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# All fortune is good fortune: the role of Fortuna in a monotheistic literary world

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ALL FORTUNE IS GOOD FORTUNE: THE ROLE OF FORTUNA  
IN A MONOTHEISTIC LITERARY WORLD

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Kimberly Bridgewater  
University of Northern Iowa  
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## ABSTRACT

The goddess Fortuna, who ruled over chance and the giving of worldly gifts was a pagan deity who survived through the conversion of Christianity in Europe. Her survival and inclusion in Medieval literature caused conflicts with the Christian religion, especially in relation to beliefs in free will and God's Providence. Now, twenty-first century scholars are still attempting to figure out how the role of free will can co-exist with Fortuna, especially in regard to the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, who render Fortuna as a dominant entity in the lives of their Christian characters. These authors, who were inspired by Boethius's perception of Fortuna, transformed Fortuna's role from that of a goddess of chance, to an entity who aids the Christian God in the movement of events based on human decisions.

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This Study by: Kimberly Bridgewater

Entitled: All Fortune is Good Fortune: The Role of Fortuna in a Monotheistic Literary World

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts– English

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Date

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“It's not about what I want, it's about what's fair! You thought we could be decent men in an indecent time! But you were wrong. The world is cruel, and the only *morality in a cruel world is chance*. Unbiased, unprejudiced ... fair. His son's got the same chance she had. Fifty-fifty.”

“What happened to Rachel wasn't chance. *We decided to act*. We three.”

—Two-Face and Batman from *The Dark Knight*

For everyone who has ever supported me in my long journey through college, including my mum, Stacie, Dr. Hoofnagle, Katie, Zalie, Bruce, Levi, and Joshua Moo.

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The role of chance and destiny in an individual's life is a prominent theme in Western literature. Today, we are constantly surrounded by the idea of Karma, a logic for us to explain why occurrences happen. For us, Karma centers around the notion of "what goes around, comes around," a revolution of good and bad luck if you will, but long before Karma became a part of mainstream Western culture, there was the goddess Fortuna and her revolving wheel that determined the fates of humans. Fortuna was, for our past ancestors, a logical explanation for why situations occurred. Fortuna had more depth and was much more than our westernized concept of Karma. Fortuna in the medieval period was an entity who gave and took away gifts and held an individual's status in little regard; her blind nature disregarded the labels of sick, rich, beautiful, talented, and so on. Her wheel would spin and tumble those at the top from good fortune to the bottom with bad fortune, and bring those at the bottom to the top, with little intention. At one time Fortuna was worshipped in Rome within multiple cults who credited her not only with chance and destiny, but she was also responsible for motherhood, fertility, and love.<sup>1</sup> Her overall presence in Rome was viewed in a positive light,<sup>2</sup> but the advent of Christianity, as well as the work of Boethius, changed the image of Fortuna into an entity that became more fickle, more feared, as well as drastically

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<sup>1</sup> See Sandra Billington's chapter "Fors Fortuna in Ancient Rome." *The Concept of the Goddess* (London: Routledge, 1996) 129-40, especially 130.

<sup>2</sup> See Hanna Fenichel Pitkin's chapter "Fortune" in *Fortune Is a Woman*. Pitkin: *Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984) 138-69, for further discussion.

more hated. However, even with these added negative perceptions, Fortuna survived the onslaught of Christianity when most other pagan deities didn't, perhaps providing one reason why Fortuna took on multiple roles such as war, love, and others as well.<sup>3</sup> Another role that Fortuna assumed in medieval literature was that of aiding the Christian God. Fortuna's new tasks included helping put events into motion while also serving as a test for mortals based on their free will to either succumb or persevere through her giving of worldly gifts.

### Fortuna in Classical Rome

The Goddess Fortuna was worshipped in Rome approximately around 640-616 BCE, during the rule of Ancus Martius. The word "fortune" is formed from the Latin words *fors* and *ferre*, ultimately meaning "that which is brought."<sup>4</sup> Fortuna was always identified as a woman, but her behavior was differently interpreted depending on the individual. At the end of the nineteenth century AD/CE, some perceived Fortuna to be inconstant, while others perceived her to be a lucky goddess who helped as well as protected peasants.<sup>5</sup> These Roman perceptions eventually stabilized towards a generally positive view of Fortuna. As Hanna Fenichel Pitkin states about Fortuna's popularity, "The Romans called her *bona dea*, the good goddess, and she had a great cult following. By the time of the Empire, she had diversified into one of those universal deities who

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<sup>3</sup> See Jonathan Kirsch's chapter "Confessors and Traitors" in *God Against the Gods: The History of the War between Monotheism and Polytheism* (New York: Viking Compass, 2004) 93-113, especially 99-100.

<sup>4</sup> Pitkin 138.

<sup>5</sup> Billington 129.

gradually replaced the old Roman contingent of gods.”<sup>6</sup> There was an abundance of temples dedicated in her honor and many emperors saw her as a protector.<sup>7</sup> Fortuna’s popularity and universal status stayed consistent through the medieval era, but the perceptions of her before this definitive status was determined were constantly changing. Towards the end of the second century BCE, the Roman view of her took to a more neutral stance. Fortuna could be either good or bad, a distinction created by proletarian and educated viewpoints. This new perception may have been brought on by the idea that what Fortuna hands out, must be accepted and dealt with, be it good or bad circumstances. This may have been a possible excuse for upper class individuals to explain the delicate instability they had with their class difference. The citizen’s changed view of Fortuna from positive to neutral caused Fortuna to become much more than just a goddess of good luck; she became chance.<sup>8</sup> Fortuna was a figure who was used by men as a symbol of how life works, thus one must take what they are given, whether good or bad.<sup>9</sup> Her wheel was also seen to be “an image of time’s passing and the power of fate.”<sup>10</sup> The idea that Fortuna was unpredictable did not come until late Roman times, when her fickle behavior became tied to the perception of a woman being unreliable.<sup>11</sup> This perception may have also led to the historian Plutarch’s observation that Fortuna was not “rational enough even to reward virtue and punish vice.”<sup>12</sup> Although Fortuna was

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<sup>6</sup> Pitkin 139.

<sup>7</sup> See Howard Rollin Patch’s book, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature* (New York: Octagon, 1967) 8-34.

<sup>8</sup> Billington 130.

<sup>9</sup> For further discussion see Patch 8-34.

<sup>10</sup> Billington 135. Wheels in Roman times were regarded to be sun symbols.

<sup>11</sup> Pitkin 138.

