre lif in joie endure!
But when ye comen by my sepulture,
Remembreth that youre felawe resteth there;
For I loved ek, though ich unworthi were."
(IV, 323-29)²²

The passage of Criseyde's complaint is not so clearly related to the memento mori as is the passage from the complaint of Troilus, but it is, nevertheless, an allusion to it:

"Endeth thanne love in wo? Ye, or men lieth!
 And alle worldly blisse, as thynketh me.
 The ende of blisse ay sorwe it occupieth;
And whoso troweth nat that it so be,
Lat hym upon me, woful wrecche, ysee,
 That myself hate, and ay my burthe acorse,
 Felyng alwey, fro wikke I go to worse."
 (IV, 834-40)

These echoes of the memento mori theme are, of course, not in Il Filostrato, nor is there any suggestion of them. It is significant that in each of these instances the memento mori theme is conjoined with the characteristic "themes" of the speakers: in Troilus' case, Fortune, and in Criseyde's, transitoriness. This is simply one more example of the many ways in which the mutability themes reflect throughout the Troilus.

While it is clear, however, that Criseyde's attitude toward love and happiness as transitory supplements the De Casu theme and adds philosophical depth to the tragedy as a whole, it is not precisely evident how this attitude motivates her actions generally. Certainly it lends complexity to her character; certainly she herself is, as she says, the living example that love, indeed all worldly bliss, ends

in woe (IV, 834-40). B. L. Jefferson says that Chaucer "conceived her as representative of the class of people described by Boethius who are constantly beset by the fear that joys will fade" (p. 128). This may be true, but this tells us little; most of what Boethius says on this subject is said by Criseyde in her soliloquy (III, 813-36). That this attitude of Criseyde's is the result of her fearful nature, there is little doubt. But the flaw in her nature which Chaucer wishes to emphasize and which is the cause of her betrayal of Troilus is that she was "tendre-herted, slydyng of corage" (V, 825). Had Chaucer not emphasized this flaw in Criseyde's make-up, and had he not surrounded her betrayal with so many extenuating circumstances, one might be tempted to suppose that this extreme sensitivity to the "brotelnesse" of human love and happiness might ultimately have accounted for a certain pragmatism on the part of Criseyde, which led her to readily grasp happiness near to hand, namely Diomedes. Such, however, is not the case. One indication that Chaucer made nothing of this vision of Criseyde is that only once after she had accepted Diomedes does she refer to the transitory theme, and this only in passing. When she writes to Troilus, expressing her regret for what has happened, she ends thus: "But al shal passe; and thus take

I my leve" (V, 1085). At this point, Criseyde's reference to the transitory theme is actually incongruous with her regret for having falsed Troilus. She appears, in fact, almost flippant. The very fact that Chaucer does not incorporate Criseyde's sensibility of the mutability of all things into the action of the poem, that is, the fact that this quality in Criseyde's outlook has nothing to do with the motivation of her actions, strongly suggests Chaucer's interest in the transitory theme.

There is another mutability theme in the Troilus, but only incidentally and indirectly: the ubi sunt theme. After Troilus had left Criseyde with Diomedes and her father at the outer gate of the rampart, he returned in grief to his own palace in Troy. The following is Boccaccio's account of Troilo on the night which he had delivered Cressida to the Greeks:

And as he turned in his bed now here and now there, without finding any resting place, at such times would he in his weeping say to himself: "What a night is this! When I consider the past night, if I read the hour aright, such time as it now is did I kiss the white bosom, the mouth, the eyes, and the lovely face of my lady, and oft embrace her.

"She would kiss me and we took a happy and gracious pleasure in conversing together. Now I find myself alone, alas, and weeping, in doubt whether so joyous a night is ever to come again. Now I keep embracing the pillow, and I feel the flame of love waxing

greater, and hope becoming less on account of the grief that overwhelmeth it." (V, 19-20)

Chaucer condenses these two stanzas into one:

"Wher is myn owene lady, lief and deere?
Wher is hire white brest? wher is it, where?
Wher ben hire armes and hire eyen cleere,
That yesternyght this tyme with me were?
Now may I wepe allone many a teere,
And graspe aboute I may, but in this place,
Save a pilowe, I fynde naught t'enbrace."
(V, 218-24)

This clearly resembles the many ubi sunt poems of the Middle Ages which lament loss by death and the decay of feminine pulchritude. Chaucer's use of the formula here is clearly ironic: Troilus is never to see Criseyde again. Certainly Chaucer's audience, who were very familiar with the ubi sunt commonplace, must have immediately caught the ironic implications of Troilus' complaint.

This reminiscence of the ubi sunt tradition, spoken ironically by Troilus, foreshadows another ubi sunt passage by Troilus which Chaucer took over practically unchanged from Boccaccio. When Troilus saw the brooch which he had given Criseyde on Diomedes' coat, taken in battle by Diophebe, he was no longer in doubt about Criseyde's betrayal. At this point, Boccaccio writes in Il Filostrato:

And then he began to say in the midst of his tears:
"O Cressida mine, where now is the faith, where the
love, where the desire, where the so pleasing guerdon

given me by thee at thy departure? Diomedes possesses all and I, who loved thee more, have been left in weeping and distress on account of thy deceit." (VIII, 12)

Chaucer has Troilus say:

"O lady myn, Criseyde,
Where is youre feith, and where is youre biheste?
Where is youre love? where is youre trouthe?"
he seyde.
"Of Diomedes have ye now al this feeste!
Allas! I wolde han trowed atte leeste
That, syn ye nolde in trouthe to me stonde,
That ye thus nolde han holden me in honde!"
(V, 1674-80)

A comparison of Boccaccio's and Chaucer's versions of Troilus' complaint at this point will indicate that Chaucer, most probably, deliberately altered the Il Filostrato passage with an eye to the ubi sunt convention. The repetition of "where is," for Boccaccio's "where" (in every instance but one) makes Chaucer's passage definitely resemble the ubi sunt convention, whether Chaucer intended it or not. Chaucer's use of "where is," together with the personal address to Criseyde in the form of "youre," serve to emphasize the loss of each of these virtues. Like the former passage (V, 218-24), the last three lines of the stanza express Troilus' reaction to the loss, itself expressed in the first three lines; the middle lines of each stanza give reference to, and more clearly define, the losses. The points that I wish to emphasize,

however, are these: first, Chaucer's source-changes, especially in the former instance, tend clearly to conform to the ubi sunt convention. Second, these complaints of Troilus, coming as they do at the moments when he realizes his losses most intensely (his first night away from Criseyde after he had given her over to the Greeks; and the moment at which he can no longer force himself to believe in her fidelity) are, dramatically, extremely appropriate places for Chaucer to recall the many ubi sunt poems that he must have known to express more effectively the transitoriness of Troilus' love. That the use of such formulae as the ubi sunt to express the transitoriness of love was not far from Chaucer's mind when he wrote the Troilus is shown most convincingly by a speech of Pandarus. On the night of the tenth day after Criseyde's departure, Troilus and Pandarus stand at the gates of the city to await her return. Troilus is pathetic in his expectation of Criseyde and tells Pandarus that he is sure, in fact he would wager his life, that Criseyde will appear. Whereupon Chaucer writes:

Pandare answerde, "It may be, wel ynough,"
 And held with hym of al that evere he seyde.
 But in his herte he thoughte, and softe lough,
 And to hymself ful sobreliche he seyde,
 "From haselwode, there Joly Robyn pleyde,
 Shal come al that that thow abidest heere.
Ye, fare wel al the snow of ferne yere!"
 (V, 1170-76)

This last line is Chaucer's substitution for the words of Boccaccio's Pandarus: "'This wretched youth expecteth a wind from Mongibello'" (VII, 10). Clearly Chaucer was familiar with this common mediaeval symbol to express the irrevocable past; Villon, a few years later, was to make it even more familiar by using it as a refrain in his Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis.

These then are the motifs of the mutability theme which might easily be delineated in the Troilus: the De Casu theme, which involves the mutability of Fortune; the transitoriness theme, the nether aspect of the Fortune theme, which finds its most definite expression in the tragic vision of Criseyde; finally, the ubi sunt and the memento mori themes, which find expression in the poem more or less indirectly and lend dramatic power to the situations in which they appear and to the mutability theme of the poem as a whole.²³

There are, finally, two other aspects of the Troilus which must be recognized in a study of the poem's mutability themes. These are, to be sure, the element in Chaucer's poetic vision which tends to view the close connection between happiness and sorrow, and the element in his vision which is always cognizant of, and is resigned to, the limitations of mortality. It is these elements, in fact, which

inform the Troilus with its tonal unity, and which constitute, perhaps, the most basic elements in Chaucer's tragic vision.

We have already seen the ideas expressed in the Troilus that always "som cloude is over the sonne" (II, 781), that "the ende of blisse ay sorwe it occupieth" (IV, 836), that love is "dredfull joye" (II, 776) and "is thyng ay ful of bisy drede" (IV, 1645). B. L. Jefferson points out that "the entire poem abounds in allusions to the transitory nature of worldly joys, now brightening, now darkening, but ever fading entirely away in the end" (pp. 125-26). This is the over-all tone and the guiding idea of the tragedy. It is my purpose here, however, simply to point out a few of the instances, numerous throughout the poem, in which Chaucer couples the ideas of joy and sorrow. Rarely does Chaucer think of joy except in terms of past sorrows.

In Troilo's and Cressida's love scene Boccaccio writes: "And all this talk they often interrupted with fervent kissing and abandoning their past suffering, shared delicious joy" (III, 40). Chaucer turns Boccaccio's stanza into two and intensifies more strongly the lovers' joy by connecting it more closely with their past woes:

but al swich hevynesse,
I thank it God, was torned to gladnesse.
.

And didnen al hire myght, syn they were oon,
 For to recoveren blisse and ben at eise,
 And passed wo with joie contrepeise.
 (III, 1397-1407)

Again Chaucer adds a passage not contained in his source, wherein he juxtaposes "hevynesse" and "gladnesse"; after Criseyde's address to "rakle nyght," in the same scene, Chaucer writes:

This Troilus, that with tho wordes felte,
 As thoughte hym tho, for piȝtous distresse,
 The blody teris from his herte melte,
As he that nevere yet swich hevynesse
Assayed hadde, out of so gret gladnesse . . .
 (III, 1443-47)

Again, in the same scene, Chaucer writes: "And now swetnesse semeth more swete,/ That bitternesse assaied was byforn" (III, 1219-20; see lines 1212-23, which are not in Chaucer's source and which elaborate this idea at length). Pandarus expresses the same idea to Troilus in the very beginning of the poem:

"For how myghte evere swetnesse han ben knowe
 To him that nevere tasted bitternesse?
 Ne no man may ben inly glad, I trowe,
 That nevere was in sorwe or som destresse.
 Eke whit by blak, by shame ek worthinesse,
 Ech set by other, more for other semeth,
 As men may se, and so the wyse it demeth."

"Sith thus of two contraries is o lore . . ."
 (I, 638-45)

The poem abounds with images which intricately connect the ideas of joy and sorrow. Chaucer accepts the fact that

in this state of mortality, the one defines the other: "hevynesse" is inevitable; and "gladnesse," when it comes, is but brief and fleeting. The final impression of the tragedy is not that "joie is next the fyn of sorwe" (I, 952); these are the words of Pandarus, always the optimist, whose attitude is fixed to motivate the action. Rather, the theme of the poem is expressed by Troilus when he says:

"But torned is, for which my lif I warie,
Everich joie or ese in his contrarie."
(V, 1378-79)

Second, Chaucer is also well aware of the limitations of man's vision: "O blynde world, O blynde entencioun!" he says early in the poem. At the beginning of Book IV, the point at which the action begins to turn, Chaucer writes:

But al to litel, weylaway the whyle,
Lasteth swich joie, ythonked be Fortune,
That semeth trewest when she wol bygyle,
And kan to fooles so hire song entune,
That she hem hent and blent, traitour comune!
(IV, 1-5)

Fortune's ability to beguile and to blind her victims is well known, but this trait of Fortune is not mentioned at this point in Chaucer's source. The Fortune image is, of course, merely a figure for the limitation of man's vision.

The mention of Antenor's betrayal is not found in Il Filostrato. Chaucer's addition of the fact lends a wonderful

irony to the tragedy as a whole and further emphasizes the blindness of mundane minds. Chaucer introduces Antenor's betrayal thus:

O Juvenal, lord! trew is thy sentence,
That litel wyten folk what is to yerne
That they ne fynde in hire desir offence;
For cloude of errour lat hem nat discerne
What best is.

(IV, 197-201)

The limitations of mortality are inseparable from the mutability themes expressed throughout the entire poem. The clamor of Troy to exchange Criseyde for Antenor is an excellent example of this intimate connection of the mortality and mutability themes. It is, in fact, the cloud of ignorance, inherent in mortal man, which was responsible for the fleeting happiness of Troilus and Criseyde. Chaucer makes the connection himself:

And lo, here ensample as yerne:
This folk desiren now deliveraunce
Of Antenor, that brought hem to meschaunce.

For he was after traitour to the town
of Troye; alas, they quytte hym out to rathe!
O nyce world, lo, thy discrecioun!
Criseyde, which that never dide hem scathe,
Shal now no longer in hire blisse bathe;
But Antenor, he shal com hom to town,
And she shal out; thus seyden here and howne.

(IV, 201-10)

So long as man lives under the moon, he is subject to the laws of mutability. This is of the essence of mortality.

The following passage epitomizes the mortality-mutability themes in the Troilus and Chaucer's attitude toward his subject generally. In order to show more clearly Chaucer's attitude in the poem, I shall quote the corresponding passage from Il Filostrato:

Great were the laments and bitterness but Fortune
still ran her course. She loved Diomed with all
her heart and Troilus wept. Diomed thanked the
gods and Troilus, on the contrary, grieved. Troilus
did ever enter the battles and more than others did he
seek Diomed. (VIII, 25)

Chaucer writes:

Gret was the sorwe and pleynte of Troilus;
But forth hire cours Fortune ay gan to holde.
Criseyde loveth the sone of Tideus,
And Troilus moot wepe in cares colde.
Swich is this world, whoso it kan byholde:
In ech estat is litel hertes reste.
God leve us for to take it for the beste!
(V, 1744-50)²⁴

This passage of Chaucer's, with his additions to the Il Filostrato, embodies and unifies the two main mutibility motifs which inform the entire poem. Fortune is, in reality, only a poetic figment used to express the misfortunes, vicissitudes, and the transitoriness of this world. Chaucer's ever-present awareness of, and his complete resignation to, man's mortality, to the world's mortality, is one of the basic sources of his objectivity toward his subject in this poem; at the same time it is the basic source, perhaps, of

his sympathy for Criseyde. The following passage from Chaucer's balade, Fortune, might be a comment on the entire poem. Fortune speaks to the complainant:

Thou pinchest at my mutabilitee,
 For I thee lente a drope of my richesse,
 And now me lyketh to withdrawe me.
 Why sholdestow my realtee oppresse?
 The see may ebb and flowen more or lesse;
 The welkne hath might to shyne, reyne, or
 hayle;
 Right so mot I kythen my brotelnesse:
 In general, this reule may nat fayle.

Lo, th'execucion of the majestee
 That all purveyeth of his rightwysnesse,
 That same thing "Fortune" clepen ye,
 Ye blinde bestes, ful of lewednesse!
The hevene hath propretee of sikernessee.
This world hath ever resteles travayle;
Thy laste day is ende of myn intresse:
 In general, this reule may nat fayle.