<sup>12</sup> Patch 12.

regarded as not rational enough, Plutarch assigned her a tremendous amount of power. He saw her to be part of the power of Zeus,<sup>13</sup> and she was also perceived to be an entity that had enough power to overthrow her father, Jove, as well as all other gods because of her changeable behavior.<sup>14</sup> This newly assigned power caused some fear, which led to men trying to limit Fortuna's power by creating three ways through which one could oppose her: "one way . . . was to show courage. Another was to oppose reason to her unreason, to live the life of wisdom; and another, less widely used, perhaps, was to devote one's self to those concerns in which Fortuna had no part—the activities of virtue."<sup>15</sup> These methods of limiting Fortuna's power allowed for her to be coupled with the idea of *virtus*, which by definition was man's ability to confront the power of fortune, but it wasn't used to overpower fortune. Pitkin notes, "*Virtus* was directed toward human self-control rather than toward control of the goddess."<sup>16</sup> This battle between *virtus* and Fortuna became very popular and appeared frequently in Roman literature. The ways to limit Fortuna's power also gained a more thorough definition, as Pitkin continues:

The cultivation of courage, rational wisdom, mastery of the passions, and selfless devotion either to public duty or to withdrawal from public and worldly concerns into the inner values of contemplation were remedies against fortune, not in the sense of reducing the realm of her power, but in the sense of withdrawing human concern from it.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Billington 130. At one time the word "Zeus" was a synonym for the power of Fortune far before men used the term "fortune."

<sup>14</sup> See Billington 129-40.

<sup>15</sup> Patch 14. This was created before Boethius wrote his *Consolation of Philosophy*, where he uses the same idea for how to oppose Fortuna.

<sup>16</sup> See Pitkin 139.

<sup>17</sup> Pitkin 139

Virtue came to be associated with reason, and Fortuna's battle continued. This battle managed to survive the infiltration of Christianity into Roman thought thanks to Constantine and his belief in Fortuna and, perhaps, thanks to Boethius and his *Consolation of Philosophy*.

### Boethius and the Transformation of Fortuna

Credit for Fortuna's survival, or the survival of the concept fate/destiny overall, could be attributed to Constantine since he continued to acknowledge Fortuna even through his conversion of Christianity,<sup>18</sup> but Boethius contributed just as greatly to Fortuna's transition from paganism to Christianity. Paganism started to decline as Christianity grew more widely practiced in the Roman community, and as a result many pagan gods and goddesses did not survive, since paganism was viewed to be a false religion. Paganism became an array of displeasing habits mixed together, as well as a superstition to the Christians who dominated Roman society. Paganism was soon defined as:

a term . . . used indiscriminately to describe a vast array of unrelated beliefs and practices, ranging in time, place and expression from the crude burial rites of the Neanderthals to the exquisite statuary and epic poetry of the Greeks and Romans and much else in between . . . But the only thing that all of these pagans share in common is . . . they did not confine their worship to the Only True God.<sup>19</sup>

This commonality, the dedication to other gods beside the Christian God, was and still is frowned upon in the Christian community; it is a darkness that infiltrates their lighted

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<sup>18</sup> Constantine's overall presence and thought was valued since he was emperor of Rome from 306-337.

<sup>19</sup> See Jonathan Kirsch's chapter "What Did Pagans Do?" in *God Against the Gods: The History of the War between Monotheism and Polytheism* (New York: Viking Compass, 2004) 39-63, especially 39.

path. For them, God does not answer to any other name than his own. Keeping this in mind, it is rather fascinating that Boethius transfers many pagan ideas surrounding Fortuna and transforms her into a more complex idea within Christianity. Fortuna becomes a figure who is bodiless; no longer prayed to or worshipped at a temple, she becomes an entity who needs others to survive, to think of her. This new addition could possibly be attributed to the fact that Fortuna was expected to be completely erased from one's thought.<sup>20</sup> As Howard Rollin Patch claims:

Belief in chance was not officially welcome to the new faith which maintained that even the hairs of the human head are numbered, and that not a sparrow falls without God's knowledge . . . It was no longer sufficient to oppose [Fortuna] with fortitude, with prudence or with philosophy, or even with virtue. It must be made clear that she had no actual existence, that her works were only illusory.<sup>21</sup>

Although an individual was not to combat Fortuna with philosophy or virtue any longer, this continued to be the way that some medieval authors had their characters battle or succumb to her, most notably, Boethius and his *Consolation of Philosophy*. This text, written in the year 524, features a long discussion between a prisoner (Boethius) and Lady Philosophy. In this work, as stated before, Boethius intertwines Fortuna and the Single God of the Christian religion. This inclusion of two different figures from separate religions is a rather interesting addition compared to other literature of the time period, considering the list of Christian Commandments (the second commandment to be exact) which claims that the worship of any other idol is a sin.<sup>22</sup> Even admiring a piece of art that focuses on an idol other than the One True God is considered blasphemy by the

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<sup>20</sup> Another reason may be because deities who routinely revealed themselves to mortals were ridiculed.

<sup>21</sup> Patch 15-16.

<sup>22</sup> For further discussion see Kirsch 39-63.

religious community; Boethius disregarded this fact and kept Fortuna and the personification of Philosophy in his work. He considers Philosophy to be the mother of all virtues, a tie with God,<sup>23</sup> but Fortuna is described through the voice of Philosophy as a monster, “a constancy no man can ever trust.”<sup>24</sup> It is noted by Philosophy that Fortuna has many disguises, and it is in her nature to turn from those she supposedly favored, because change is normal behavior for her. These perceptions of Fortuna, now inherently a more devious entity, were most likely thanks to the Christian view of pagan deities to be not only “false gods but [also] devils and demons.”<sup>25</sup> These transformed perceptions helped to lay the groundwork for the way other authors perceived Fortuna, most notably Chaucer, Dante, Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, and later Niccolò Machiavelli, although they also added more depth to Fortuna and new ways of interpreting her role in human lives. These perceptions, however, were not the problem as much as the conflict of determining how Fortuna and the Christian God could co-exist.

#### The Place of Free Will alongside Fortuna and God’s Providence

Fortuna’s involvement in the life of mortals, not only in reality, but also in literature, created debates about the role of free will, especially once Christianity became the dominant religion in Western Europe. In medieval literature, Fortune serves as a test for individuals and their choices; she helps propel events into motion based on human

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<sup>23</sup> See Book II, Section III. In Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*. Ed. Joel C. Relihan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2001) 64.

<sup>24</sup> Boethius Book II, Section I, 58.

<sup>25</sup> See Kirsch 166.



free will. Her behavior is rather devilish, as Christians would have viewed her to be,<sup>26</sup> but even with this added behavior, she aids in the revelation of sin and the destruction of worldly possessions, thus helping mortals approach a deeper relationship with the Christian God. Some may disagree with this idea, especially followers of Augustine and Aquinas, since both men contradict Boethius, claiming the word “fate” is not to be used and is not acceptable in Christian texts.<sup>27</sup> It was Augustine especially who claimed that, “through [human] free-will, individuals made choices, which God either punished or rewarded, in his justice and his mercy.”<sup>28</sup> Augustine clearly supports the notion that there is only one supreme power; even Boethius, at first, confirms the idea that only God maintains control of the universe since God needs no external assistance,<sup>29</sup> but then he also contradicts himself by offering the idea that fate is actually God’s Providence:

“Providence includes all things at the same time, however diverse or infinite, while Fate controls the motion of different individual things in different places and in different times. So this unfolding of the plan in time when brought together as a unified whole in the foresight of God’s mind is Providence; and the same unified whole when dissolved and unfolded in the course of time is Fate.

“They are different, but the one depends on the other. The order of Fate is derived from the simplicity of Providence.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Patch 16. He notes here, “The Goddess is more or less identified with the spirit of evil.”

<sup>27</sup> For a more thorough discussion of the view of Boethius, see Adrian Papahagi, “Hic Magis Philosophice Quam Catholice Loquitur: The Reception of Boethian Platonism in the Carolingian Age.” *Boethiana Medievalia: A Collection of Studies on the Early Medieval Fortune of Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy*. (Bucharest, Zeta Books, 2010) 37-72.

<sup>28</sup> See Marilyn Corrie. ““God May Well Fordo Desteny’: Dealing with Fate, Destiny, and Fortune in Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* and Other Late Medieval Writing.” *Studies in Philology* 110.4 (2013): 690-713, especially 693.

<sup>29</sup> See Boethius Book III, Section XII, 115, in which Philosophy states, “In regulating the universe He will need no external assistance – otherwise, if He needs anything, He won’t have complete sufficiency.”

<sup>30</sup> See Boethius Book IV, Section VI, 141.

Boethius pays special attention to the way that time works in relation to Providence and Fate. He discusses how time is distinguishable from Providence and how God's foresight is what brings time, Providence, and Fate together. Here, Boethius also claims that it is Fate who helps to put events into motion, providing evidence that he believed God did not work alone. Both Providence and Fate depend on one another to coexist and function properly. The idea of God and fortune/fate co-existing is also hinted at by Philosophy in the discussion of given gifts:

“The human race would still repeat  
Its querulous complaints.  
Though God should gratify their prayers  
With open-handed gifts of gold  
And furbish greed with pride of rank,  
All that God gave would seem as naught.  
Rapacious greed soon swallows all.”<sup>31</sup>

In this passage, Philosophy hints at one reason for Fortune's existence: Fortune exists in order to give gifts, so God does not condone greed, creating another piece of evidence justifying Fortune's involvement alongside the Christian God in medieval literature. In other words, Boethius points out how gifts are a worldly concern that mortals constantly crave, necessary or not, so Fortune serves this realm in order to give out gifts. Thus, the Christian God is not responsible for promoting mortals' greed, remaining entirely a pure entity.

Another rather interesting element of *The Consolation of Philosophy* is Philosophy's many examples of why Fortune is fickle and untrustworthy; she eventually

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<sup>31</sup> See Boethius Book II, Section II, 61.

digresses, however, and claims she is not “rigidly opposed to Fortune.”<sup>32</sup> Fortune is helpful to man as long as she stops deceiving and reveals her true self: “For bad fortune, I think is more use to a man than good fortune. Good fortune always seems to bring happiness, but deceives you with her smiles, whereas bad fortune is always truthful because by changing she shows her true fickleness. Good fortune deceives, but bad fortune enlightens.”<sup>33</sup> This enlightenment can be tied to the enlightenment one would feel while being closer to God, revealing the path of true goodness where God is found. Many philosophers believed that the pagan gods and goddesses were “fanciful ways of describing the various attributes or manifestations of a single high god.”<sup>34</sup> Boethius may have taken this philosophical thought and attributed it to his rendition of Fortuna, using her now as a manifestation of the Christian God, thus establishing her new found connection to Christianity as a servant for God’s divine will.

#### Critical Approaches to the Theory of Fortuna in a Monotheistic World

As mentioned before, I credit Boethius for creating the stepping stones for the many other creative representations of Fortuna in other medieval pieces, especially, as later discussed in this thesis, those of Chaucer, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. Some scholars, on the other hand, view Fortuna (through the adoption of Christianity) to have become a bland, brainless figure, and claim that Boethius never explained how God and Fortune could ever be unified. As Hanna Fenichel Pitkin states:

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<sup>32</sup> Boethius Book II, Section VIII, 81.

<sup>33</sup> Boethius Book II, Section VIII, 80.

<sup>34</sup> Kirsch 102.

With the triumph of Christianity, fortune by no means disappeared, but the conception was transformed. For the early Middle Ages, the imagery was set by Boethius's enormously influential *Consolations of Philosophy*, which presents a much more somber picture. Much of the metaphor and imagery surrounding fortune disappears; there remains only the wheel, 'which fortune grimly turns.'<sup>35</sup>

Although Fortune's wheel is an important part of her being, Fortune is much more than an entity spinning a wheel. As Philosophy states, "by her flattery good fortune lures men away from the path of true good, but adverse fortune frequently draws men back to their true good like a shepherdess with a crook. Do you think it is of small account that this harsh and terrible misfortune has revealed those friends whose hearts were loyal to you?"<sup>36</sup> Fortune works to steer those she has tested and who have strayed down the wrong path towards the path of good, and she does so by doing more than spinning a wheel. Her gifts and her presented opportunities are occasions for men to use their free will effectively in order to choose their own path. Pitkin disagrees with the philosophical thought that men are in charge of their decisions, however, especially with their retention of free-will in order to choose reason over worldly treasures. Pitkin claims, "Man is a passive object over which [Fortune] contend[s]. Man's role as defined by *virtus* is one not of resistant effort but of submission."<sup>37</sup> She believes that mortals in relation to Fortune are entirely subject to her rule, but the Boethian model proves that as long as an individual does not succumb to his passions and abandon reason, the more free will he will have:

"There is freedom . . . For it would be impossible for any rational nature to exist without it. Whatever by nature has the use of reason has the power of judgment to decide each matter. It can distinguish by itself between what to avoid and what to

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<sup>35</sup> Pitkin 139.

<sup>36</sup> Boethius Book II, Section VIII, 80.

<sup>37</sup> Pitkin 141.

desire. But man pursues what he judges to be desirable and avoids that which he thinks undesirable. So that those creatures who have an innate power of reason also have the freedom to will or not to will, though I do not claim that this freedom is equal in all ... Human souls are of necessity more free when they continue in the contemplation of the mind of God and less free when they descend to bodies, and less still when they are imprisoned in earthly flesh and blood. They reach an extremity of enslavement when they give themselves up to wickedness and lose possession of their proper reason.”<sup>38</sup>

Boethius, through the dialogue of *Philosophy*, states that there is a freedom of will, but it becomes less available to them once they abandon reason. Men are allowed to choose what is most desirable to them; however, once they are too far gone (consider Dr. Faustus for example), once they give themselves up entirely to evil, they lose their mind and can no longer see the more reasonable path. The Boethian model allows for choices to be made in the presence of *Fortuna*, especially since free-will was a gift of God.