(ll. 57-72)

This entire passage from Fortune expresses abstractly what Chaucer has expressed dramatically in the Troilus: Criseyde and Chaucer (as narrator in the poem) have known at every turn that the world, happiness, and love are mutable; and Troilus is the exemplum of Fortune's mutability. The very language of Chaucer's descriptions in the love scenes of Troilus and Criseyde is so ecstatic that in itself it seems to hint of a final catastrophe. The world is mutable; and the Troilus proves it. Here is "resteles travayle" and "litel hertes reste"; only the region beyond the moon does

not change, and it is significant that Fortune tells the complainant: "Thy laste day is ende of myn intresse." Thus the significance of Chaucer's epilogue to the Troilus.

Far from being inappropriate as some critics maintain, the epilogue is the natural evolvment of the poem.²⁵ The epilogues of Chaucer and of Boccaccio differ, in fact, inasmuch as the two poems themselves differ; and these separate epilogues themselves indicate the principal concerns of the two poets in the poems. The epilogue of Boccaccio is, in a very real sense, a "Contemptus Feminarum": "A young woman is fickle and is desirous of many lovers. . . . She hath no feeling for virtue or reason, inconstant ever as leaf in the wind" (VIII, 30). Therefore, pray for Troilus to Love and also for yourself, "that Love may kindly grant you the boon of loving so wisely that ye shall not die in the end for an evil woman" (VIII, 33). The epilogue of Chaucer, on the other hand, gathers together and emphasizes the various mutability themes which we have studied in the poem in the all-inclusive Contemptus Mundi theme. Troilus has been slain and his spirit has gone "up to the holughnesse of the eighthe spere" (V, 1809); Chaucer writes:

And down from thennes faste he gan avyse
This litel spot of erthe, that with the se
Embraced is, and fully gan despise

This wrecched world, and held al vanite
 To respect of the pleyn felicite
 That is in hevene above; and at the laste,
 Ther he was slayn, his lokyng down he caste.

And in hymself he lough right at the wo
 Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste;
 And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so
 The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,
 And sholden al oure herte on heven caste.

(V, 1814-25)

What is more integral to the De Contemptu Mundi theme than that Troilus should "fully gan despise/ This wrecched world," and that we "sholden al oure herte on heven caste"? Willard Farnham has pointed out that this De Contemptu Mundi moral of Chaucer is "the climax of the changes that Chaucer has made throughout the story in order to accomplish its shading as De Casibus tragedy" (p. 151). Chaucer took from the Teseida his device of following Troilus' soul to the eighth sphere. This enabled him to make explicit what was really implicit in the poem all along. As we have seen, it is as if Chaucer were saying: "Here I am showing you what does not last"; but in the epilogue, it is as if he were saying--in fact, he does say--"Here I am telling you what is lasting and, indeed, the only thing which is lasting." To be sure, if one reads the epilogue closely, he will find that the Contemptus Mundi theme is subsequent to, and is the logical outcome of, the theme of transitoriness. Troilus despised the world and

"held al vanite/ To respect of the pleyne felicite/ That is in hevene above." From the vantage point of the eighth sphere, beyond the reach of mortality, of chance, of Time, in short, of Fortune, Troilus sees the "brotelnesse" of worldly felicity, which Criseyde had seen at every turn of the action and which had inspired many of Chaucer's changes from Il Filostrato. Again, when Troilus "dampned al oure werk that foloweth so/ The blynde lust," there is no question of man's sinful endeavors; it is "the which that may nat laste" that causes Troilus to despise the world. Chaucer makes this clear when he says: "Swych fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse!" Chaucer's concern, then, is not the sinfulness or the wickedness of the world, as is the concern of Innocent III and most of the De Contemptu Mundi writers, but the transitoriness of all earthly things:

Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte,
 And of youre herte up casteth the visage
 To thilke God that after his ymage
 Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire
 This world, that passeth soone as floures faire.
 (V, 1837-41)

It is the transitoriness of this world, a Vanity Fair, and the mutability of Fortune which ultimately turns Chaucer's mind to the only symbol of permanence, "that sothefast Crist" (l. 1860), who "nyl falsen no wight" (l. 1845). If, certainly,

the Troilus is an exemplum of mutability--and I have shown that in many ways it is--then the epilogue is artistically appropriate to the poem; actually it is but the climax of a De Casu tragedy. "What is there more to say?" asks Dorothy Bethurum:

Only what Chaucer does implicitly say: Love is wonderful, the most wonderful thing in the world. I don't have it, but the books say it is, and successful lovers say it is. Troilus and Criseyde both said it often, but at the end of the poem neither has it. The truth is, nobody has it in its perfection--or has it very long. That is what Chaucer always knew. "To litel whil our blisse lasteth." And by putting himself exactly in our position, he has presented the ideal vision and his sober realistic comment on it. (Op. cit., p. 518)

Nor does it invalidate the epilogue to say that Chaucer, throughout the whole poem, portrayed love as inescapable and ennobling. The most that can be said, I think, is said in this observation of Willard Farnham:

The most glaring inconsistency of which Chaucer is guilty in his own comment is between this final admonition [in the epilogue] not to love in the way of the world and his earlier admonition, when Troilus first sees Cressida, not to scorn love, since the worthiest of mankind have been and always will be conquered and ennobled by it [I, 232-59]. (P. 156)

There is obviously this inconsistency in the poem; and all that can be said is that Chaucer was playing truant to the conventions of courtly love. The mediaeval sensibility was

not one characterized by a refined ambivalence toward the world and toward God; rather it was a divided, inconsistent, even a contradictory sensibility. To understand the mediaeval sensibility, in fact, one must understand the sensibility of Catholicism.

All Catholics, in a sense, remain forever children: Faith is the umbilical cord, never broken, which keeps them as children. The area of mystery, which makes Greek and Shakespearean tragedy seem to "calculate" the world so adequately, is forever enclosed within the security of truth. This, of course, disenchant's the mystery, reduces its wonderment to a belief. It is, in fact, no longer an intangible item. To look for Greek or Shakespearean tragedy in the works of Chaucer is to discount the element of Faith in the Middle Ages; it is to discount the Middle Ages entirely. John Speirs is right when he says, "Those of us who find this conclusion not in accordance with the great humane Chaucerian poem as a whole perhaps fall into the error of those who would ignore the context of Dante's Paolo and Francesca episode."²⁶ In brief, the people of the Middle Ages, like all children, could afford intellectual contradictions and divided sympathies simply because they felt emotionally secure. It is, certainly, ironic that they

could give themselves most wholeheartedly to the world because the world, ultimately, meant nothing to them. Thus Chaucer's complete abandonment to the power of love in the poem and his complete insistence that this same love is transitory. Critics who insist upon the art of the Troilus and who thereby view the epilogue as a contradiction (even as Chaucer's appeasement of the ecclesiastical authorities) forget that it was not until Keats's "Grecian Urn" that art was to become the symbol of permanence: it should therefore be logical and self-contained. These critics misinterpret Chaucer entirely. Chaucer stood firmly upon the brink of the Renaissance, it is true, but his Retractions, which must not be doubted, kept him firmly within the Middle Ages. He "retracted," as it were, solely because he believed still that only Christ "nil falsen no wight." In a word, Chaucer's Retractions represent a transition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. They indicate an acceptance of the world in an age which still recognized the reality of heaven. It is this reality, a reality of permanence, expressed in the epilogue, which is ultimately responsible for the mutability themes in the Troilus.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

¹Lydgate's Troy Book, Henry Bergen, ed., EETS (Extra Series), 97, 103, 106. Book III, 4214-30.

²Op. cit., p. 498.

³The Poet Chaucer (Oxford, 1955), p. 69.

⁴R. K. Root, The Book of Troilus and Criseyde by Geoffrey Chaucer (Princeton, 1926), p. xlviii.

⁵Op. cit., p. 130.

⁶Op. cit., p. 145. B. L. Jefferson says that the poem "may be considered a monk's tale, told with minute attention to human psychology and wrought into infinitely better poetry," op. cit., p. 125. It was left for Farnham, however, to develop this idea. See also D. W. Robertson, Jr., "Chaucerian Tragedy," ELH, XIX, (1952), 1-37. Robertson sees in Troilus, in an extreme form, "the tragedy of every mortal sinner" (p. 36).

⁷Op. cit., p. 117.

⁸N. E. Griffin and A. B. Myrick, The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio: A Translation with Parallel Text (Philadelphia, 1929), I, 16. All references to the Filostrato are from this text.

⁹For further instances in this regard, see Kittredge, op. cit., pp. 117-21.

¹⁰See W. C. Curry, Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences (New York, 1960), pp. 241 ff.; B. L. Jefferson, op. cit., pp. 122 ff.

¹¹See T. A. Kirby, Chaucer's Troilus: A Study in Courtly Love (Baton Rouge, 1940), p. 262.

¹²Root, op. cit., p. xlvihi; Farnham, op. cit., p. 145.

¹³Underscoring my own, as are all the underscored passages from Chaucer's works in this chapter.

¹⁴It seems almost certain that "Felicite, which that thise clerkes wise/ Comenden so" refers to any form of earthly happiness whatever. In the Consolation, iii, p. 2, 25 ff., Lady Philosophy enumerates all the theories in regard to what constitutes happiness that wise clerks have advanced or might possibly advance. These she rejects and later concludes that "we han establissched that the sovereyne good is verry blisfulnesse. Thanne moot it nedis be that verray blisfulnesse is set in sovereyn God" (iii, p. 10, 64-68). Clearly the inference is that the happiness of the lovers is a heavenly happiness. Note, incidentally, the general similarity between Chaucer's lines (1687, 1689, 1693-94) and First Corinthians, ii, 9: "That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him" (here St. Paul quotes Isaias, lxiv, 2). Chaucer's ironical use of similar (celestial) imagery in the Merchant's Tale should not be overlooked in interpreting his use of this same imagery here.

The idea which I am developing here, that Chaucer through sustained celestial-imagery is purposely showing that the lovers are, in the mediaeval mind, showing a reversal of values, was dimly hinted at by B. L. Jefferson, p. 128. Jefferson merely quotes lines 1691-94, and points out that the lovers "are enjoying the very essence of bliss." (I don't know exactly what Jefferson means by "the very essence of bliss," but to the mediaeval mind this could hardly mean anything but the beatific vision.) Beyond this, he makes nothing of it except as the high point in a De Casu tragedy.

Further, D. W. Robertson, Jr., op. cit., points out much of the religious imagery in Book III of the Troilus and says that it "is used to show the corruption of Troilus' higher reason as he substitutes the 'grace' of Criseyde for providence. Once this substitution is made, the fall is complete" (p. 24). Except the slight reference in the following excerpt, however, he makes absolutely nothing of it: "When Criseyde perceives Troilus' 'trouthe and clene entente,' she makes him a joyful 'feste.' In the 'hevene,' at a feast which is not exactly the 'Feast of the Lamb,' Troilus appropriately sings a hymn" (p. 27). Beyond these two slight references, I am not aware of this idea having been developed before. Lest this imagery be taken as conventional merely, see what Robertson says about the other religious imagery in Book III of the poem, p. 24.

¹⁵See Il Filostrato, III, especially stanzas 31-32, 42, 62, 65-69, and 71.

¹⁶C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (New York, 1958), Galaxy Books, p. 196.

¹⁷See A. J. Denomy, F.R.S.C., "The Two Moralities of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," Trans. of the Royal Society of Canada, sec. 2, vol. 44 (1950), 35-46.

¹⁸See Boethius, I, m. 3, 4 ff. for the influence on ll. 766-67.

¹⁹See IV, 1644-45. "For I am ever agast, forwhy men rede/
That love is thyng ay ful of bisy drede."

²⁰See B. L. Jefferson, op. cit., pp. 122-23 (note), for a list of references to the numerous passages which contribute to Troilus' fatalism.

²¹One might even be tempted to conjecture, in fact, that this soliloquy of Criseyde suggested Chaucer's insertion of

the soliloquy of Troilus into his revised version. Crieseyde's soliloquy, however, is not quite long enough to make this conjecture; that is, the parallelism in terms of digression is not quite close enough.

²²Without going into the memento mori tradition, I cite the following as one of many parallels which might be found for this passage: "Respice sepulcra, et vide quis servus, quis dominus, quis pauper, quis dives. Discerne, si potes, victum a rege, fortem a debili, pulchrum a deformi. Memor itaque naturae, non extollaris aliquando. Memor autem eris, si te ipsum respexeris." Saint Prosper of Aquitaine (390?-463?), printed in the works of St. Augustine, Migne, Pat. Lat., t. 45, col. 1897-1898. The theme is perhaps as old as mankind. See The Greek Anthology, W. R. Paton, tr. (New York, 1925), The Loeb Classical Library Series, II, 175 and 201.

²³See other expressions of this theme in I, 134-40; 211-17; 946-52; II, 764-70; III, 351-57; 1058-64; 1219-22; 1625-28; 1636-37; 1714; IV, 1-11; 269-72; 323-26; 384-92; 421-24; 834-40; V, 731-33; 1432-35; 1457-1519; 1541-47.

²⁴For the same expression, "Swich is this world," and a similar one, "Thus goth the world," see Troilus IV, 384-92; V, 1429-35. These are Chaucer's additions and are spoken in similar circumstances, with this exception, that the former is spoken by Pandarus.

²⁵For an excellent discussion of this thesis, see Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition (Berkeley, 1957), pp. 161-65. Also Root, op. cit., p. 1 ("Introduction").

²⁶Chaucer the Maker (London, 1940), p. 82.

CHAPTER VI

THE CANTERBURY TALES

PART I: THE KNIGHT'S TALE

In the Canterbury Tales, the height of Chaucer's narrative art, the mutability theme is still very apparent. The Knight's Tale, in fact, contains as much mutability material, proportionately, as does the Troilus; but here it is clear that Chaucer is working toward a solution to his dilemma evidenced in the Troilus, that is, the antithesis of the spiritual and the worldly realms. The remaining tales are the product of this resolution.

With the exception of the Troilus, no single poem by Chaucer has received so much critical attention as the Knight's Tale. E. B. Ham, for example, entitled his article of 1950 "Knight's Tale 38" and said that his title is "an egregious understatement."¹ And, indisputably, no single poem of Chaucer's has caused so much disagreement among the critics with regard to the poem's purpose and intention. This disagreement, however, does not usually center around

the mutability elements in the poem; these are clear and, generally, clearly recognized. But even though this is so, the mutability elements themselves have been the source of various interpretations in regard to the poem. In 1927, for example, H. N. Fairchild, in defending Chaucer's individuation of Arcite and Palamon, saw Arcite as representative of the Active Life and Palamon of the Contemplative Life. In fact, he writes:

Now is it better to plunge into the turmoil of practical affairs, there to serve indirectly a God whose face will often seem further away the more we strive to reach it; or to "flee from the press" and anticipate the joys of heaven by serving God directly in inactive and perhaps selfish contemplation of his goodness? The Knight's Tale may be interpreted as an attempt to grapple with this problem.²

Charles Muscatine's interpretation of the poem implies the concept of mutability, even if it does not directly treat of it. He sees the poem, essentially, as expressing a tension between order, the nature of the noble life lived ideally, and disorder or chaos:

Order, which characterizes the structure of the poem, is also the heart of its meaning. The society depicted is one in which form is full of significance, in which life is conducted at a dignified, processional pace, and in which life's pattern is itself a reflection, or better, a reproduction, of the order of the universe. And what gives this conception of life its perspective, its depth and seriousness, is its constant awareness of a formidably antagonistic element--chaos, disorder--which in life is an

ever-threatening possibility, even in the moments of supremest assuredness, and which in the poem falls across the pattern of order, being clearly exemplified in the erratic reversals of the poem's plot, and deeply embedded in the poem's texture.³

Muscatine's order-disorder theme, then, is essentially the mutability-permanence theme. This is suggested further when, after having pointed out various instances and portrayals of misfortune and disorder in the poem (including the inevitability of death, expressed by Theseus), he concludes:

This subsurface insistence on disorder is the poem's crowning complexity, its most compelling claim to maturity. . . . And the crowning nobility, as expressed by this poem, goes beyond a grasp of the forms of social and civil order, beyond magnificence in any earthly sense, to a perception of the order beyond chaos. When the earthly designs suddenly crumble, true nobility is faith in the ultimate order of all things. (Pp. 189-90)

Perhaps one of the more important interpretations of the Knight's Tale is that of W. C. Curry,⁴ who argues that Chaucer has substituted astrological influences for much of the cumbersome mythological machinery of the Teseida which would be of no purpose to his narrative. His thesis is stated in the beginning of his study:

It is the general aim of this chapter . . . to interpret the technical significance of the astrological references, and their implications, with which the poem abounds and to show that Chaucer, in order to furnish such a motivating force for the final stages of the action, has skilfully gone about transferring the power of the ancient gods of his sources to the

astrological planets of the same name; that the real conflict behind the surface action is a conflict between the planets, Saturn and Mars; that the kings Lycurgus and Emetreus are, respectively, Saturnalian and Martian figures introduced to champion the causes of the heroes; and that the illness of Arcite is a malady inflicted upon him by his planetary enemy, Saturn. (Pp. 119-20)⁵

Curry ends his study by pointing out the relationship of these astrological forces to Destiny, and both in turn to Providence, and by indicating these relationships in the poem.

Another interpretation centered around the mutability theme is that of R. M. Lumiansky.⁶ He holds that the approximately 100 lines comprising the speeches of Arcite, Palamon, and Theseus "both motivate the characters and reflect upon the action occurring in the remaining 2,100 lines" of the poem.⁷ He notes, moreover, numerous instances in which "the Knight accounts for each event by suggesting that it resulted from an influence outside the individual. . . . Providence, Destiny, Fortune, Nature, 'cas,' or 'aventure'" (p. 35), all, of course, from the Consolation; and concludes that "the Boethian influence is so pervasive as virtually to control the action" of the poem (p. 38). Lumiansky further relates the poem to the Consolation by a detailed study of "the philosophical shifts which Palamon

and Arcite experience" (p. 38). At the beginning of the poem, Arcite accepts his fortune, Palamon does not; thus each resembles Boethius, at the end and at the beginning of the Consolation, respectively. Having fallen in love with Emily, however, Arcite changes, gives himself up to Love and Fortune, thereby seeking false felicity. So that, at the end, "he can only make a final effort at a sensible reconciliation by urging Emily to remember Palamon if she ever decides to marry" (p. 47). But with Arcite's death, Palamon becomes "gentil Palamon" (l. 2976), no longer restlessly striving to fulfill his desires; he "has now realized the folly of his blind pursuit of false felicity and has thus reached some understanding of an established benevolent order in the universe" (p. 40). As such, he deserves Emily's hand, and "the Knight takes his leave of this couple in words which suggest that Palamon's happy state results, in part at least, from his realization of his former misconceptions and his present acceptance of the Boethian view" (p. 41).

If Lumiansky's interpretation is not justified by the text, at least it suggests that the mutability elements in the poem are so important that the poem might be viewed wholly in these terms. Such, for example, is the interpretation of R. A. Pratt, "'Joye After Wo' in the Knight's

Tale."⁸ Pratt presents his argument, substantially, in the following excerpt:

. . . this tale of Palamon and Arcite begins in sorrow and ends in gladness. The two opening 'Theseidic' events--the conquest of the Amazons, and the defeat of Creon--bring overtones of war, and in their early speeches Palamon and Arcite are sad enough because of prison and love, but most of the scenes are joyously recounted, and in the end, after tournament and funeral, Arcite has found 'welfare' (l. 3063) and Palamon has found his 'wele' (l. 3101) living in bliss with Emelye. The end is joy after sadness. (Pp. 416-17)

A glance at these five interpretations of the Knight's Tale is sufficient, I think, to show the extent and importance of the concept of mutability in the poem itself.⁹

(1) Were Hoxie N. Fairchild's interpretation valid (but it is not), this poem would exhibit a situation somewhat similar to Truth and would therefore depict the Contemptus Mundi theme. (2) Much of Muscatine's study is concerned with "the poem's symetrically ordered structure" (p. 187) and the nature of the noble life. Since it deals primarily with the social order, he is not overly concerned with the vicissitudes and the other forces of disorder which affect life generally, and which constitute perhaps one of the more important themes of the Knight's Tale. Whatever he does say in this regard, however, is valuable and will be incorporated into

the present study. (3) Curry's interpretation explains a very important aspect of the mutability theme in the poem. For him, the poem is a tightly-woven structure held together by the interplay of destinal forces. Man is at the mercy of these forces; thus the vanity of human wishes or the fruitless efforts of man to escape the limitations of his own destiny. (4) Lumiansky enlarges upon Jefferson's study of the Boethian elements in the poem; he attempts to explain its motivation by these elements. It is true, certainly, that fortune, destiny, true and false felicity have large parts in the poem, but his conclusions are forced. One might take almost any poem and discuss it in terms of "true" and "false" felicity, if one uses these terms broadly enough; the action-vs-withdrawal theme is found in many literary works. (5) Finally, Pratt's thesis is "Chaucerian" enough and his findings are valid, to be sure; but is his interpretation not a little specious when he speaks of Arcite's "welfare" as "joye after wo"? Yet there is a certain validity, more or less, in each of these interpretations; and I cannot, certainly, proffer a "new" interpretation of The Knight's Tale.

My purpose in this study, therefore, is twofold:

First, to integrate much of the criticism offered thus far in

regard to the mutability elements in this poem. I shall do this by suggesting that the basic theme of the poem might conveniently be seen in this dichotomy: between mutability, expressed most pointedly in the speeches of Arcite and Palamon, but also in the portrayals of fortune and vicissitude throughout the poem, and order, the symbol of permanence, expressed in the speeches of Theseus and Egeus and in the resolution of the poem. Second, by discussing at length the mutability elements contained in this poem, I hope to provide a somewhat clearer picture of the scope and depth of Chaucer's concern with the many aspects of mutability.

The major speeches in the poem are taken from the Consolation of Boethius and are Chaucer's own additions to his source. These are the speeches of Arcite, Palamon, and of Theseus.¹⁰ Arcite's and Palamon's are essentially the same and differ only in so far as their own circumstances are different: both deal with the limitations of mortal man in opposition to an ultimate order which he is unable to comprehend. Arcite, who has just been released from prison at the request of his friend Perotheus, is dismayed that he must leave Athens and will therefore not be able to see Emily again. At this point, he complains:

"Allas, why pleynten folk so in commune

On purveiaunce of God, or of Fortune,
 That yeveth hem ful ofte in many a gyse
 Wel bettre than they kan hemself devyse?
 Som man desireth for to han richesse,
 That cause is of his mordre or greet siknesse;
 And som man wolde out of his prisoun fayn,
 That in his hous is of his meynee slayn.
 Infinite harmes been in this mateere.
 We witen nat what thing we preyen heere:
 We faren as he that dronke is as a mous.
 A dronke man woot wel he hath an hous,
 But he noot which the righte wey is thider,
 And to a dronke man the wey is slider.
 And certes, in this world so faren we;
 We seken faste after felicitee,
 But we goon wrong ful often, trewely.
 Thus may we seyen alle, and namely I,
 That wende and hadde a greet opinioun
 That if I myghte escapen from prisoun,
 Thanne hadde I been in joye and perfit heele,
 Ther now I am exiled fro my wele.
 Syn that I may nat seen you, Emelye,
 I nam but deed; ther nys no remedye."
 (11. 1251-74)

These last seven lines explain the circumstances which have
 determined the attitude of Arcite. Throughout his speech he
 is concerned with the vanity of human wishes.¹¹

The imprisoned Palamon, on the other hand, jealous of
 Arcite's "good fortune," exclaims:

"O crueel goddes that governe
 This world with byndyng of youre word eterne,
 And writen in the table of atthamaunt
 Your parlement and youre eterne graunt,
 What is mankynde moore unto you holde
 Than is the sheep that rouketh in the folde?
 For slayn is man right as another beest,
 And dwelleth eek in prison and arreest,
 And hath siknesse and great adversitee,
 And ofte tymes gilteless, pardee.

What governance is in this prescience,
 That gilteless tormenteth innocence?
 And yet encresseth this al my penaunce,
 That man is bounden to his observaunce,
 For Goddes sake, to letten of his wille,
 Ther as a beest may al his lust fulfille.
 And whan a beest is deed he hath no peyne;
 But man after his deeth moot wepe and pleyne,
 Though in this world he have care and wo.
 Withouten doute it may stonden so.
 The answer of this lete I to dyvynes,
 But wel I woot that in this world greet pyne ys."
 (ll. 1303-24)

"Thus," says Pratt, "the two kinsmen find this world a place of woe: Arcite blames man's stupidity; Palamon blames the gods" (p. 418). The point to be made here is that these separate speeches are most probably not meant to characterize the two knights,¹² but that Chaucer added this Boethian material, perhaps, for two reasons: First, these long philosophical reflections, coming as they do in the very beginning of the poem, focus attention upon the mutability theme in themselves and in its many ramifications throughout the poem. Second, these complaints anticipate Theseus' "solution" at the poem's end.

It is, finally, in these speeches a question of man's mortality, of his inability to control his own destiny. Each of the knights, in fact, reflects his destiny in the very act of moralizing on the human condition. Arcite says: "And som man wolde out of his prisoun fayn,/ That in his hous

is of his meynnee slayn," an irony somewhat similar to his own situation. Palamon, on the other hand, refers to man's imprisonment as one of the adversities of this world. Arcite compares man to a drunkard, who is completely ignorant of, and irresponsible for, his own actions; to Palamon, men are as sheep, cowering in the fold. Palamon, furthermore, raises the question of innocent suffering, a question which Criseyde also brings up in the Troilus.¹³ These and similar problems in regard to the human condition are, as we shall now see, expressed throughout the poem generally.

In the beginning the Theban women, wailing because Creon will not permit them to bury their dead, tell Theseus:

"Now be we caytyves, as it is wel seene,
 Thanked be Fortune and hire false wheel,
 That noon estaat assureth to be weel."
 (ll. 924-26)¹⁴

While in prison, Arcite recognizes the helplessness of man, whose destiny is ruled by the stars:

"Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee.
 Some wikke aspect or disposicioun
 Of Saturne, by som constellacioun,
 Hath yeven us this, although we hadde it sworn;
 So stood the hevene whan that we were born."
 (ll. 1086-90)

Palamon also recognizes the force of destiny upon man's life (ll. 1108-1109). The destiny motif, in fact, runs throughout.¹⁵ In the Troilus, when Criseyde is forced to spend the

night at the home of Pandarus because of the terrible storm, Chaucer blames Fortune (III, 617-23); here, too, he relies upon Fortune to explain the chance meeting of Theseus and the two knights, who are fighting in the woods:

The destinee, ministre general,
That executeth in the world over al
The purveiaunce that God hath seyn biforn,
So strong is it that, though the world had sworn
The contrarie of a thyng by ye or nay,
Yet somtyme it shal fallen on a day
That falleth nat eft withinne a thousand yeer.
For certainly, oure appetites heer,
Be it of werre, or pees, or hate, or love,
Al is this reuled by the sighte above.

(ll. 1663-72)

This passage makes clear that the destiny motif is simply another aspect of the theme of mutability. It is, in fact, the explanation of change, vicissitude, and misfortune in the world.¹⁶ Chaucer calls upon destiny to explain an "accidental" occurrence which might come about only once in a thousand years. So throughout the poem do Arcite and Palamon explain their adverse or agreeable circumstances in terms of destiny, a force which causes whatever "happens" to them. Indeed, the cumulative force of all these references to destiny and to fortune serves to portray and to emphasize the limitation of man's own actions and explains, in part, his subjection to vicissitudes (another instance in the works of Chaucer of the inseparability of the mortality and

mutability themes). It is clear, then, that the speeches of Arcite and Palamon are merely focal points of a theme which persists throughout the Knight's Tale.

The mutability theme is also stressed in the vicissitudes which the kinsmen suffer for love. For example, the poet says:

Whan that Arcite hadde romed al his fille,
And songen al the roundel lustily,
Into a studie he fil sodeynly,
As doon thise loveres in hir queynte geres,
Now in the crope, now down in the breres,
Now up, now down, as boket in a welle.
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.
Selde is the Friday al the wowke ylike.
(ll. 1528-39)¹⁷

The "ups-and-downs," in fact, which Arcite and Palamon suffer for love constitute the plot of this poem: their despair while in prison upon seeing Emily in the garden, the disruption of their own knightly brotherhood, Arcite's hopes upon his release from prison and his subsequent frustrations, the duel in the woods, and, finally, the tournament itself, all of which result from love's power over them.

The vicissitudes of love are brought out by Chaucer even more clearly in the wall-paintings on the temple of Venus. Here is depicted in great detail, and "ful pitous to

Chaucer's addition to his source, emphasize the "blynde entencioun" of mankind, the very thing that Arcite had complained about in the first part of the poem. In fact, all these quoted passages on love are Chaucer's additions to the Teseida. The helplessness of Palamon and Arcite before the god of Love parallels their helplessness before God and the destinal forces. And the ups and downs of love are themselves a part of the vicissitudes of life generally, as they are portrayed in the poem.

Much of the plot of this tale revolves around vicissitudes: the Theban women have been widowed by civil wars; Thebes has been sacked by Athens, which led to the knights' imprisonment; and Arcite dies of a fall from his horse.

It has been pointed out that the poem

abounds in such words of suffering as "waymentynge," "criynge," "youlynge," "distresse," "angwissh," "deeth," "torment," "strif," "adversitee," "lamentioun," "wrecched," "pitous," "deedly," "suffre," "compleyne," "sorwe," and "wo."¹⁸

To be sure, the poem presents in many and various ways the image of "every worldly soore." In the temple of Mars, for example, is seen:

the derke ymaginyng
Of Felonye, and al the compassyng;
The crueel Ire, reed as any gleede;
The pykepurs, and eek the pale Drede;
The smylere with the knyf under the cloke;
The shepne brennyng with the blake smoke;

The tresoun of the mordrynge in the bedde;
 The open werre, with woundes al bibledde;
 Contek, with bloody knyf and sharp menace.
 Al ful of chirkyng was that sory place.
 The sleere of himself yet saugh I ther,--
 His herte-blood hath bathed al his heer;
 The nayl ydryven in the shode a-nyght;
 The colde deeth, with mouth gaping upright.
 Admyddes of the temple sat Meschaunce,
 With discomfort and sory contenance.
 (ll. 1995-2010)¹⁹

In all of Chaucer's poetry, there is not found such a catalogue of vice, villainy, and mischance; it is as if Mars were, in fact, the source of all evil. Every possible catastrophe which might happen to mankind is depicted on the walls of this temple. The walls of the temple of Diana, not found in the Teseida, also sustain this theme of "care and wo" (l. 2072).