As stated earlier, Boethius has criticized as being a rather confused individual trying to mesh conflicting ideas together while not forming any sort of explanation for why these forces could co-exist. Howard Rollin Patch, however, argues that medieval authors did include both pagan and Christian powers together in their work. Patch gathers evidence from Boethius and deduces that there is meant to be a connection between God and Fortune; Boethius struggles to make that connection readily known to the reader, but it was meant to exist:

Some writers retained both Fortune and the Christian God without any precise attempt to reconcile the two conceptions. One of the most influential figures in medieval thought, the remarkable Boethius ... sets forth a clear picture of the pagan goddess and, at the same time, obviously worships the Christian God, without showing us exactly how the two may exist together in one universe. While he gives a character sketch of *Fortuna* thoroughly in accord with that familiar in classical literature, and almost certainly based in large measure on his

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<sup>38</sup> Boethius. *Book V, Section II*, 155-156.

reading there, he only suggests a solution of the difficulty, taking his ideas in part from Aristotle.<sup>39</sup>

This idea from Aristotle is the notion that chance/fate is necessary to the development of free-will and that fate is indeed a servant of God. Patch claims that Boethius does not explain the connection between Fortune and the Christian God, but he contradicts himself with his attention to Aristotle's ideas that Boethius takes. Aristotle's idea that fate serves God in order to establish the development of free will is the early connection between the conflicting religious works in medieval literature. It is Boethius and his transformation of Fortune that allow for choices to be made and events to occur based on those choices to fully create the established connection. Now, I think Patch does not account for the fact that he holds a modern perspective, and these types of perspectives do not hold the same depth as those from medieval times. As modern readers, we tend to misinterpret and not fully understand what authors were describing because we do not always have the same mindset that these authors did centuries ago. Thus, the idea the medieval author is trying to explore is not always readily in sight. I do believe, however, that Boethius presents conflicting ideas, for example when, as mentioned above, he contradicts himself by stating that God does not need any external assistance, but uses fate for his Providence. On the other hand, Boethius gives examples of how fate and God work together, even mentioning the infamous wheel and how God is the center and fate is the rim.<sup>40</sup> Since Fortune deals primarily with worldly concerns, the wheel is constantly present in mortal

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<sup>39</sup> Patch 17-18.

<sup>40</sup> Boethius Book IV, Section VI, 141.

life. The closer an individual remains to God,—which in turn means being closer to the middle of the wheel,—the less motion will be experienced from Fortune.

Regardless of Patch’s claim that Boethius does not provide substantial evidence for his claims about of the relationship between the pagan goddess and the Christian God, Patch goes on to explain how Dante may have taken a Boethian idea and applied it to his own work: “[Dante] give[s] poetic reality to what is really implicit in the treatment of Boethius . . . in the seventh canto of the *Inferno*, the capricious goddess becomes a ministering angel entirely subservient to the Christian God . . . the pagan and Christian traditions are thus united in Dante’s representation.”<sup>41</sup> Dante’s writing and inspiration from Boethius provides evidence that Boethius planted the idea of a relationship between Fortuna and God, which blossomed in other writers. Patch also notes that it is Boethius who inspires Chaucer to “return to the Christian conception of Fortuna herself, with echoes of both Boethius and Dante, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, showing, that it was Boethius who furnished him with the basis for his idea.”<sup>42</sup> As many scholars know, Chaucer was responsible for translating Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* while he was writing “The Knight’s Tale” and *Troilus and Criseyde*, both discussed later in this thesis, from which he may have gotten his ideas for his use of Fortune. Patch also claims that Chaucer uses Fortune to show that she is “the shepherdess of us poor beasts,”<sup>43</sup> reiterating Boethius’s idea of two conflicting forces working together in one, since God is most notably a Christian’s shepherd.

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<sup>41</sup> Patch 18-19.

<sup>42</sup> Patch 31.

<sup>43</sup> Patch 31.

Ida L. Gordon shares my thoughts about the role of Fortune in medieval literature in relation to the Christian God. She claims, “When [Chaucer] interprets the Troilus story in the light of the Boethian distinction between true and false happiness, he is not only using the *Consolation* directly but also as it had been used before, especially in the *Roman de la Rose*, and it is in the light of the newer philosophies of love that he applies the Boethian ideas.”<sup>44</sup> She follows this later by stating, “[Chaucer] exploits . . . the relevance to his story of the three main topics of the *Consolation*—the relation of Fortuna to Providence, of true to false happiness, and the problem of reconciling God’s foreknowledge with man’s free will.”<sup>45</sup> Gordon’s claims that Chaucer reinforces these ideas in his own work as inspired by Boethius helps to support my contention that these aspects of Christianity, such as free-will, and Fortuna’s role in that religion, did exist for medieval authors, especially Chaucer. The idea that there is free will in a fictional world, where many believed Fortuna to rule, is significant in regard to my research that there can be choices made by mortals regardless of fate, providence, or predestination.

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that Fortune is not just a brainless, wheel-spinning tyrant, but instead a captivating entity. Perhaps she demonstrates less than desirable behavior at times, but she is an entity who aids God in providing tests and obstacles for characters to use their free will for them to either overcome or subdue themselves. This is an important addition to previous existing research concerning Fortune, because there are no scholars who have written about Fortune being a test for

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<sup>44</sup> See Ida L. Gordon’s chapter “Ambiguity and Boethius” in *The Double Sorrow of Troilus: A Study of Ambiguities in ‘Troilus and Criseyde’* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) 24-60, especially 26. Chaucer is also noted to have translated fragmented pieces of *Roman de la Rose*, another text discussed later in this thesis.

<sup>45</sup> Gordon 26.



mortals. There is also little research demonstrating characters with free will in Chaucer's work or *Romance of the Rose*, since the question of the existence of free choice is ever constant in the studies of Fortune. In the following chapter, "Agents of Fortune," I will discuss how certain characters in Chaucer's texts, such as Walter in "The Clerk's Tale," Theseus in "The Knight's Tale," and Pandarus in *Troilus and Criseyde*, are used as a proxy for Fortune in order to exemplify her behavior and to offer choices to mortals. These characters are agents of Fortune and help to push her wheel in order to propel events forward. I will also connect Fortune to Christianity as demonstrated through symbolism in the texts. In the third chapter, "The Pursuit of Love and the Lack of Reason: Fortune's Control of Love Objects and Gifts," I concentrate on how love can be considered a gift from Fortune, which she uses to test mortal men to either choose reason or abandon it. If a man abandons reason, he is enslaved to the wheel for the remainder of his mortal life and is left to worship Fortune. The final chapter will include the conclusion and a synthesis of the ideas stated previously, while also discussing the new found perception of Fortune, as well as her significance not only to literature, but also individuals and our significance to her.

## CHAPTER 2

### AGENTS OF FORTUNE

Geoffrey Chaucer was no stranger to fortune and fame. He was born into a family of wine merchants, who by chance, gained higher status. He survived the Great Plague of 1348-1349, and knew his fair share of royals from his experience as a page, squire, customs collector and writer for the court.<sup>46</sup> Chaucer had his share of worldly goods, and quite possibly; this influenced his admiration for Boethius and his presentation of Fortune since it may have served as a warning for him to not become comfortable with Fortune's gifts. In Chaucer's works as well as others', Fortune showers various worldly favors upon man and taking them back as quickly as she gifts them. In many pieces of medieval literature, Fortune is described as a ruling lady of courtly affairs, and because of this she considers herself entitled to a queenly role, with the expectation of servants to help her.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, Chaucer depicts her as having servants who worship her and do her work, because each character (discussed later) is a cunning individual who manipulates others, while at the same time still allowing for them to maintain a choice. Keeping this in mind, I will demonstrate that Walter in "The Clerk's Tale," Theseus in "The Knight's Tale," and Pandarus in *Troilus and Criseyde* all represent Fortune's behavior and power and assist in pushing the wheel. Chaucer begins working with this idea in "The Clerk's Tale," with the character of Walter, which he further develops in "The Knight's Tale," with the

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<sup>46</sup> For further discussion of the history of Chaucer, see Robert Boenig, and Andrew Taylor's introduction to *The Canterbury Tales*. Ed. Robert Boenig and Andrew Taylor. (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2012) 9-38.