The climax of all these vicissitudes portrayed in the poem is seen in the death speech of Arcite; here it is also clear that "the theme of love itself is subsumed in the category of all earthly experience" (Muscatine, p. 187):

"Naught may the woful spirit in myn herte
 Declare o point of alle my sorwes smerte
 To yow, my lady, that I love moost;
 But I biquethe the servyce of my goost
 To yow aboven every creature,
 Syn that my lyf may no lenger dure.
 Allas, the wo! allas, the peynes stronge,
 That I for yow have suffred, and so longe!
 Allas, the deeth! allas, myn Emelye!
 Allas, departynge of oure compaignye!
 Allas, myn hertes queene! allas, my wyf!

Myn hertes lady, endere of my lyf!
 What is this world? what asketh men to have?
 Now with his love, now in his colde grave
 Allone, withouten any compaignye."
 (ll. 2765-79)

"What is it," says Arcite, "that men want?" The circle has come full-turn: it is the same question which he had raised after he had been released from prison--only to find that he was forever a prisoner to mortality; "We faren as he that dronke is as a mous. . . . We seken faste after felicitee,/ But we goon wrong ful often, trewely." Arcite had won Emily, but he had also won his death. As if in a momentary flash, Arcite sees the full impact of the limitation of man's vision and of the limitation of man's happiness (by death). His happiness, in fact, lasted "as it were a twynklyng of an ye."²⁰ And as if Chaucer would not let the point rest here, he writes:

"Why woldestow be deed," thise wommen crye,
 "And haddest gold ynough, and Emelye?"
 (ll. 2835-36)²¹

This is, indisputably, the very moment of irony.²² These two lines constitute the only dialogue in the scene of mourning just after Arcite's death (ll. 2817-36). It is dramatically opportune for Egeus to come on stage at precisely this point:

No man myghte gladen Theseus,

Savynge his olde fader Egeus,
 That knew this worldes transmutacioun,
 As he hadde seyn it chaunge bothe up and down,
 Joye after wo, and wo after gladnesse.
 (ll. 2837-41)²³

Egeus is ostensibly talking about death, but his remarks supply the poem's commentary about life. The intensive questioning of life's meaning in the speeches of Arcite and Palamon, the numerous references to destiny throughout the poem, the many different ways in which Chaucer has portrayed the vicissitudes of love and of life generally, in brief, the mutability of all worldly endeavor: these find their solution at the end of the poem in the speeches of Egeus and Theseus. After Egeus had given Theseus many examples and illustrations (l. 2842) of "this worldes transmutacioun," he tells him:

"This world nys but a thurghfare ful of wo,
 And we been pilgrymes, passynge to and fro.
 Death is an ende of every worldly soore."
 (ll. 2847-49)

These lines, certainly, are more than merely "commonplace."²⁴ Pratt points out that "in Egeus' words we begin to find an answer to Palamon's complaint" (p. 421); he remarks, moreover, that this speech of Egeus prepares for the long speech of Theseus, who develops the idea of "this worldes transmutacioun" as he speaks of the "Firste Moevere" (p. 421).

Besides the dramatic function of Egeus' words, however, it seems to me that his relationship both to what has gone before in the poem and to the speech of Theseus which follows might be viewed in another way. When Egeus says that "this world nys but a thurghfare ful of wo," he is expressing abstractly what has been, to this point, dramatically portrayed in the poem. He recapitulates, as it were, a dominant theme of the poem. Furthermore, when Egeus adds to this idea that "we been pilgryms, passynge to and fro," he is giving expression to the Contemptus Mundi idea. This idea is not strongly emphasized by Egeus, surely, but the woe of the world has been portrayed constantly throughout the poem, and Theseus himself speaks of "this wrecched world" (l. 2995) and of the "foule prisoun of this lyf" (l. 3061). The point, in short, is this: the speech of Egeus is related to the speech of Theseus in a similar way, at least, that the Contemptus Mundi expression precedes the answer to it in Truth and in the epilogue of the Troilus.

In Truth, it is to be recalled, Chaucer writes:

The wrastling for this world axeth a fal.
 Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernesse:
 Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy
 stal!
 Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al.
 Hold the heye wey, and lat thy gost thee lede;
 And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede.

.
 Unto the world leve now to be thral;
 Crye him mercy, that of his hy goodnesse
 Made thee of noght, and in especial
 Draw unto him . . .

(11. 16-21; 23-26)

The negative aspect of the Contemptus Mundi idea is inseparable in Chaucer's mind from its positive aspect: the turning away from the world indeed suggests the turning toward God. This same pattern is seen in the epilogue of the Troilus. Troilus "gan despise/ This wrecched world, and held al vanite/ To respect of the pleyn felicite/ That is in hevене above . . ." (V, 1816-19). He condemned "al oure werk that foloweth so/ The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste . . ." (V, 1823-24). But to this negative expression, Chaucer adds:

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

He counsels the young folk, furthermore, to lay their hearts "al holly" on Christ. Against the Contemptus Mundi expression, therefore, is balanced the goodness and the stability of God. Such too is the pattern which prevails at this point of the Knight's Tale. And in this regard it is

significant to note two things: First, neither the Contemptus Mundi expression of Egeus nor the "Firste Moevere" expression of Theseus are in the Teseida. Second, the words of Egeus which immediately precede this Contemptus Mundi expression (ll. 2843-46), and from which this expression naturally evolves, were, in the Teseida, spoken by Theseus in the last book of the poem.²⁵

Theseus' speech at the close of the poem occurs a "length of certeyn yeres" (l. 2967) after the death of Arcite. Still saddened by Arcite's death, he summons Emily and Palamon, themselves still grieving. He begins his speech by talking about "the faire cheyne of love," which binds together all things in the universe under the "Firste Moevere." Things do not just "happen," nor is destiny simply a blind force; there is a divine plan operating in the world. When the First Mover made this "faire cheyne of love . . . heigh was his entente./ Wel wiste he why, and what thereof he mente." Theseus' words relate primarily to death and successions, but the concepts of order and stability, as against chaos and purposeless mutability, underlie everything he says. "That same Prince and that Moevere," he continues:

"Hath stablissed in this wrecched world adoun
 Certeyne dayes and duracioun
 To al that is engendred in this place,

Over the whiche day they may nat pace. . . .
 Thanne may men by this order wel discerne
That thilke Moevere stable is and eterne.
 Wel may men knowe, but it be a fool,
 That every part dirryveth from his hool;
 For nature hath nat taken his bigynnyng
 Of no partie or cantel of a thing,
But of a thyng that parfit is and stable,
 Descendynge so til it be corruppable."

(ll. 2995-98; 3003-10)

From this passage it is clear that Theseus' speech emphasizes two points: First, there is, certainly, a guiding purpose operating throughout all creation: this supplies the answers to the questionings of Arcite and Palamon and to all the other problems in regard to mutability which this study has shown to exist in the poem. Second, the dichotomy between the mutable and corruptible world (at the outer edge of the circle from the creator) and the perfect and stable "Firste Moevere" (indicated in the underscored lines) is clearly stated. Twice again does Theseus refer to this order in creation:

"And therefore of his wise purveiaunce,
 He hath so wel biset his ordinaunce,
 That speses of thynges and progressiouns
 Shullen enduren by successiouns,
 And nat eterne
 what maketh this but Juppiter, the kyng,
 That is prince and cause of alle thyng,
 Convertynge al unto his propre welle
 From which it is dirryved, sooth to telle?"

(ll. 3011-15; 3035-38)

To rebel against this order is folly (ll. 3045-46). The

death of Arcite, then, is part of the divine plan and should therefore not be lamented. "Why have we hevynesse," he says, since he has departed honorably out of the "foule prisoun of this lyf?" (ll. 3058; 3061). Thus the positive aspects of Egeus' Contemptus Mundi speech are seen in the order of the universe and in the perfection and stability of the First Mover.²⁶ As in Truth and in the Troilus, Theseus' speech ends on the note of the promise and the hope of eternal immutability: death is, in reality, the conversion of the creature back "unto his propre welle/ From which it is dirryved."

Once this is stated, the way is prepared for the marriage of Emily and Palamon and for the reader's acceptance of these words of Theseus:

"What may I conclude of this longe serye,
But after wo I rede us to be merye,
And thanken Juppiter of al his grace?
And er that we departen from this place
I rede that we make of sorwes two
O perfit joye, lastynge evermo."

(ll. 3067-72)

After such a vivid portrayal in the poem of the vicissitudes of life, Theseus' conclusion here and the Knight's relating that the entire wedded life of Palamon and Emily was spent in perfect bliss are convincing only because of the preceding speech of Theseus. The world has been "ordered," Palamon and Emily are part of the "faire cheyne of love," and, under

these aspects, they can indeed have "O parfit joye, lastynge evermo." At this point, the philosophy of Boethius and the romance of chivalry blend--become one and indistinguishable.

PART II. THE REMAINDER OF THE CANTERBURY TALES

Of the rest of the Canterbury Tales, only in the Man of Law's is the mutability theme sustained throughout the entire poem. In the beginning of the poem, Chaucer emphasizes the destiny theme and at the end, the transitory theme. In between are references to fortune and to transitoriness. All of the mutability elements in the Man of Law's Tale are Chaucer's additions to his source; these effect the high seriousness of the poem and contribute genuine significance and pathos to a plot which in Trivet's work is simply a factual narration of incidents befalling a human victim. The high seriousness of Chaucer's poem consists precisely in this: the manifestation of Christian perfection, especially the perseverance in the belief in the "sothefast Christ," amid all the forces of mutability and mortality which operate in this world beneath the moon. In the other tales, on the other hand, the mutability theme appears very often to motivate or to explain incidents in the plot, but in no one of the tales is there any attempt made to sustain

the theme throughout the entire narrative.

In the Man of Law's Tale, the mutability motifs are very clear cut: they are the destiny and the transitory motifs. These are also the predominant motifs in the other tales. For this reason, I shall examine these tales under the following aspects: Chaucer's use of fortune, his employment of the transitory theme, and a few other mutability references which can not properly be placed in either of these categories.²⁷ It is to be noted here, as has been pointed out in the examination of the Knight's Tale, that Chaucer's use of fortune and destiny, from the point of view of mutability, is not essentially different. Theoretically, destiny operates of course through fortune. Thus, in Chaucer's poetic, destiny is used to explain a "hap" which might just as well have been explained by fortune. For this reason, I shall use the two concepts interchangeably except when the context calls for their distinction.

In the Man of Law's Tale, the Sultan, having heard his merchants describe the nobility of Constance, wanted her for his wife, "to love hire while his lyf may dure." This line, Chaucer's addition, becomes ironical when it is immediately followed by another addition to Trivet's work:

Paraventure in thilke large book

Which that men clepe the hevene ywritten was
 With sterres, whan that he his birthe took,
 That he for love sholde han his deeth, allas!
 For in the sterres, clerer than is glas,
 Is writen, God woot, whoso koude it rede,
 The deeth of every man, withouten drede.

In sterres, many a wynter therbiforn,
 Was writen the deeth of Ector, Achilles,
 Of Pompei, Julius, er they were born;
 The strif of Thebes; and of Ercules,
 Of Sampson, Turnus, and of Socrates
 The deeth; but mennes wittes ben so dulle
 That no wight kan wel rede it atte fulle.

(B 190-203)

The astrological material not only foretells the death of the Sultan but gives "high seriousness" and universality to the entire story. Chaucer's lengthy enumeration of great historical personages functions to lend credibility to the stars' influence upon the lives and deaths of men. In short, the destiny motif is intended to explain the "mutability" in the life of the Sultan. As with the Sultan, so too with Constance. "The woful day fatal is come" for her to leave her father the emperor and to go to Syria to marry the Mohammedan ruler. Chaucer apostrophizes the unfavorable astrological conditions which prevail at her departure:

O first moevyng! crueel firmament,
 With thy diurnal sweigh that crowdest ay
 And hurlest al from est til occident
 That naturelly wolde holde another way,
 Thy crowdyng set the hevene in swich array
 At the bigynnyng of this fiers viage,
 That crueel Mars hath slayn this mariage.

He further observes that both Mars and Luna have passed from the sign Libra into Scorpio, the darker (night) mansion of Mars. This is a very unfavorable time for Constance to begin her journey. For this reason, Chaucer says:

Imprudent emperour of Rome, alas!
 Was ther no philosophre in al thy toun?
 Is no tyme bet than oother in swich cas?
 Of viage is ther noon eleccioun
 Namely to folk of heigh condicioun?
 Noght whan a roote is of a burthe yknowe?
 Allas, we been to lewed or to slowe!
 (B 295-315)

Constance's "root of nativity" was already known; it would have been easy to determine the "election" of this particular time but, alas, observes Chaucer, there is the element of man's mortality.²⁸ Here, as in the stanzas on the Sultan's death as written in the stars, the poet combines the destiny motif with the limitation of man's vision. These destiny passages in the very beginning of the poem set the tone for the entire work: Constance is forever the victim of forces beyond her control. Chaucer does not, however, maintain the destinal motif throughout the entire poem, as he did in the Knight's Tale; from this time on, the transitory theme predominates.

Chaucer's favorite rhetorical device throughout the Canterbury Tales is the apostrophe. His use of the fortune-

destiny material usually takes this form. Notice the grave tone of the apostrophe just examined and, in contrast, the mock-heroic tone of this apostrophe in the Merchant's Tale.

Having satirized January's senile illusion of finding heavenly bliss, "ful deliciously," in the sensuous enjoyment of his young wife May, Chaucer prefaces the old man's ensuing blindness thus:

O sodeyn hap! o thou Fortune unstable!
 Lyk to the scorpion so deceyvable,
 That flaterest with thyn heed whan thou wolt styng;
 Thy tayl is deeth, thurgh thyn envenymyng.
 O brotil joye! o sweete venym queynte!
 O monstre, that so subtilly kanst peynte
 Thy yiftes under hewe of stidefastnesse,
 That thou deceyvest bothe moore and lesse!
 Why hastow Januarie thus deceyved,
 That haddest hym for thy fulle freend receyved?
 And now thou hast biraft hym bothe his yen,
 For sorwe of which desireth he to dyen.
 Allas! this noble Januarie free,
 Amydde his lust and his prosperitee,
 Is woxen blynd, and that al sodeynly.
 (E 2057-2071)

Chaucer obviously is using the fortune material ironically here; it is January who is still being satirized. It is interesting to note that in Chaucer's mock-heroic apostrophe to Fortune, the imagery is highly conventional. It is, in fact, surprisingly similar to that imagery used in the Man in Black's tirade against Fortune in the Book of the Duchess. Thus we see the mature Chaucer, now in complete control of his material. This apostrophe, furthermore, prepares for the

turn in the plot. From here on, January's fortune constantly becomes worse until, finally, he is shown to be the complete and utter fool.

A similar use of the destiny-fortune material occurs in the Nun's Priest's Tale. After Daun Russell the fox seized Chauntecleer "and on his bak toward the wode hym beer," the poet says:

O destinee, that mayst nat been eschewed!
 Allas, that Chauntecleer fleigh fro the bemes!
 Allas, his wyf ne roghte nat of dremes!
 And on a Friday fil al this meschaunce.
 (B² 3338-41)

Chaucer then apostrophizes Venus and Geoffrey de Vinsauf (who, in turn, had apostrophized Friday, the day on which Richard I was wounded). It is clear, then, that Chaucer's use of the destiny material here is only another part of his sustaining the mock-heroic style. There remains only one more significant use of fortune in this manner, in the Franklin's Tale.