<sup>47</sup> Patch 33-87, especially 48.

character of Theseus. His depiction evolves even further in *Troilus and Criseyde*, in the character of Pandarus. The use of agents is an important concept associated with Fortune because, according to Daniel Heller-Roazen:

[Fortune] as the figure of instability, change and self-differentiation, cannot have a self-consistent form, Fortune is thus only ever present by virtue of another. [She is a] formless and speechless entity that has been transformed, through language of the text into a character with a determinate form and language.<sup>48</sup>

Fortuna's survival through Christianity allowed her to remain, but only with the sacrifice of her physical body. Now as a mere thought, she needs others to speak through. These three characters in Chaucer's texts who work as agents, all resemble Fortune through their yearning to dominate any situation and to play games with other people's lives.<sup>49</sup> These characters are also used as pawns to help move events forward in order to progress the outcomes of other characters.

To begin, it will be important to detail Fortuna's behavior and the concept of being high and low on her wheel, in order to fully understand why certain characters resemble her in power and behavior. Fortuna is meant to be a goddess who is inconsistent and ever changing:

In manner Fortune is naturally both kind and unkind; we hear of her placid face and her bland air, as well as of her stormy appearance and her truculent and threatening attitude. In character she is proud, subject to wrath, and consequently vindictive and malign. In effecting her will she is deceitful and dishonest. Does she ever feel shame or pity? She sometimes flatters, but she is in general such an envious creature.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See Daniel Heller-Roazen's chapter "Fortune, or the Contingent Figure" in *Fortune's Faces: The Roman de la Rose and the Poetics of Contingency* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003) 80-116, especially 86.

<sup>49</sup> Patch has noted that "Fortune enjoys exalting and debasing mankind as a game," 81.

<sup>50</sup> Patch 47-48.

This behavior of being both naturally kind and unkind helps to present Fortune, and the characters who help her, as a figure who indeed can place both favorable and unfavorable obstacles in mortal's life in order to move events forward. Fortune is most remembered for her fickleness and her ability to give and take away, thus placing others high and low on the wheel. Patch claims, perhaps based on Boethius's representation, "Her wheel cannot stop: she would cease to be Fortuna if she ceased to be changeable. Her moves are sudden and, of course, unexpected."<sup>51</sup> In *Consolation of Philosophy*, Lady Philosophy says, "If you are trying to stop [Fortune's] wheel from turning, you are of all men the most obtuse. For if it once begins to stop, it will no longer be the wheel of chance."<sup>52</sup> Fortune becomes a figure who cannot be interrupted, a structure in life one must deal with through prosperity or woe.

It is suggested that one can never escape Fortune's wheel unless they are dead,<sup>53</sup> but there are those who are lucky enough to stay outside of the wheel for the time being by aiding Fortune. Walter, Theseus, and Pandarus are all examples of this, seemingly because they never experience woe or any sort of suffering. They are always outside of punishment and seem to always be exhibiting enjoyment and prosperity even though they have no sense of reason. Although these characters are never punished, since Chaucer concludes his tales before this can happen, Boethius points out that Fortune "seduces with friendship the very people she is striving to cheat, until she overwhelms them with

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<sup>51</sup> Patch 50.

<sup>52</sup> Boethius Book II, Section I, 59.

<sup>53</sup> I am referring to the end of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, where Troilus looks down at the world and laughs, hinting that he has escaped the wheel while the others have not. V. 1820-1827.

unbearable grief at the suddenness of her desertion.”<sup>54</sup> These characters who abandon reason entirely for Fortune, will eventually continue to be subject to her and be farther from the enlightened path. The constant enjoyment of worldly possessions is a sign of constant dependency on Fortune. The greed for her gifts traps individuals in a vicious circle, a circle that ultimately becomes Fortuna’s wheel, and a contract of servitude to her.

#### “The Clerk’s Tale”

This servitude, the agency of Fortune, is first shown by the character Walter in “The Clerk’s Tale.” Walter is a character who has enjoyed worldly goods and the finest gifts Fortune has to offer. He is born into nobility, becomes a lord, and is considered, as Barbara Bartholomew says, “Fortune’s darling.”<sup>55</sup> Walter is following his many ancestors who have ruled before him. Walter is described as such a high lord that his noble subjects are ready to do what he asks obediently. Chaucer says, however, that Walter is beloved and yet feared, which resembles the oppositions of high and low and the ever changing behavior of Fortune: “Thus in delit he lyveth and hath doon yoore, / Biloved and drad thurgh favour of Fortune, / Bothe of his lordes and of his commune.”<sup>56</sup> Chaucer states outright that Walter is in his royal position because of Fortune, and the details credit Walter as a figure who “is noble, dashing, and attractive . . . but his virtues are of a

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<sup>54</sup> Boethius Book II, Section I, 57.

<sup>55</sup> Barbara Bartholomew, *Fortuna and Natura: a Reading of Three Chaucer Narratives* (Hague: Mouton, 1966) 60.

<sup>56</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Clerk’s Tale,” *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robert Boenig and Andrew Taylor (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview, 2012) 68-70.

worldly sort.”<sup>57</sup> Walter’s people fear him, and although he is said to be “ful of honour and of curteisye,”<sup>58</sup> the narrator comments that “in somme thynges he was to blame.”<sup>59</sup> This may seem like a minor phrase, but it is actually very important. Walter is meant to be an outlet for Fortune, as an agent and as a character who demonstrates her behavior, and as stated previously, Fortune gives and takes away. Walter is to blame for some things, just as Fortune would be when she gives out the fortune others don’t want. Walter is rumored to have positive and negative attributes because he is to be blamed for some things; this suggests the high and low of the wheel, and the positives and negatives of life. The narrator blames Walter for his selfishness because he only cares for the present, and will not take a wife to secure his kingdom’s future: “But in his lust present was al his thoght / as for to hauke and hunte on every syde.”<sup>60</sup> It is important to remember that Walter only cares about his happiness and his ability to be free from being “tied down” in marriage because he serves only Fortune and no one else: “Like Fortuna herself, Walter has no eye for past or future . . . he leaves the state to its own devices so that he may follow his own delightful but transitory pleasures.”<sup>61</sup> Walter’s eye for the present is a connection to Fortuna, which can be understood from Boethius’s explanation of fate’s role in God’s Providence: “If Providence sees something as present, it is necessary for it to happen, even though it has no necessity in its own nature. God sees those future events which happen of free will as present events . . .”<sup>62</sup> Walter’s choice to not think of the future is an

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<sup>57</sup> Bartholomew 60.

<sup>58</sup> Chaucer “The Clerk’s Tale” 74.

<sup>59</sup> Chaucer “The Clerk’s Tale” 76.

<sup>60</sup> Chaucer “The Clerk’s Tale” 80-81.

<sup>61</sup> Bartholomew 61.

<sup>62</sup> Boethius Book V. Section VI. Page 173.

indication of how proud he is in his behavior in wanting to be free, a behavior associated with Fortuna. Fortuna is often regarded to be “proud, subject to wrath, and consequently vindictive and malign.”<sup>63</sup> Walter’s eye for the present is perhaps a connection to how Fortuna would view current events as well, allowing for Fortune to act, such as in the opportunity for Walter’s subjects to approach him for the sake of the kingdom’s future.

Walter’s subjects have to go and see him in small groups to persuade him to get married. They kneel before him and thank him for deciding to get married for “their” sake. The text details how humble his servants are: “And they with humble entente buxomly / Knelynge upon hir knees ful reverently / Hym thonken alle ...”<sup>64</sup> Walter, of course, will not let anyone choose his wife for him. He must have mastery over the situation, and he gives his subjects guidelines which they have to follow in order for him to get married. He asks that they worship his wife like an emperor’s daughter for as long as her life endures:

“But I yow preye and charge upon youre lyf,  
 What wyf that I take ye me assure  
 To worshipe hire whil that hir lyf may dure  
 In word and werk bothe heere and everywhere  
 As she an emperoures doghter were.”<sup>65</sup>

Walter’s speech demonstrates a high level of mastery and control over those who look up to him, and his subjects are debased since they are kneeling at his feet; they are subject to his control, much like those who are at the mercy of Fortune. Walter’s subjects agree to allow their ruler to choose his own mate, and Walter makes an astonishing move. He

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<sup>63</sup> Patch 47.

<sup>64</sup> Chaucer “The Clerk’s Tale” 186-188.

<sup>65</sup> Chaucer “The Clerk’s Tale” 164-168.

chooses a peasant girl to marry, in this case acting more and more on Fortune's behalf by taking an impoverished woman and bestowing worldly riches upon her. Walter also makes Grisilde promise to obey him:

“I seye this: be ye redy with good herte  
To al my lust, and that I frely may,  
As me best thynketh, do yow laughe or smerte,  
And nevere ye to grucche it, nyght ne day.  
And eek whan I sey ye ne sey nat nay,  
Neither by word ne frowning contenance.  
Swere this, and heere I swere yow alliance.”<sup>66</sup>

Walter gives Grisilde a hefty number of guidelines she must follow if she chooses to marry him. He is domineering, presenting a strict set of commands, much like a governing ruler would, a ruler like Fortune. Walter even strips Grisilde of her old clothing and dresses her in new garments: “And for that nothyng of hir olde geere / She sholde brynge into his hous, he bad / That wommen sholde dispoillen hire right there.”<sup>67</sup> Walter provides the materials to dress her, but it is a group of women who are responsible for taking away her old clothes and dressing her in rich attire. The scene completely presents a reality where Fortune is present since Fortune is a woman who can take and give at will. Walter gives the command, like Fortune would, and it is the women who represent her, by providing the action and moving events forward. These riches that Walter supplies, he may be able to use against Grisilde to take them away and throw her to the bottom of the wheel at will.

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<sup>66</sup> Chaucer “The Clerk’s Tale” 351-357.

<sup>67</sup> Chaucer “The Clerk’s Tale” 372-374.



The marriage between Walter and Grisilde appears to be progressing happily for a little while, because Grisilde is fulfilling her duties as a wife and the people love her, but Walter isn't satisfied because he burns with the desire to test Grisilde:

This markys in his herte longeth so  
 To tempte his wyf, hir sadnesse for to knowe,  
 That he ne myghte out of his herte throwe  
 This merveillous desir his wyf t'assaye.  
 Nedelees, God woot, he thoghte hire for t'affraye.<sup>68</sup>

It is Walter's decision to try and test his wife, and he does so even though it is mentioned that "God knows" he is trying to frighten Grisilde. Although the term "God woot" in this passage can be a sign of emotion from the narrator, in light of the role of Fortune in this context, it can also be understood that God knows of the test that Walter is giving, since the duke is the agent of Fortune. Walter tests Grisilde to see if she will defy him once he takes away her baby daughter. Barbara Bartholomew interprets this scene as a moment of impulse: "For Walter, as for Fortuna, whim becomes reality in a flash: he, like her, is characterized by impulsive decisions and actions which result in disaster for those people under his control."<sup>69</sup> I disagree that this idea, which supposedly spontaneously sprouted from Walter's head, is at all a coincidence. This action has a purpose and it is to test Grisilde; to play a game with her, which Fortune enjoys, as does Walter.

This game is evident in the way that Walter takes it upon himself to remind Grisilde of how she was once from a poor estate and he was the one who granted her riches and higher status. He rubs her poverty in her face and lies to her that his people are

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<sup>68</sup> Chaucer "The Clerk's Tale" 451-455.

<sup>69</sup> Bartholomew 61.

the ones who want to take her daughter away. Like Fortuna, who is “deceitful and dishonest,”<sup>70</sup> Walter uses several methods to deceive Grisilde and push her to the edge of her emotions. He also uses the aid of another to help in this test. Like Fortuna, Walter has subjects to obey his will:

A maner sergeant was this privee man,  
 The which that feithful ofte he founden hadde  
 In thynges grete, and eek swich folk wel kan  
 Doon execucioun on thynges badde.  
 The lord knew wel that he hym loved and dradde,  
 And whan this sergeant wiste the lordes wille,  
 Into the chambre he stalked hym ful stille.”<sup>71</sup>

The sergeant is described as both fearing and loving Walter, demonstrating the exact relationship that Fortuna would have with those who serve her, possibly a clue to how Walter views her. The sergeant is an individual who performs certain tasks under sworn secrecy. Thus far, Walter has used others to do his physical work for him; he verbally gives the orders, but it is certain chosen individuals who perform the actions, reflecting Walter’s relationship to Fortune. She needs others to help her to push the wheel since she is bodiless, and Walter uses these same sorts of individuals to help propel events forward. The sergeant chooses to follow through with Walter’s test and he takes the child from Grisilde. It is important to pay close attention to Chaucer’s description of Grisilde as the sergeant is telling her about what he must do. Chaucer writes, “Grisildis moot al suffren and consente, / And as a lamb she sitteth meke and stille, / And leet this crueel sergeant doon his wille.”<sup>72</sup> Grisilde is compared to a lamb who must sit, still and silently, as the

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<sup>70</sup> Patch 47

<sup>71</sup> Chaucer “The Clerk’s Tale” 519-525.

<sup>72</sup> Chaucer “The Clerk’s Tale” 537-539.

sergeant sees Walter's will through. As mentioned in the introduction, Patch claims that Chaucer uses Fortune to show that she is "the shepherdess of us poor beasts,"<sup>73</sup> reiterating Boethius's idea of two conflicting forces working together in one, since God is most notably a Christian's shepherd. Grisilde must sit meekly at the trial before her as would a defenseless lamb.