It is to be recalled that Dorigen, the faithful wife of Arveragus, playfully promised to become Aurelius' amie if he should remove the dangerously jutting rocks from the coast of Brittany. This, with the aid of magic, Aurelius did. Dorigen, caught between her love and her devotion to truth, apostrophizes Fortune:

"Allas," quod she, "on thee, Fortune, I pleyne,

That unwar wrapped hast me in thy cheyne,
 Fro which t'escape woot I no socour,
 Save oonly deeth or elles dishonour;
 Oon of thise two bihoveth me to chese.
 But nathelees, yet have I levere to lese
 My lif than of my body to have a shame,
 Or knowe myselfen fals, or lese my name;
 And with my deth I may be quyt, ywis.
 Hath ther nat many a noble wyf er this,
 And many a mayde, yslayn hirsself, allas!
 Rather than with hir body doon trespass?"
 (F 1535-66)

As the reader may have noted, the fortune-motif is not developed. The apostrophe takes the special form of the complaint; Fortune is merely the dramatic pretext for Dorigen's complaint. Following this passage are nearly one hundred lines of rhetorical exempla of famous women who chose death rather than to submit their bodies to dishonor.

These five passages, then, four of which take the form of the rhetorical apostrophe (and one of these the more special form of the complaint) constitute, with the exception of the Monk's Tale, Chaucer's major uses of fortune and destiny in the Canterbury Tales. Of these passages, two are used to enhance the gravity or seriousness of the plot; two are used for mock-heroic effects: the apostrophes in the Merchant's and in the Nun's Priest's Tales effect an ironical gravity of relatively insignificant incidents. Finally, in Dorigen's complaint, Chaucer uses Fortune merely to introduce the complaint itself which, with the nearly one hundred lines

of exempla, serves to emphasize Dorigen's dilemma. Chaucer's use of the fortune-destiny material in these tales is, therefore, exclusively for dramatic purposes; that is, the extent and presentation of this material are determined by the dramatic effects which he wishes to achieve. Aside from incidental references to fortune or destiny scattered throughout the Tales and, of course, the Monk's Tale, which deals almost entirely with fortune, these instances which I have presented constitute the extent of Chaucer's use of fortune in the Canterbury Tales.²⁹

The Monk's Tale was written before the Canterbury period but at least one of the tragedies was added after 1385.³⁰ Chaucer's use of fortune here follows the conventional mediaeval de casibus scheme. The tale illustrates by seventeen exempla the falls of famous persons "out of heigh degree/ Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly" who had formerly enjoyed great prosperity. Generally the agent in these falls is Fortune, "For certein, whan that Fortune list to flee,/ Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde." The Monk begins by relating the fall of Lucifer but pedantically insists that his fall was not influenced by Fortune, for "Fortune may noon angel dere"; he thereby reminds the pilgrims that Fortune's power does not extend beyond the moon.

Throughout the poem, in fact, the Monk makes thirty references to Fortune.³¹

E. M. Socola's argument is convenient as a summary glance at the tragedies and Chaucer's presentation of Fortune in the tale. Assuming that the Modern Instances belong between the tragedies of Zenobia and Nero, he sees three successive groupings of the seventeen tragedies, which constitute the following design:

- (1) those tragedies in which Fortune is not mentioned or plays no part (Lucifer, Adam, and Samson);
- (2) those tragedies in which Fortune appears as an abstraction (Hercules, Nebuchadnezzar-Balshazzar, Zenobia, Peter of Spain, Peter of Cyprus, Barnabo, and Ugolino); and (3) those tragedies in which Fortune is a personal and an individualized being (Nero, Holofernes, Antiochus, Caesar, and Croesus).³²

Socola's argument is convincing and offers internal evidence for the arrangement of the tragedies other than that in the Ellesmere. It must be remembered, however, that throughout Chaucer's poetry generally Fortune is presented both abstractly and allegorically without any perceivable pattern. More pertinent to this study is Chaucer's use of Fortune in the tragedies.

B. L. Jefferson points out that "the Monk's Tale is nothing more nor less than a list of illustrations showing the fickleness and emptiness of power so emphasized by Boethius" (op. cit., p. 85). Willard Farnham, who discusses

the Monk's Tale in the light of the De Casibus tradition, states that the Monk's central theory is that "tragedy is a manifestation of man's powerlessness in an irrational world."

Farnham continues:

The Monk remains in his way true to this theory of tragedy; he is much truer to the formula than Boccaccio and consequently much less capable of Boccaccio's inspired violations. In no one of his stories do we find anything comparable to Boccaccio's emotional defense of worldly activity for Alcibiades, or Boccaccio's sympathetic and detailed plotting of the rise and fall of Hannibal showing the hero's own contribution to his misfortune through a subtle weakness peculiarly tragic in one so truly great. Most of the Monk's efforts are open-and-shut tragedies showing how Fortune at her pleasure overthrows the innocent and the wicked alike. (Op. cit., p. 133)

Eight of the sixteen victims (Lucifer's fall was beyond the realm of tragedy) are free from any tragic fault whatever; Fortune favored Nero even when he was wicked, but suddenly changed and says: "By God! I am to nyce/ To sette a man that is fulfild of vice/ In heigh degree, and emperour hym calle" (B² 3712-14). Thus it is Fortune's whimsicality which is emphasized rather than a causal relationship between Nero's actions and his fall. In the case of Ugolino, furthermore, Chaucer even heightens the pathos of the tragedy. In Dante's Inferno, Ugolino is guilty of treason and therefore seems to deserve his suffering (even if his children do not).

Chaucer leaves Ugolino innocent and thus "shapes the story to fit his main thesis that the world is a realm of causeless misfortune" (Farnham, p. 136). Even when the victims appear more or less to deserve their falls, as in the cases of Adam and Antiochus, Chaucer makes no attempt to show a causal connection between the actions of Fortune and of the victims. And in the case of Samson, whose most serious fault is that he trusted a woman--perhaps of all the tragedies the most potentially dramatic for relating the flaw to the fall --Fortune is not even mentioned and Samson's fall is made to occasion the Monk's advice that one should not tell his wife his secret. All of which is to say that if at times Chaucer seems to hint at a connection between man's failings and his fall, he does not do so very clearly or consistently, not nearly so clearly as does Boccaccio. In short, a close scrutiny of the tragedies will bear out the truth of Farnham's statement: "One has the feeling that he [the Monk] is never getting far away from his teaching that misfortunes have no rational causes and are expected simply because the world is a vale of tears" (*op. cit.*, p. 134). At the end of the tragedy of Hercules, the Monk offers a brief moral:

Lo, who may truste on Fortune any throwe?
For hym that folweth al this world of prees,

Er he be war, is ofte yleyd ful lowe.
 Ful wys is he that kan hymselfen knowe!
 (B² 3326-29)

It is the same philosophy as that expressed in Truth, where Chaucer tells Vache, "Flee fro the prees, and dwelle with sothfastnesse"; and in Fortune, where Chaucer tells Fortune, "But trewely, no force of thy reddour/ To him that over himself hath the maystrye!" Fortune, in fact, might well be Chaucer's commentary on the Monk's Tale: "This wrecched worldes transmutacioun,/ As wele or wo, now povre and now honour,/ Withouten ordre or wys discrecioun/ Governed is by Fortunes errour."³³

Like the fortune motif (in tales other than the Monk's), the transitory theme is generally used dramatically. This theme is most conspicuous in the Man of Law's Tale. The Sultan's intention to become a Christian aroused his mother, who plotted to slay him and the Christians (who had come with Constance) alike. Immediately before relating this incident, Chaucer adds to his source the following apostrophe from Innocent III's De Contemptu Mundi:

O sodeyn wo, that evere art successour
 To worldly blisse, spreyned with bitternesse!
 The ende of the joye of oure worldly labour!
 Wo occupieth the fyn of oure gladnesse.
 Harke this conseil for thy sikernessee:
 Upon thy glade day have in thy mynde
 The unwar wo or harm that comth bihynde.
 (B 421-27)

This apostrophe sustains the destiny motif introduced in the beginning of the poem--the impression is that in our state of mortality it is necessary that woe is ever the successor to worldly bliss--and gives an exalted significance to the action which is to follow. Granted that this exclamatio is a rhetorical device, it offers an excellent example of Chaucer's ability to adapt his reading (in this case, part of his translation of De Contemptu Mundi) to his poetry; and the fact that he should recall (even "look up," since it is a close translation) this passage from the work of Innocent betrays his interest in the transitory theme generally.

This interest is again evidenced in part of one stanza and all of another in the Man of Law's Tale, both of which are also adapted from the De Contemptu Mundi. Alla and Constance were reunited in Rome, "And swich a blisse is there bitwix hem two/ That, save the joye that lasteth evermo,/ There is noon lyk that any creature/ Hath seyn or shal, whil that the world may dure" (B 1075-78; note the seemingly natural reservation in line 1076, which betrays Chaucer's ever-present consciousness of the dichotomy between the mutable and the immutable worlds). This happiness, however, lasted but a short time; before a year has passed, Alla died. Chaucer prepares for the announcement of his death thus:

But litel while it lasteth, I yow heete,
 Joye of this world, for tyme wol nat abyde;
 Fro day to nyght it changeth as the tyde.

Who lyved euere in swich delit of day
 That hym ne moeved outhur conscience,
 Or ire, or talent, or som kynnes affray,
 Envye, or pride, or passion, or offence?
 I ne seye but for this ende or in plesance
 Lasteth the blisse of Alla with Custance.

(B 1132-41)

These lines are another rather close translation of a section of Innocent's work (supra, p. 99). It is significant to note that the Man of Law's Tale was written late in Chaucer's literary career (most probably about 1390). It was also around this time that he translated the De Contemptu Mundi.³⁴ Innocent's work, therefore, relates to the Man of Law's Tale as the work of Boethius relates to the Troilus and to the Knight's Tale, written five to eight years earlier. That Chaucer should almost literally translate essentially the same ideas from both Innocent's and Boethius' works (see especially Criseyde's speech, III, 814 ff.)--and interpolate similar ideas of his own into Mars' complaint--certainly indicates a sympathy for the theme. The first chapter of this study has shown how commonplace this theme was throughout the Middle Ages. The idea of the transitoriness of life and of joy was, in fact, trite. Chaucer's adaptations of this theme, however, from two authorities esteemed by the

mediaeval mind lend the theme a gravity, beyond the realm of the trite and the commonplace, which it might not otherwise have had. This fact, I think, must not be overlooked in determining the extent of Chaucer's fondness for the theme of transitoriness. Finally, at the end of the Man of Law's Tale, the teller prays: "Now Jhesu Crist, that of his myght may sende/ Joye after wo, governe us in his grace . . ." (B 1160-61). Thus the transitory theme is clearly an intricate part of Chaucer's story of Constance. United with the destiny motif, it turns a bare narrative into one of the finest tales of genuine pathos in all English literature.

The transitory theme is woven into the dramatic texture of the Merchant's Tale and is used for ironic effects. And because of its ironic use, it provides, perhaps of all Chaucer's works, the clearest expression of his poetical sensibility in regard to the dichotomy between the worlds of mutability and immutability. Most of the marriage material in the first part of the Merchant's Tale is taken from the sixth chapter of Deschamps' Miroir de Mariage.³⁵ In this work the description of marriage in its ideal state is suggestive of paradise, but the equation of the two states of bliss is never made. In Chaucer's poem, on the other hand, the equation is made both in the Merchant's conscious irony at

the very beginning of the poem and in the unconscious and dramatic irony of January, whose illusion constitutes the main point of the poem.

The old merchant, about to tell the story of January and May, speaks ironically of marriage before he gets very far into his story. Bachelors, he says, "have often payne and wo;/ On brotel ground they buylde, and brotelnesse/ They fynde, whan they wene sikernesse" (E 1278-80). In fact:

A wyf is Goddes yifte verrailly;
Alle othere manere yiftes hardily,
As londes, rentes, pasture, or commune,
Or moebles, alle been yiftes of Fortune,
That passen as a shadwe upon a wal.
But drede nat, if pleylnly speke I shal,
A wyf wol laste, and in thyn hous endure,
Wel lenger than thee list, paraventure.
(E 1311-18)

The underscored lines of this passage are not found in the Miroir. It is significant that Chaucer uses the transitory imagery in the merchant-teller's ironic description of wedlock. A wife, he says, is man's "paradys terrestre" (E 1332); then continues his "ideal" portrayal of wedlock in imagery somewhat reminiscent of that in the love scenes of the Troilus:

How myghte a man han any adversitee
That hath a wyf? Certes, I kan nat seye.
The blisse which that is bitwixe hem tweye
Ther may no tonge telle, or herte thynke.
(E 1338-41)

The Merchant's "satire not only helps to build up the atmosphere of extreme bitterness that will give the irony of action its unique character, but also allows us to anticipate January's coming troubles more definitely than we could if we were less keenly aware of the teller's real feelings about married life."³⁶ Before going into January's troubles, however, Chaucer very carefully builds up his illusions of "parfit felicitee" in marriage.

Old January, who is sixty years of age but who feels "nowhere hoor" except on his head, prepares to seek a young and beautiful wife, not to exceed twenty years of age. He spurns Justinus' advice that he should choose a wife for her virtue as well as her beauty and then only after long consideration. January finally finds the young and beautiful maiden whom "he wolde han to his wyf,/ To lede in ese and hoolynesse his lyf" (E 1627-28). One thing, however, bothers his conscience; and this he tells to his friends:

"I have," quod he, "herd seyde, ful yooore ago,
 Ther may no man han parfite blisse two,
 This is to seye, in erthe and eek in hevene.
 For though he kepe hym fro the synnes sevene,
 And eek from every branche of thilke tree,
 Yet is ther so parfit felicitee
 And so greet ese and lust in mariage,
 That evere I am agast now in myn age
 That I shal lede now so myrie a lyf,
 So delicat, withouten wo and stryf,
 That I shal have myn hevene in erthe heere.

For sith that verray hevene is boght so deere
 With tribulacion and greet penaunce,
 How sholde I thanne, that lyve in swich plesaunce
 As alle wedded men doon with hire wyvys,
 Come to the blisse ther Crist eterne on lyve ys?
 This is my drede, and ye, my bretheren tweye,
 Assoilleth me this question, I preye."
 (E 1637-54)³⁷

After January has become blind, the poet says:

O Januarie, what myghte it thee availle,
 Thogh thou myghte se as fer as shippes saille?
 For as good is blynd deceyved be
 As to be deceyved whan a man may se.
 (E 2107-10)

Clearly, then, Chaucer has used the transitory theme, namely the perfect felicity and "sikernessee" of marriage as against the imperfect felicity and the vicissitudes of its reality, to portray the foolish January's illusion that marriage is "withouten wo and stryf" and is a "hevene in erthe here." January's folly reaches its climax in the fruit-tree incident.

The Merchant's Tale is of course in part a fabliau and, as such, Chaucer's satire against January, while perhaps the bitterest satire he ever wrote, should not be interpreted apart from its particular context. It is primarily January's unrealistic view of marriage which makes him the butt of the satire. But Chaucer need not have used the celestial imagery to heighten January's illusion. This he did, however,

to make January's folly appear even more ridiculous and therefore to sharpen the point of the fabliau. But, parenthetically, the mere fact that he so used this celestial imagery seems to me significant in interpreting the full meaning of this same imagery in the third book of the Troilus. The intent and dramatic situations of the two poems are, to be sure, vastly different; but Margaret Schlauch's statement in regard to Chaucer's satire of the courtly lover in Damian is, I think, applicable to his uses of the celestial imagery both in the Troilus and in the Merchant's Tale:

The mere act of changing a romantic situation into a fabliau implies a critical attitude. The mediaeval fabliaux constitute our antidote for the unsubstantial and sugared fare of the romances; they present an antithesis of sharp unconscious criticism, and it is significant that they spring largely from a different class. When the values of one type are permitted to intrude in the other, the result is not only comedy but also social satire, whether deliberate or involuntary.³⁸

January's visions of perfect bliss in marriage parallel, to some extent, the courtly lover's vision of perfect bliss when he is with his amie. Specifically, Chaucer seems to portray this situation in the love scenes of Troilus and Criseyde. If January's illusion of the heavenly bliss of marriage is not an indirect commentary on the illusions of Troilus and Criseyde, is it not at least probable that

Chaucer's conscious use of this celestial imagery in the Merchant's Tale might indicate his conscious use of this same imagery in the Troilus?