Four years pass, and Grisilde gives birth to a male heir. The kingdom rejoices, but Walter is still not satisfied by Grisilde's performance and feels he must test her again: "This markys caughte yet another lest / To tempte his wyf yet ofter if he may. / O nedelees was she tempted in assay!"<sup>74</sup> Chaucer writes how Walter desires to tempt Grisilde more often than he had previously. Using the same tactics as before, he once more convinces Grisilde that his people want the second child killed, but he additionally adds that his people want him to marry another wife of nobility. Grisilde is again presented a test where her decision will propel events forward. She chooses to remain in that lamb-like state where she allows Walter to treat her cruelly:

"Right as yow list. Axeth no reed at me.  
For as I lefte at hoom al my clothyng  
Whan I first cam to you, right so," quod she,  
"Lefte I my wyl and al my libertee  
And took youre clothyng. Wherfore I yow preye,  
Dooth youre plesaunce. I wol youre lust obeye."<sup>75</sup>

Grisilde's speech is interesting because if we are to understand that Fortune is the one administering the test through Walter, Grisilde realizes it here. She mentions how she left her clothing, will and liberty at home and in return she took his clothing, his worldly

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<sup>73</sup> Patch 31.

<sup>74</sup> Chaucer "The Clerk's Tale" 619-621.

<sup>75</sup> Chaucer "The Clerk's Tale" 653-658.

gifts. In this realization, she claims that what he desires, another wife, she will obey because in return for her impoverished life, and more importantly, her free will, will be restored. Walter puts Grisilde at the bottom of the wheel when he takes her children, the riches, and her beautiful clothes away from her. It is ironic, however, that this bad fortune gives much more than good fortune.

Grisilde is allowed to keep her undergarments so that she will not be embarrassed to walk back to her old home, and it is important to pay attention to the fact that she strips herself. “Biforn the folk hirselves strepeth she. / And in hir smok with heed and foot al bare / Toward hir fader hous forth is she fare.”<sup>76</sup> It is through her independent action this time, and not Walter’s or any of his servants, that she surrenders her worldly goods. She decides to abandon these goods, demonstrating how unattached she was to them in the first place. Because of her acceptance of her adversity, Walter restores to her the children and her riches, bestowing gifts in a manner like Fortune. The women strip and dress her again, this time more willingly. The important passage, however, is Chaucer’s addition through the Clerk, to discuss how important it is for God to test individuals:

For, sith a womman was so pacient  
 Unto a mortal man, wel moore us oghte  
 Receyven al in gree that God us sent.  
 For greet skile is he preeve that he wroghte  
 But he ne tempeth no man that he boghte  
 As seith Seint Jame, if ye his pistel rede.  
 He preeveth folk al day — it is no drede —  
 And suffreth us as for oure excercise  
 With sharpe scourges of adversitee  
 Ful ofte to be bete in sondry wise,  
 Nat for to knowe oure wyl, for certes he,  
 Er we were born, knew oure freletee.

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<sup>76</sup> Chaucer “The Clerk’s Tale” 894-896.

And for oure beste is al his governaunce.  
 Lat us thanne lyve in vertuous suffraunce.<sup>77</sup>

Chaucer claims that it is normal and rather reasonable for God to test those whom he has created. Grisilde is used as an example of patience that mortals should exhibit towards God's trials, but it is Walter who is used as an embodiment of Fortune in order to demonstrate Fortune's ability to test mortal's strength of will and the creation of such trials.

#### "The Knight's Tale"

"The Clerk's Tale" presented Chaucer's least developed character as an agent of Fortuna. In "The Knight's Tale," the duke Theseus acts as the prime mover of Fortune's wheel, and becomes a more devious agent than Walter. Theseus is presented as an agent pushing Fortuna's wheel and is characterized to be rather fickle, much like his lady Fortune: "Theseus acts with unpredictable inconsistency, one moment harsh and despotic, the next instant merciful and clement."<sup>78</sup> Moreover, similar to Walter, he is described in the first few lines of the poem as someone of high power, much like Fortuna and her rule over humanity.

His achievements help depict a ruler who is very much favored by Fortune. As Patch says, "Fortuna is very much at home at court, so she deals particularly in royal favors, bestowing kingship, empire, and crown."<sup>79</sup> Theseus is noted to be such a great

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<sup>77</sup> Chaucer "The Clerk's Tale" 1149-1162.

<sup>78</sup> Bartholomew 77.

<sup>79</sup> Patch 59.

conqueror that there is no one else who can measure up to him and he even has conquered the land of the Amazons and won himself a new wife. The reader is first introduced to Theseus on his homecoming journey with his queen and new princess “with victorie and with melodye.”<sup>80</sup> He comes across women weeping who beg him for help. The women mention that Theseus is “Lord to whom fortune hath yeven / Victorie and as a conquerour to lyven.”<sup>81</sup> These women acknowledge that Theseus is indeed in Fortune’s good graces, and because of his prosperity and high rule, they ask that Theseus do them a favor. The women cry because they are not allowed to bury their husband’s bodies, since they were killed by enemy soldiers in Thebes. Although regaining the bodies is truly none of Theseus’s concern, he agrees to help. In deciding to try and capture the city and restore the bones to the wives, he is moving events forward in Thebes, a primary role of Fortuna. Theseus lays waste to Thebes, exhibiting his nature to control others around him and to always prosper above all others. He subjects others to the wheel by presenting an opportunity for a random battle that is truly none of his concern, but instead is used as a demonstration of his power to force others to accept his will.

Theseus pushes Fortune’s wheel once more when he decides to take two knights as prisoners without ransom: “And ful soone he hem sente / To Atthenes to dwellen in prisoun / Perpetuelly. He nolde no raunsoun.”<sup>82</sup> In the fourteenth century it was common to take prisoners and hold them for ransom,<sup>83</sup> but Theseus does not want any money.

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<sup>80</sup> Chaucer “The Knight’s Tale” 872.

<sup>81</sup> Chaucer “The Knight’s Tale” 915-916.

<sup>82</sup> Chaucer “The Knight’s Tale” 1022-1023.

<sup>83</sup> Chaucer “The Knight’s Tale” 3n. 65. “In the fourteenth century, the custom was to try to capture enemy soldiers in battle rather than kill them, for ransoming was profitable.”

Theseus chooses to throw the two soldiers, Arcite and Palamon, in prison to essentially rot away, but the reader is not told why. Theseus chooses to imprison these two men instead of gaining more worldly possessions because he wants to act as the main controller of their lives. If Theseus had slaughtered them, death would have been an escape from the wheel, but instead Theseus drops them to the bottom of the wheel by confining them to a prison. Having Theseus take away their freedom and send Arcite and Palamon to prison may also be Chaucer's way of connecting his tale to Boethius and his experience with Fortuna's treatment. Theseus pushes the wheel again and chooses to let Arcite go, but banishes him from Athens, leaving Palamon alone in his prison.