The transitory theme has a much less substantial role in the other tales of the Canterbury group. Different aspects of this theme appear scattered throughout and, more often than not, have little or no connection with the plots. In the Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale, for example, the Host reminds the company of the late time of the day, which observation occasions the following:

"Lordynges, the tyme wasteth nyght and day,
 And steleth from us, what pryvely slepynge,
 And what thurgh necligence in oure wakyng,
 As dooth the streem that turneth nevere agayn,
 Descendynge fro the montaigne into playn.
 Wel kan Senec and many a philosophre
 Biwaillen tyme moore than gold in cofre;
 For 'los of catel may recovered be,
 But los of tyme shendeth us,' quod he.
 It wol nat come agayn, withouten drede,
 Namore than wole Malkynes maydenhede,
 Whan she hath lost it in hir wantownesse.
 Lat us nat mowlen thus in ydelnesse."
 (B 20-32)

The Host then calls upon the Man of Law to tell his tale. Most of the transitory references which will presently be considered are, like the comment of the Host, digressions of greater or lesser length. The Wife of Bath, for example, refers to the passage of time by interrupting the fond remembrance of her "yowth" and "jolitee" to say: "But age,

allas! that al wole envenyme,/ Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith" (D 474-75). Besides these references to the transitoriness of time, one other group of transitory-references figures significantly in the Tales, those which relate to death.

In the Prologue to the Clerk's Tale, the Clerk mentions that he had learned the tale which he is about to tell from Petrarch. The mention of Petrarch occasions this digression:

"Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete,
Highte this clerk, whos rethorike sweete
Enlumyned al Ytaille of poetrie,
As Lynyan dide of philosophie
Or lawe, or oother art particuler;
But deeth, that wol nat suffre us dwellen heer,
But as it were a twynklyng of an ye,
Hem bothe hath slayn, and alle shul we dye."
(E 31-38)

A similar digression on death occurs in the Reeve's Prologue. The first part of the Reeve's "sermonyng" is, as it were, a portrait of old age (A 3874-82), but there is no interpretation of old age in terms of the transitoriness of life, such as that already pointed out in the Wife of Bath's Prologue (D 474-75). A little beyond the middle of his sermon, however, he says:

"And yet ik have alwey a coltes tooth,
As many a yeer as it is passed henne
Syn that my tappe of lif bigan to renne.

For sikerly, whan I was bore, anon
 Deeth drough the tappe of lyf and leet it gon;
 And ever si the hath so the tappe yronne
 Til that almoost al empty is the tonne.
 The streem of lyf now droppeth on the chymbe.
 The sely tonge may wel ryng and chymbe
 Of wrecchednesse that passed is ful yore;
 With olde folk, save dotage, is namore!"
 (A 3888-98)

It was seen in Chapter I that the idea of death's beginning at birth goes back to classical times, perhaps even before written records themselves. This image of Death's drawing the tap from the barrel, however, is so far as I know original with Chaucer. Tyrwhitt admired line 3895, "The streem of lyf now droppeth on the chymbe," and said that "the imagery is very exact and beautiful" (Skeat, V, 114). This figure is one of the most beautiful in all Chaucer's poetry and the entire image is among the most vivid of his imagery. In view of Chaucer's general interest in the transitoriness of life, I cannot help suspecting that the image is not simply conventional or commonplace but that it derived from a sensibility forever alerted to the sound of the drops "on the chymbe."

The final instance of the transitory theme which I shall deal with at any length occurs in the Miller's Tale. In this tale the old "lewed" carpenter is contrasted with the young "hende" Nicholas, clerk, astrologer, trickster,

and lover. When Nicholas had determined upon a plan to trick the simple old man, he went to his room and stayed there for two days. Upon learning this, John, thinking Nicholas ill, exclaims:

"I am adred, by Seint Thomas,
It stondeth nat aright with Nicholas.
God shilde that he deyde sodeynly!
This world is now ful tikel, sikerly.
I saugh to-day a cors yborn to chirche
That now, on Monday last, I saugh hym wirche."
(A 3425-30)

Chaucer uses this dialogue to characterize the "sely" carpenter: the simplicity of the old carpenter is seen in his immediate association of the ill Nicholas and the corpse; and the extent of his sensibility is revealed in the fact that only six days previously he had seen him "wirche."

These references to the fortune and to the transitory themes constitute the more important and conspicuous uses of the mutability theme in the Canterbury Tales. There are, moreover, many incidental references to these themes which are not so important but which indicate Chaucer's abiding interest in the concept of mutability and show the extent to which this concept occupied his poetic sensibility. In the Merchant's Tale, for example, we find: "But worldly joye may nat alwey dure/ To Januarie, ne to no creature" (E 2055-56); in the Nun's Priest's Tale, "For evere the letter ende of

joye is wo./ God woot that worldly joye is soone ago" (B² 4395-96); and in the same tale there are two incidental references to fortune (B² 4189-90, 4593-94). In the Wife of Bath's Tale, "gentillesse" is opposed to "temporel thyng, that man may hurte and mayme" (D 1132); when the "riotoures thre" of the Pardoner's Tale find the treasure, they immediately exclaim, "This tresor hath Fortune unto us yiven" (C 779); even the falcon in the Squire's Tale tells Canacee, about her mate: "But finally, thus atte laste it stood,/ That Fortune wolde that he moste twynne/ Out of that place which that I was inne" (F 576-78); and the moral which the Host draws from the sad story of the beautiful Virginia, in the Physician's Tale, is "That yiftes of Fortune and of Nature/ Been cause of deeth to many a creature" (C 295-96). Again, in the Miller's Tale we find, "A man woot litel what hym shal bityde" (A 3450); in the Physician's Tale, "Beth war, for no man woot whom God wol symte/ In no degree. . . ." (C 278-79); and in the Shipman's Tale, salutations and gestures accorded to feminine beauty and personality "Passen as dooth a shadwe upon the wal" (B² 1199). In one of Chaucer's few additions to Petrarch's Griselda story, he has the more serious folk of the town apostrophize the inconstancy of the mob. "'O stormy peple! unsad and evere untrewe! Ay undiscreet and chaungynge as a fane!/ Delitynge evere in rumbul that is

newe,/ For lyk the moone ay wexe ye and wane!'" (E 995-98). Twice again Chaucer refers to inconstancy, both times to that of men: for the Manciple, "Flessh is so newefangel, with meschaunce,/ That we ne konne in nothyng han plesaunce/ That sowneth into vertu any while" (H 193-95); and for the falcon in the Squire's Tale, "Men loven of propre kynde newefangelnesse,/ As briddes doon that men in cages fede," who, if they might escape, "wol spurne adoun his [sic] cuppe,/ And to the wode he wole, and wormes ete" (F 610-11, 616-17). Finally, in the same tale, Canacee's question to the suffering falcon epitomizes the mutability theme as it appears in the Canterbury Tales: "'Is this for sorwe of deeth or los of love?/ For, as I trowe, thise been causes two/ That causen moost a gentil herte wo;/ Of oother harm it nedeth nat to speke'" (F 450-53). In seventeen of the twenty-three Tales which have been considered here, some aspect of the mutability theme appears, at least incidentally (and while the theme does not occur in the Reeve's Tale, it does appear in his Prologue).³⁹

It is now time to consider Chaucer's use of the other mutability themes in the Tales. In the Canterbury Tales (other than in the Knight's Tale), Chaucer makes little use of those mutability themes which are not, properly speaking,

identifiable with the transitory theme. His only use of the decay of the world theme, for example, occurs in the Clerk's Tale and is his own addition to his source. At the end of his narrative the Clerk speaks the following about Walter's son:

His sone succedeth in his heritage
In reste and pees, after his fader day,
And fortunate was eek in mariage,
Al putte he nat his wyf in greet assay.
This world is nat so strong, it is no nay,
As it hath been in olde tymes yore . . .
(E 1135-40)

The ubi sunt formula in the Parson's Tale has no known source: "Where been thanne the gaye robes, and the softe shetes, and the smale shertes?" (I 197). It is probable that this formula is not Chaucer's own but its occurrence in the Tales is, nevertheless, significant.

The final motif in this category is the same as that expressed by Palamon in his prison-speech: how can an all-good God permit evil? In the Man of Law's Tale, the motif takes the form of innocent-suffering. When the constable receives the counterfeit letter from Alla's mother, wherein he is told to exile Constance, he exclaims:

"O myghty God, if that it be thy wille,
Sith thou art rightful juge, how may it be
That thou wolt suffren innocentz to spille,
And wikked folk regne in prosperitee?"
(B 813-16)

Similarly, in Dorigen's complaint the problem is this: why should an all-wise God create something which apparently serves no purpose and which is the means whereby men lose their lives?

"Eterne God, that thurgh thy purveiaunce
 Ledest the world by certein governaunce,
 In ydel, as men seyn, ye no thyng make.
 But, Lord, thise grisly feendly rokkes blake,
 That semen rather a foul confusion
 Of werk than any fair creacion
 Of swich a parfit wys God and a stable,
 Why han ye wrought this work unresonable?
 For by this werk, south, north, ne west, ne eest,
 Ther nys yfostred man, ne bryd, ne beest;
 It dooth no good, to my wit, but anoyeth.
 Se ye nat, Lord, how mankynde it destroyeth?
 An hundred thousand bodyes of mankynde
 Han rokkes slayn, al be they nat in mynde,
 Which mankynde is so fair part of thy werk
 That thou it madest lyk to thyn owene merk.
 Thanne semed it ye hadde a greet chiertee
 Toward mankynde; but how thanne may it bee
 That ye swiche meenes make it to destroyed?
 Which meenes do no good, but evere anoyen?"
 (F 865-84)

While this complaint of Dorigen makes for a rather long digression, it is in fact motivated dramatically: her fear of "thise grisly feendly rokkes blake" for her husband's life ultimately brings about her spontaneous and playful promise to Aurelius. These are the only mutability themes other than those of fortune and transitoriness which are to be found in the tales presently under consideration.

The Canterbury Tales represents Chaucer's most complete

development as an artist. There are many reasons for this. First, Chaucer's narrative technique found its fullest expression in the world of observation and experience. Second, the dramatic framework of a pilgrimage offered him an opportunity to display an infinite variety of characters, of moods, of situations, and of social classes; through this dramatic interplay of characters, he was able to reveal the universality of character through the particularity of the individual. Not the least important element of Chaucer's artistic success in the Canterbury Tales, however, is his "final resolution" of the antithesis expressed in his earlier works, "abstract moral theory on the one hand and vital human art on the other" (R. C. Goffin, p. 175, supra). Specifically, as Chaucer accepted the world of experience for his artistic scope, he concomitantly abandoned, but never completely, the De Contemptu Mundi idea. This may seem obvious and, in fact, a logical necessity. It is, however, the details of the "obvious" which the critics have never seriously attempted to unravel. Goffin did not elaborate further. The full implications of Chaucer's "final resolution" of this antithesis can be seen only in the light of his earlier works.

The only two pre-Canterbury period poems which pose serious problems for the critics are the Parliament of Fowls

and the Troilus. The reason for this is that the De Contemptu Mundi idea is juxtaposed with the exaltation of courtly love. It is significant that, outside of the shorter poems, especially Truth, the out-and-out De Contemptu Mundi occurs only in these two poems. Perhaps this fact, plus Chaucer's rejection of courtly love in the Tales, led Bronson to conclude that the subject of courtly love was radically incompatible with Chaucer's temperament (p. 173, supra) and then to proceed with his interpretation of the Parliament accordingly. This assumption is not justified by the Parliament itself. At the time Chaucer wrote the Parliament, it might just as validly be said that the De Contemptu Mundi idea was incompatible with his temperament! What I am saying is that there is a perceivable, progressive interplay between Chaucer's art and his "moral theory." The pattern, as I see it, is this: in the Parliament, Chaucer's sensibility was indeed divided. It was perfectly allowable in the mediaeval poetic to contrapose love and lust, the spiritual and the sensuous, the Somnium and the Garden of Love. This Chaucer did, and, in this sense, he was typically mediaeval. The Parliament itself offers absolutely no evidence that Chaucer was seeking, or even thought about, a final resolution of these antithetical ideas. At this point, then, Chaucer was

still working within the framework of the mediaeval convention and poetic.

In the Troilus Chaucer, by converting Boccaccio's tale into a de casu tragedy and by, as I see it, implicitly criticizing the courtly love ideal at the very height of the poem in his use of the celestial imagery, is working away from the convention of courtly love and toward the world of reality which will eventually be portrayed in the Canterbury Tales. The Troilus, in fact, constitutes the "intermediate link" in Chaucer's intellectual development. Here is found an ambivalence: Chaucer criticizes courtly love in his use of the celestial imagery and in the epilogue but in the texture of the poem he praises it. It is to be remembered that Chaucer found it necessary to append an epilogue to the Troilus, and this epilogue is the expression of none other than the complete denial of the courtly love ideal.

In the Knight's Tale there is further progression. There is, certainly, no deliberate idealization of courtly love in the Knight's Tale; here Chaucer maintains the courtly love conventions, but only in so far as these conventions are equated with the noble life. Unlike his use of these conventions in the Troilus, they are the vehicle of the poem's deeper meaning rather than ends in themselves. The main

problem of the poem, I think, is order versus disorder: Chaucer is seeking, actually, an order or pattern whereby he may interpret the mutable world of experience. This he finds in the speech of Theseus, which is the positive answer to the De Contemptu Mundi expression of Egeus. Chaucer's mutable and immutable worlds are finally reconciled; it is even possible, I think, to see in this final acceptance of order in the universe a foreshadowing of the Renaissance's insistence upon this same order. It is the beginning, certainly, of the end of the De Contemptu Mundi idea. It was the chaotic, contaminating matter of this world, it is to be remembered, which introduced the De Contemptu Mundi idea into Plato's philosophy. The ending of the Knight's Tale, then, is significant for two reasons: the expression of a final affirmation of order in the world in the speech of Theseus and the rejection of the courtly love code in the marriage of Emily and Palamon. Thus the way is open for the portrayal of the world of experience in the remaining tales.

In the Canterbury Tales, however, Chaucer's acceptance of the world was never complete. The "final resolution" of which Goffin speaks was tilted heavily on the side of the immutable world. Chaucer's rejection of courtly love--he satirizes it in the Merchant's and in the Nun's Priest's

Tales--seems to have obviated the necessity for the out-and-out De Contemptu Mundi expressions. But while there is no definite, strong expression of repudiation of the world in the Tales, such as is found in the epilogue to the Troilus, it has been pointed out that the transitory theme plays a very substantial part throughout. Its importance and function, in fact, has been too often overlooked. From youth through maturity, the transitoriness of all earthly things is the most abiding aspect of Chaucer's poetry. The mature Chaucer generally used the theme more dramatically than he did in his earlier works; if it is not incorporated into the plot, as are the complaints of Dorigen, for example, it is more often than not incorporated into a rhetorical device which has a direct bearing on the tale itself. Chaucer's interest in the theme never waned; the artist merely waxed and so learned better to control his interest. It has been pointed out that the transitory theme is part of, if not intricately related to, the De Contemptu Mundi theme. The former is, however, compatible not only with courtly love poetry but with all subject matter of poetry; Shakespeare's wide use of the theme is proof of this. The latter, however, is not compatible with love poetry and is, in fact, suitable only for religious poetry. Chaucer's "compromise" was the

acceptance of the world in all its transitoriness. From this acceptance stems much of the tension and universality of his poetry.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

¹ELH, XVII (1950), 252.

²"Active Arcite, Contemplative Palamon," JEGP, XXVI (1927), 286.

³Op. cit., p. 181.

⁴Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences (New York, 1960), pp. 119-63.

⁵Cf. J. M. Manly, Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer (New York, 1928), p. 543, who disagrees with Curry in regard to Saturn as Arcite's planetary enemy. Manly says: "Saturn seems . . . to have acted from no personal enmity, but only to please Venus (cf. I, 2438-78) and to have taken no special interest in the heroes earlier. But Chaucer undoubtedly inserts the early references to the planets to prepare the reader for their later influence."

⁶Of Sondry Folk (Austin, 1955), pp. 29-49.

⁷P. 34. Arcite, ll. 1251-74; Palamon, ll. 1303-33; Theseus, ll. 2987-3074.

⁸JEGP, LXVII (1958), 416-23.

⁹See H. S. Wilson, "The Knight's Tale and the Teseida Again," UTQ, XVIII (1949), 131-46, which only remotely touches upon this theme. William Frost, "An Interpretation of Chaucer's Knight's Tale," RES, XXV (1949), 300 ff. Only one-third of Frost's article deals with mutability elements in the poem,

but this is concise and generally excellent.

¹⁰For the sources of these speeches in the Consolation, see the notes to these lines in F. N. Robinson, op. cit., pp. 672 and 682.

¹¹This idea of the limitation of man's vision and the consequent irony of his intentions is also expressed in the Troilus, IV, 197-203. Germaine Dempster, Dramatic Irony in Chaucer (New York, 1959), pages 20 and 89, points out the irony of these passages from the Troilus and the Knight's Tale.

¹²B. L. Jefferson, op. cit., p. 131, Fairchild, and Lumiansky (both cited above) see a significant differentiation between the characters of Arcite and Palamon. R. K. Root, The Poetry of Chaucer, pp. 169-70, denies them subtle characterization, but finds Arcite the man of action and Palamon the dreamer. Germaine Dempster, op. cit., p. 89, and J. R. Hulbert, "What Was Chaucer's Aim in the Knight's Tale," SP, XXVI [1929], 375 ff., see little if any differentiation between the two kinsmen. It is doubtful that Arcite's "submissive" attitude here is meant to characterize him; most probably, Chaucer is merely interested in injecting these problems into the poem.

¹³See Troilus, III, 1016-22.

¹⁴See Troilus, V, 1749, "In ech estat is little hertes — reste." The Fortune-image here is not in the Teseida. Unless otherwise indicated, all the passages which I quote in connection with the Knight's Tale are Chaucer's additions to his source.

¹⁵See, for example, lines 915-16; 1074; 1238-43; 1465-66; 1490; 1507; 1516; 1566; 1841-44; 1861 (perhaps no more than conventional phraseology); 2322-25. Also, Curry, op. cit., pp. 119-63.

¹⁶See ibid., pp. 154 ff., for Curry's discussion of Providence, Destiny, and the destinal forces.

¹⁷See Skeat's note(V, 72) to line 1532, where he points out that "Here up, here doune" in the De Reg. Princip. of Occleve refers to the lack of stability in the world. It might be helpful to mention at this point that Skeat glosses "geery" (l. 1536) as "changeable," loc. cit. This passage is not in the work of Boccaccio, and I have not seen it cited by critics as an instance of the mutability of love in the poem. One of Boccaccio's favorite motifs is the portrayal of the effects of abandonment and absence, and the pains and joys of love. See S. Battaglia, "Schemi lirici nell'arte del Boccaccio," Archivum romanicum, XIX (1935), 61-78. For this information I am indebted to R. A. Pratt, "Chaucer's Use of the Teseida," PMLA, LXII (1947), 602-603.

¹⁸Jack G. Gilbert, "The 'Philosophy Group' in the Canterbury Tales: A Study of the Knight's Tale, the Monk's Tale, and the Nun's Priest's Tale," an unpublished thesis (M.A.), Louisiana State University (1959), p. 80. For surveying the scholarship on the philosophical aspects of the Knight's Tale and for a clear statement of the issues involved in the poem, Gilbert's study is excellent.

¹⁹Frost, op. cit., p. 301, and Muscatine, op. cit., p. 189, are right, I think, in considering these wall-paintings organic rather than merely decorative.

²⁰Clerk's Tale, E 37.

²¹This passage is not in the Teseida; nor are lines 2777-79 of the preceding passage.

²²It is surprising that neither Germaine Dempster, op. cit., nor other critics have noted this bit of irony.

²³These lines (with the exception of line 2838) are directly translated from the Teseida.

²⁴F. N. Robinson (notes to lines 2837 and 2849, p. 682) calls these sentiments "commonplace." Dale Underwood, "The First of The Canterbury Tales," ELH, XXVI (1959), 464 n., says: "That the ideas in the Egeus passage are commonplace and even platitudinous has been repeatedly stressed by commentators. So in themselves they are. But they are as close to the Consolation as the other three speeches here discussed [the speeches of Arcite, Palamon, and Theseus], for which Boethian correspondences have been generally recognized." See William Frost, op. cit., p. 300, for a defense of these lines. It might be added here that what, after all, is "commonplace" but a term attached to a pattern of thought of an epoch? The word is perilous because it implies that the thought does not function in the work in which it appears.

²⁵ll. 2843-46 were spoken by Theseus, Teseida, XII, 6, when proposing the marriage of Palamon and Emily. Chaucer substitutes the "Firste Moevere" passage in their stead.

²⁶In the Troilus, Chaucer had already used the device (from the Teseida, XI, 1-3) of Troilus' flight after death to the eighth sphere (on the date of the Knight's Tale, see J. S. P. Tatlock, The Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works, Chaucer Society Publications, 1907, pp. 70-83). This provided his main commentary on the poem and on life itself. In the Knight's Tale, therefore, he simply inserts the fact that Arcite's "spirit chaunged hous and went ther,/ As I cam nevere, I kan nat tellen wher" (ll. 2809-10). He then went to the Consolation for Theseus' speech on the First Mover and the fair chain of love. This passage, like the epilogue to the Troilus and the abstractly stated ending of Truth, provides Chaucer's chief commentary on the poem and on life itself.

²⁷Throughout this section I shall consider only Chaucer's additions to his sources unless otherwise indicated.

²⁸W. C. Curry, op. cit., pp. 175 ff., argues that the horoscope presented here refers to "the conjunction of stars at Constance's birth; this is the 'root of her nativity.'" An election was not made, therefore, since it would have been useless; Constance's marriages were doomed from birth. Curry's argument, I think, misinterprets the context. Chaucer clearly laments the fact that an election has been overlooked (B 309-15), not disregarded because it would have been useless.

²⁹See also the Merchant's Tale, E 1967-73.

³⁰Robinson, op. cit., p. 746.

³¹Gilbert, op. cit., p. 99. See his classification of these references.

³²"Chaucer's Development of Fortune in the 'Monk's Tale,'" JEGP, LXIX (1950), 164.

³³Chaucer implies the de casu pattern in the Man of Law's Tale, B 652-58; and the Clerk's Tale, E 810-12. In the latter, he adapts his source to imply this pattern of tragedy.

³⁴Robinson, op. cit., p. 692.

³⁵J. L. Lowes, "Chaucer and the Miroir De Mariage," MP, VIII (1910-11), 165-86. See especially the parallel texts on pp. 170-75.

³⁶Dempster, op. cit., p. 49.

³⁷Germaine Dempster, ibid., pp. 52-53, thinks that this passage was inserted by Chaucer to occasion Justinus' advice to January, that a wife may be his "purgatorie" (E 1670),

which, in turn, was dictated by the Wife of Bath's remarks (D 175, 489-90). This does not invalidate my thesis; Chaucer's intended satire of January here is rather obvious.

³⁸"Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale' and Courtly Love," ELH, IV (1937), 210.

³⁹See the following lines for other fortune and transitory references: B² 2640-50, 3972; C 22-23; I 470-74, 1068, 1076-80.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the concept of mutability and has distinguished five prominent motifs within this theme: transitoriness (which includes the symbol and the uses of Fortune), decay of the world, ubi sunt, putrefaction, and contempt of the world. All but one, putrefaction, appear and have been identified in Chaucer's poetry.

The theme of mutability and its variations have also been studied and identified in the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius, the De Contemptu Mundi of Innocent III, and Le Roman de la Rose of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. The first two of these works Chaucer translated entirely; the last, only in part. These representative works of the Middle Ages not only influenced Chaucer's thought generally but a very substantial amount of the mutability material contained in these works was incorporated into his poetry.

The extent and the function of the mutability theme in the works of Chaucer have been studied in detail. It is safe to conclude that, with the exception of the theme of love, no other is more predominant throughout Chaucer's

poetry. Yet, in almost every case, it is the mutability of love which finally occupies Chaucer's attention. As to the function of the mutability theme in Chaucer's poetry, the following examples may be taken as representative: in the Book of the Duchess, the mutability theme unifies, at least tenuously, the frame with the dream-vision itself; in the Parliament of Fowls, it provides a contrast to the worldly and sensuous Garden of Love and presents the "lore" before the "lust" of the play; in the Troilus, it provides Chaucer's very concept of tragedy (the de casibus type) and lends complexity of character and philosophical depth to the poem as a whole; furthermore, this theme, expressed in the epilogue and implied in the celestial imagery of the love scenes, provides Chaucer's chief commentary on life as portrayed in the poem; and in the Knight's Tale, the mutability theme supplies the substructure of the entire poem. Finally, all these various functions of the mutability theme are seen together in the other Canterbury tales.

It is even possible, furthermore, to view Chaucer's development as an artist in terms of his use of this theme. As his artistic scope became more and more oriented toward the world of experience, so did the transitory motif become more predominant and the De Contemptu Mundi motif tend to

disappear. If the De Contemptu Mundi expression of the Epilogue to the Troilus was primarily religiously motivated, this motivation was not unrelated to Chaucer's gradual moving away from mediaeval literary conventions in general and toward the world of the Canterbury Tales in particular. Only once after the Troilus did the De Contemptu Mundi expression again appear: Egeus' speech in the Knight's Tale is not much more than a hint of it. Not one time does this theme appear in the other Canterbury tales. Chaucer in his intellectual and artistic maturity has accepted the world, but a world always colored by his awareness of its impermanence. This part of the De Contemptu Mundi he was too much the mediaeval man ever to abandon. This awareness, in fact, appears so strong in the works of Chaucer's later years that one is tempted to conjecture that the idea of a pilgrimage as a framework for the Canterbury Tales emerged, ultimately, from his abiding sensibility of man's pilgrimage on earth.

APPENDIX I

THE THEME OF MUTABILITY IN OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

There is a surprising amount of somber melancholy for the departure of life and splendor in Old English literature. In the Wanderer, for example, we find:

I cannot think of the wide world
but what my heart-thoughts gather gloom,
pondering thus the life of all,
how they suddenly ceased to tread the floor,
the proud thanes. So does this middle earth
day by day perish and fail.¹

In the same poem, the expression of mutability takes the form of the ubi sunt theme:

A man stood wondering by these walls
deeply pondering this dark life.
Wise in heart he remembered far-off things,
unhappy deeds, and spake these words:
Where is the horse and where is his rider where is
the Giver of treasure,
Where are the guests at the banquet, where are the
joys of hall?
Alas, the bright cup, alas the armoured man,
Alas the hero's glory. How time has gone by,
dark under night's cloak, as though it were not.
(Ibid., p. 39)

Again:

All is hardship in the kingdom of earth;
decrees of Wyrð change the world under heaven.

Here man is passing, here maid is passing;
 here life is passing, here lover is passing.
 All the face of the earth stands empty.

(Ibid., p. 40)

One of the most striking mutability images in all literature occurs in Bede's Ecclesiastical History. King Edwin had summoned a council with his chief men about accepting the Faith of Christ. One of the king's men spoke the following:

"Your Majesty, when we compare the present life of man with that time of which we have no knowledge, it seems to me like the swift flight of a lone sparrow through the banqueting-hall where you sit in the winter months to dine with your thanes and counsellors. Inside there is a comforting fire to warm the room; outside, the wintry storms of snow and rain are raging. This sparrow flies swiftly in through one door of the hall, and out through another. While he is inside, he is safe from the winter storms; but after a few moments of comfort, he vanishes from sight into the darkness whence he came. Similarly, man appears on earth for a little while, but we know nothing of what went before this life, and what follows. Therefore if this new teaching can reveal any more certain knowledge it seems only right that we should follow it."²

Note also the sentiments of The Seafarer:

	Days are passing
and all the pomp	of earth's kingdoms,
There are now no kings,	now no Caesars
nor gold-givers,	as in olden days,
when with his lord	each man revelled in treasures
and in royal-wise	lived out his days.
The host has fallen,	joys have passed away,
weaker ones endure	and hold the world,
enjoy its business.	Glory is bowed down,
and honour of the earth	grows old and sere,

as does every man throughout this middle world.
 Old age comes on him, his face grows pale,
 the grey-haired man mourns that his lost friends,
 the sons of aethelings, have been laid in the earth.
 Nor may his flesh-house, when the spirit leaves it,
 taste the sweet nor feel the sore,
 touch with its hand nor think with its mind.
 (Williams, op. cit., p. 43)

Stopford Brooke's statement gathers together much of the mutability poetry of the Old English period:

Another heathen motive was the regret for the passing away of the splendour and mirth and fame of men. It is the note of the Prince's lay in Beowulf and of the Ruin; it continues after Christianity in the Wanderer and the Seafarer and in all the poems of Cynewulf. Mingled with this is the regret for the loss of youth, of dear companions, and of personal happiness, such regret as we find in Deor's Complaint. This too continues, but it was changed and modified by the Christian hope. "One thing is sure," cries the Epilogue to the Wanderer, "the Fortress of Heaven"; and Cynewulf in many a poem, when he has mourned for earth and loss, and the storms in which all he loved has perished, thinks of the "Haven which the Ruler of the Ether has established," where all "his friends are dwelling now in peace and joy." These are new feelings for the English, and they are the foundations of all our religious poetry. The note of Cynewulf, of Vaughan, of Keble is much the same.³

It is clear, therefore, that a relatively large amount of Old English literature deals with the theme of mutability.

It is to be noted that Brooke says, "the regret for the passing away of the splendour and mirth and fame of men" is a "heathen motive." In the precise measure that this poetry expresses a regret, in the true sense of the word, for

these losses, I think the motive might be called "heathen." It must be recognized, however, that the Anglo-Saxon sensibility of "the transitoriness and uncertainty of all mortal things" is not peculiarly heathen: this dissertation makes it abundantly clear that the mutability-sensibility is preeminently Christian. In this regard, I shall quote the remarks of E. K. Chambers at length because they are useful in showing just how little consideration has been given to this matter by scholars generally. Chambers is speaking here of the expression of the transitoriness and uncertainty of all earthly things which is found abundantly in the mediaeval religious lyrics:

Professedly it is Christian poetry, but the colour of its sentiment is no essential part of the Christian attitude towards life. Perhaps we have to do with a matter of racial temperament rather than of creed, and it is the Anglo-Saxon melancholy that inspires so keen a sense of the transitoriness and uncertainty of all mortal things. . . . By this sad lilt the very child in his cradle is taught that sorrow is the law of life. Weeping he comes into the world, and with good cause, for the world will be his foe, as it has ever been the foe of his "eldern." His foot is in the wheel, and he is beginning a pilgrimage, at the end of which death out of "a wel dim horre" awaits him. It is the cry of pagan Lear, as he feels the foundations of his life crumbling around him--

"Thou knowest, the first time that we smell the air,
We wawl and cry . . .
When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this stage of fools."

Of course, it is largely a matter of emphasis. Even the lullaby takes its Christian turn; it is through Adam's apple and the wickedness of Satan that death came into the world. And the consciousness of the vanity of things fits in well enough with one aspect of Christian doctrine. It is a reading of life which Christianity had had to meet and to absorb into itself at an early stage. The poets, as we have seen, could draw from the Psalms and Ecclesiastes. They could draw also from more than one patristic writing De Contemptu Mundi. A more immediate source is the so-called Poema Morale, which dates from the second half of the twelfth century.⁴

I do not say that the mutability sentiment is an essential part of the Christian attitude towards life. I do, however, say this: de facto, this sentiment was intensified with the acceptance of Christianity; the sentiment fits in well with many aspects of Christian doctrine; and the classic and patristic influence was so overwhelming that the mediaeval sensibility was necessarily pre-formed in this regard. I hope the first chapter of this dissertation makes these statements incontrovertible.

NOTES TO APPENDIX I

¹Williams, op. cit., p. 38.

²Bede: A History of the English Church and People, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, in Penguin Books (Baltimore, 1955), pp. 124-25.

³English Literature From the Beginning to the Norman Conquest (London, 1930), p. 100.

⁴Chambers and Sidgwick, op. cit., pp. 284-85.

APPENDIX II

ORIGINALS OF TRANSLATIONS

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- 42: Hexaemeron (Migne, PL, XIV, cols. 180-81): Hodie videas adolescentem validum, pubescentem, aetatis viriditate florentem, grata specie, suavi colore; crastina die tibi facie et ore facie et ore mutatus occurrit: et qui pridie tibi lautissimus decorae formae visus est gratia, alio die miserandus apparet aegritudinis alicujus infirmitate resolutus. Plerosque aut labor frangit, aut inopia macerat, aut cruditas vexat, aut vina corrumpunt, aut senectus debilitat, aut eviratos deliciae reddunt, luxuria decolorat. Nonne verum est, quia aruit fenum, et flos decidit? Alius avis atavisque nobilis, et majorum honestatus infulis, prosapiae veteris clarus insignibus, amicis abundans, stipatus clientibus et utrumque latus tectus, producens maximam ac reducens familiam, repente aliqua accidentis periculi mole turbatus, destituitur ab omnibus, a sodalibus derelinquitur, impugnatur a proximis. Ecce verum est, quia sicut fenum vita hominis, priusquam evellatur, arescit.

Le Roman de la Rose (ed. Ernest Langlois, SATF [Paris, 1914-24]):

- 102: Ellis, ll. 360-64; Le Roman, ll. 352-57:

Mout estoit ja ses vis flestiz,
Qui fu jadis soés e plains;
Or estoit toz de fronces pleins.
Les oreilles avoit mossues,
E toutes les denz si perdues
Qu'ele n'en avoit mais nes une.

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103: Ellis, ll. 367-92; Le Roman, ll. 361-86:

Li Tens qui s'en vait nuit e jor,
 Senz repos prendre e senz sejour,
 E qui de nos se part e emble
 Si celeement qu'il nos semble
 Qu'il s'arest adès en un point,
 E il ne s'i areste point,
 Ainz ne fine de trespasser,
 Que l'en ne puet nefs penser
 Queus tens ce est qui est presenz,
 Sel demandez as clers lisanz;
 Car ainz que l'en l'eüst pensé
 Seroient ja troi tens passé.
 Li Tens qui ne puet sejourner,
 Ainz vait toz jorz senz retorner,
 Con l'eve qui s'avale toute,
 N'il n'en retorne arriere goute;
 Li Tens vers cui neienz ne dure,
 Ne fers ne chose tant soit dure,
 Car Tens gaste tot a manjue;
 Li Tens qui toute chose mue,
 Qui tot fait croistre e tot norrist
 E qui tot use e tot porrist;
 Li Tens qui envieilli noz peres,
 Qui vieillist rois e empereres
 E qui toz nos envieillira,
 Ou Morz nos desavancira.

105: Ellis, ll. 4811-24; Le Roman, ll. 4533-44:

qui tout a gité
 Son preterit en vanité,
 E qu'ele a sa vie perdue
 Se dou futur n'est secourue,
 Qui la soutiegne en penitence
 Des pechiez qu'el fist en enfance,
 E, par bien faire en cete peine,
 Au souverain bien la rameine,
 Don Jennece la dessevrait,
 Qui des vanitez s'abevrait;
 Car li presenz si po li dure
 Qu'il n'i a conte ne mesure.

106: Ellis, ll. 4900-07; Le Roman, ll. 4617-24:

En la fin encor le savras,
 Quant ton tens perdu i avras,
 E degastee ta jouvente
 En cete leece dolente.
 Se tu peuz encore tant vivre
 Que d'amours te veies delivre,
 Le tens qu'avras perdu plourras,
 Mais recouvrer ne le pourras.

Ellis, ll. 4881-87; Le Roman, ll. 4597-4604:

Bone amour deit de fin cueur naistre;
 Don n'en deivent pas estre maistre
 Ne quel font corporel soulaz.
 Mais l'amour qui te tient ou laz
 Charneus deliz te represente,
 Si que tu n'as ailleurs t'entente,
 Pour ce veauz tu la rose avoir,
 Tu n'i songes nul autre avoir.

Ellis, ll. 5323-46; Le Roman, ll. 5019-40:

Ou la fain qui mourir le face,
 Pense il, espeir, e s'i soulace,
 Que, quant plus tost defenira,
 Plus tost en paradis ira,
 Qu'il creit que Deus le li present
 Quant il laira l'essil present.
 Pythagoras te dit meïs,
 Se tu son livre onques neïs
 Que l'en apele Vers dorez,
 Pour les diz dou livre onorez:
 "Quant tu dou cors departiras,
 Touz frans ou saint air t'en iras
 E laisseras humanité,
 Vivanz en pure deïté."
 Mout est chaitis e fos naïs
 Qui creit que ci seit ses païs:
 N'est pas vostre païs en terre,
 Ce peut l'en bien des clers enquerre
 Qui Boece, de Confort, lisent,
 E les sentences qui la gisent;
 Don granz biens aus genz lais ferait
 Qui bien le leur translaterait.

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107: Ellis, ll. 6699-6700; Le Roman, ll. 6341-42:

Don il s'ensuit a cler veiant
Que li mauvais sont pour neient.

Ellis, ll. 5645-49; Le Roman, ll. 5337-40:

Es autres biens, qui sont forain,
N'as tu vaillant un viez lorain;
Ne tu ne nul ome qui vive
N'i avez vaillant une cive . . .

Ellis, ll. 8735-42; Le Roman, ll. 8316-22:

Car, qui les fins e les prouvances
De beauté savrait regarder,
Beauté se peut trop po garder;
Tantost a faite sa vespree,
Con les floretes en la pree,
Car beauté est de tel matire:
Quant el plus vit e plus empire.

Ellis, ll. 6171-74; Le Roman, ll. 5844-46:

Le deu lairas qui ci t'a mis,
E ne priseras une prune
Toute la roe de Fortune.

107-108: Ellis, ll. 5083-93; Le Roman, ll. 4783-94:

C'est l'amour qui vient de Fortune,
Qui s'eclisse come la lune
Que la terre obnuble e enombre
Quant la lune chiet en son ombre,
S'a tant de sa clarté perdue
Con dou soleil pert la veüe,
E quant el ra l'ombre passee,
Si revient toute enluminee
Des rais que li solauz li montre,
Qui d'autre part reluist encontre:
Cete amour est d'autel nature,
Car or est clere, or est ocure.

108: Ellis, ll. 6171-7280; Le Roman, ll. 5844-6898.

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Ellis, ll. 7215-17; Le Roman, ll. 6835-40:

Ne ja nus si liez ne sera,
 Quant il bien se pourpensera,
 Qu'il ne truisse en sa graigneur aise
 Quelque chose qui li desplaie,
 Ne ja tant de meschief n'avra,
 Quant bien pourpenser se savra . . .

Ellis, ll. 8767-68; Le Roman, ll. 8353-59:

Jadis soulait estre autrement,
 Or va tout par empirement.
 Jadis, au tens des prumiers peres
 E de noz prumeraines meres,
 Si con la letre le tesmoigne,
 Par cui nous savons la besoigne,
 Furent amours leiaus e fines . . .

Ellis, ll. 8799-8800; Le Roman, ll. 8381-84:

N'iert point la terre lors aree,
 Mais, si con Deus l'avait paree,
 Par sei meïsmes aportait
 Ce don chascuns se confortait.

Ellis, l. 8821; Le Roman, ll. 8403-8406:

E quant li airs iert apaisez,
 E li tens douz e aaisiez,
 E li vent mol e delitable,
 Si come en printens pardurable . . .

109: Ellis, ll. 21039-62; Le Roman, ll. 20185-204:

Briement, Jupiter n'entendi,
 Quant a terre tenir tendi,
 Fors muer l'estat de l'empire
 De bien en mal, de mal en pire.
 Mout ot en lui mol jousticier.
 Cil fist printens apeticier,
 E mist l'an en quatre parties,
 Si come eus sont ores parties:

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Estez, printens, autonne, ivers,
 Ce sont li quatre tens divers
 Que touz printens tenir soulait;
 Mais Jupiter plus nou voulait,
 Qui, quant au regne s'adreça,
 Les aages d'or depeça
 E fist les aages d'argent,
 Qui puis furent d'arain, car gent
 Ne finerent puis d'empirer,
 Tant se voudrent mal atirer.
 Or sont d'arain en fer changié,
 Tant ont leur estat estrangié . . .

110: Ellis, ll.-16645-59; Le Roman, ll. 15891-905:

E quant ce sairement fait orent
 Si que tuit entendre le porent,
 Nature, qui pensait des choses
 Qui sont desouz le ciel encloses,
 Dedenz sa forge entree estait,
 Ou toute s'entente metait
 En forgier singulieres pieces,
 Pour continuer les espieces;
 Car les pieces tant les font vivre
 Que Mort ne les peut aconsivre,
 Ja tant ne savra courre après;
 Car Nature tant li va près
 Que quant la Mort o sa maque
 Des pieces singulieres tue
 Ceus qu'el treuve a sei redevables.

111: Ellis, ll. 16669-72; Le Roman, ll. 16005-09:

Mais Nature douce e piteuse,
 Quant el veit que Mort l'envieuse,
 Entre li e Corrupcion,
 Vient metre a destruccion
 Quanqu'eus treuvent dedenz sa forge . . .

Ellis, ll. 16917-20; Le Roman, ll. 16149-53:

Nature, qui tant est soutive,
 Combien qu'ele fust ententive

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A ses euvres que mout amait,
 Lasse, dolente se clamait,
 E si parfondement plourait . . .

Ellis, ll. 17783-88; Le Roman, ll. 16975-81:

Mais qui bien garder i savra,
 Ja si bone pais n'i avra
 Que la chaleur l'umeur ne suce
 E senz cessier gaste e manjuce
 De jour en jour, tant que venue
 Seit la mort qui leur est deüe
 Par mon dreit establissement . . .

112: Ellis, ll. 19897-904; Le Roman, ll. 19061-76:

Onques ne fis rien pardurable,
 Quanque je faz est corrompable.
 Platons meismes le tesmoigne
 Quant il pale de ma besoigne
 E des deus qui de mort n'ont garde:
 Leur crierres, ce dit, les garde
 E soutient pardurablement
 Par son vouleir tant seulement;
 E se cil vouleirs nes tenist
 Trestouz mourir les couvenist.
 Mi fait, ce dit, sont tuit soluble,
 Tant ai poeir povre e obnuble
 Au regart de la grant poissance
 Dou deu qui veit en sa presence
 La tribble temporalité
 Souz un moment d'eternité.

Ellis, ll. 19917-24; Le Roman, ll. 19089-97:

Car ja riens n'iert fait par Nature,
 Combien qu'ele i mete grant cure,
 Qui ne faille in quelque saison;
 Mais quanque par bone raison
 Veaut Deus conjoindre e atremper,
 Forz e bons e sages senz per,
 Ja ne voudra ne n'a volu
 Que ce seit jamais dissolu;
 Ja n'i vaudra corrupcion.

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113: Ellis, ll. 20223-21545; Le Roman, ll. 19385-20667.

Ellis, ll. 20659-62; Le Roman, ll. 19801-04:

Pensez de vous monteplier,
Si pourreiz ainsinc conchier
La felonesse, la ruvesche,
Atropos, qui tout empeesche.

Ellis, ll. 20741-50; Le Roman, ll. 19885-98:

Pensez de mener bone vie,
Aut chascuns embracier s'amie,
E son ami chascune embrace
E baise e festeie e soulace.
Se leiaument vous entramez,
Ja n'en devreiz estre blamez.
E quant assez avreiz joé,
Si con je vous ai ci loé,
Pensez de vous bien confessier,
Pour bien faire e pour mal laissier,
E reclamez le deu celestre
Que Nature reclaime a maistre:
Cil en la fin vous secourra
Quant Atropos vous enfourra.

Ellis, ll. 20787-21545; Le Roman, ll. 19931-20667.

Ellis, ll. 21233-41; Le Roman, ll. 20369-78:

Mais or palons des beles choses
Qui sont en ce bel parc encloses:
Je vous en di generaument,
Car taire m'en vueil erraument;
E qui voudrait a droit aler,
N'en sai je proprement paler,
Que nus cueurs ne pourrait penser,
Ne bouche d'ome recenser
Les granz beautez, les granz values
Des choses laienz contenues . . .

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113-14: Ellis, ll. 21137-46; Le Roman, ll. 20279-88:

Car, qui dou bel jardin carré,
Clos au petit guichet barré,
Ou cil amanz vit la querole
Ou Deduiz o ses genz querole,
A ce beau parc que je devise,
Faire voudrait comparaison,
Il ferait trop grant mespreison
S'il ne la fait tel ou semblable
Come il ferait de veir a fable.

114: Ellis, ll. 650 ff.; Le Roman, ll. 635 ff.

115: Ellis, ll. 20865-78; Le Roman, ll. 20010-26:

Toujourz en un moment demeure
Cil jourz, qui ne peut anuitier,
Tant sache a lui la nuit luitier;
N'il n'a pas temporel mesure,
Cil jourz tant beaus, qui toujourz dure,
E de clarté presente rit;
Il n'a futur ne preterit,
Car, se bien la verité sent,
Tuit li trei tens i sont present,
Li queus presenz le jour compasse;
Mais ce n'est pas presenz qui passe
En partie pour defenir,
Ne don seit partie a venir;
Qu'onc preteriz presenz n'i fu.
E si vous redi que li fu-
Turs n'i ravra jamais presence,
Tant est d'estable parmanance.

116: Ellis, ll. 21214-22; Le Roman, ll. 20349-58:

Pour Deu, seigneur, prenez ci garde:
Qui bien la verité regarde,
Les choses ici contenues,
Ce sont trufles e fanfelues.
Ci n'a chose qui seit estable,
Quanqu'il i vit est corrompable.

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Il vit queroles qui faillirent.
E faudront tuit cil qui les firent.
Ausinc feront toutes les choses
Qu'il vit par tout laienz encloses.

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Date of Examination:

July 19, 1961