Theseus appears to be making decisions at random, but in reality his decisions are much more than chance. By choosing to let one prisoner go free and keep the other, he causes an incredible amount of conflict. Arcite makes his decision to sneak back into Athens under a new name and Theseus bestows riches upon him, believing he is a different man than the one he exiled. He makes him a squire, thus demonstrating the changing nature of Fortune and how she bestows gifts, especially in relation to the court:

Bothe of hise dedes and his goode tonge,  
That Theseus hath taken hym so neer  
That of his chambre he made hym a squier  
And gaf hym gold to mayntene his degree.<sup>84</sup>

Arcite is given a large sum of money and land, an opportunity to rejoice in an abundance of worldly gifts. Palamon, however, is noted to have suffered greatly for seven years without any gifts. "Forpyned, what for wo and for distresse. Who feeleth double soor and

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<sup>84</sup> Chaucer "The Knight's Tale" 1438-1441.

hevynesse.”<sup>85</sup> This prolonged period of suffering for Palamon is significant for the trials of Fortune. It is Palamon who survives at the end of the story and Arcite who dies in a rather brutal manner. It is possible that Palamon survives because he endured so long without Fortune’s gifts, whereas Arcite enjoyed in Fortune’s worldly gifts the longest and was the first to fall in order for Palamon to be brought high on the wheel. Another possible reasoning for Palamon’s success and Arcite’s failure is the decision prompted by Theseus’s building of three temples. Palamon chooses Venus and Arcite chooses Mars. A footnote about Palamon choosing Venus and voicing to her how she is “Thow gladere of the mount of Citheron,”<sup>86</sup> states that “Venus makes people glad because, in the old astrology, she, with Jupiter, is one of the two planets who uniformly bring good fortune. The two who bring bad luck are Saturn and Mars.”<sup>87</sup> Further in the tale, when Venus’s champion Palamon does not win, she cries to Saturn to do something so he will still come out as the victor. Saturn causes misfortune for Arcite, causing the earth to tremble. Saturn, coupled with Arcite’s choice of Mars is another reason for his fall, each reasoning dealing with the occurrence of fortune.

Arcite’s fall does not occur until after he and Palamon are reunited, when events are then triggered into faster motion. Once the two men are rejoined, they do not celebrate their comradery, but instead fight over their love for Theseus’s sister, Emelye. When Theseus approaches this scene, the women of the court cry to Theseus to do something, but not to kill the two knights. Theseus once more listens to them, and he

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<sup>85</sup> Chaucer “The Knight’s Tale” 1453-1454.

<sup>86</sup> Chaucer “The Knight’s Tale” 2223.

<sup>87</sup> Chaucer “The Knight’s Tale” 3n. 83.



comes up with a solution, or another test if you will. Theseus says that he speaks for his sister Emelye and decrees that the two men will fight for her in a tournament with a hundred knights each on their sides. He declares the one to win will be the one “to whom that Fortune yeveth so fair a grace.”<sup>88</sup> Theseus also says he will be the judge of the tournament, even though he had previously said whoever is in Fortune’s grace will win; this provides a clue that it is Fortune who will be the judge of the tournament through Theseus as her proxy.

Arcite is promised victory by Mars, and he gains it. Theseus maintains his role as judge and claims, “I wol be trewe juge and no partie. / Arcite of Thebes shal have Emelie, / That by his fortune hath hire faire ywonne,”<sup>89</sup> but those who are high on the wheel shall be low again and Arcite has enjoyed Fortune’s worldly gifts for too long. Arcite falls from his horse after taking off his helmet and parading around the arena in a victory march, boasting in his pride, and later dies of his wounds, which were indirectly the result of Theseus’s involvement in the affair to begin with. Egeus, Theseus’s father, consoles those who weep over Arcite with a philosophical reflection of Fortune’s wheel turning: “As he hadde seyn it up and down / Joye after wo and wo after gladnesse / And shewed hem ensamples and liknesse.”<sup>90</sup> He counsels other characters that life is full of sorrow and the world will turn from joy to woe in an instant, in language reminiscent of the turning of the wheel:

“Right so ther lyvede never man, he seyde,  
In al this world that somtyme he ne deyde.

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<sup>88</sup> Chaucer “The Knight’s Tale” 1861.

<sup>89</sup> Chaucer “The Knight’s Tale” 2657-2659.

<sup>90</sup> Chaucer “The Knight’s Tale” 2840-2842.

This world nys but a thurghfare ful of wo,  
 And we been pilgrymes passynge to and fro.  
 Deeth is an ende of every worldes soore.”<sup>91</sup>

The significance of Egeus’s speech is that the world will always be full of woe and not one person who lived on earth will escape death, since it is what the end of life’s journey brings. Every individual is a pilgrim on this journey, who will always pass through joy and woe. Chaucer’s addition of this speech does not only depict what life brings, but it is also used to show how the world works in relation to Fortune’s presence. Margaret Hallissy elaborates, “Egeus clearly has the image of Fortune’s wheel in mind when he talks of ‘this world’s transmutation.’ The old, like Egeus, have experienced mutability, having seen the world [change] ... Given the impossibility of lasting joy, the inevitability of woe, all must accept their own transitoriness.”<sup>92</sup> No matter what, man will continuously be either on the top or the bottom of Fortune’s wheel and will only be able to escape from this when he greets death. Chaucer’s characters in “The Knight’s Tale” demonstrate that Fortune’s agents, like Theseus, are the handlers of man’s fate, through Fortune as ultimate overseer, as they set events into motion by their constant involvement in the worldly concerns of others.

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<sup>91</sup> Chaucer “The Knight’s Tale” 2845-2849.

<sup>92</sup> See Margaret Hallissy’s chapter “The Knight’s Tale” in *A Companion to Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995) 55-74, especially 71.

*Troilus and Criseyde*

Chaucer continues his development of Fortune's agents in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Yet again we see another character who aids in turning her wheel and becomes the voice of Fortune. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Pandarus becomes this voice because "Fortune appears in the text as a creature who, in the absence of any fixed and proper shape, must mechanically construct and assume whatever form she appears to have."<sup>93</sup> More evidence for Pandarus becoming Fortune's agent comes from his demonstration of behavior characteristic of Fortune, especially since he seems to have a personality that is ever changing: "[Fortune] goes along changing her style, or turning her face like a weathercock."<sup>94</sup> Fortune presents both joy and woe at quick intervals. Pandarus is one who reflects this type of behavior throughout the poem because he will appear to be helpful and kind, but the next moment he will appear sly and deceitful. In so doing, he resembles Fortune, who, as J. Allan Mitchell says, "propels the narrative forward—the story of love won and lost is roughly analogous to a revolution of the Wheel of Fortune."<sup>95</sup>

Pandarus further reflects Fortune in his interest in Troilus's sorrowful attitude because he is love-sick from the sight of Criseyde. Pandarus comes into Troilus's chamber unexpectedly and questions whether Troilus is wallowing in remorse for a sin committed:

"Or hastow som remors of conscience,  
And art now falle in som devocioun,

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<sup>93</sup> Heller-Roazen 87.

<sup>94</sup> Patch 49.

<sup>95</sup> J. Allan Mitchell, "Romancing Ethics in Boethius, Chaucer, And Levinas: Fortune, Moral Luck And Erotic Adventure," *Comparative Literature* 57.2 (2005) 101.

And wailest for thi synne and thin offence,  
And hast for ferde caught attricioun?"<sup>96</sup>

This passage is important because of Chaucer's transformation of Fortune through Christianity. If we are to understand that through the inspiration of Boethius and Christianity, Fortune serves as a servant of God in medieval literature, then Pandarus's interest in whether or not Troilus is repentant for fear of damnation instead of love for God is important. Fortune would be interested in the prospect of sin or virtue because this creates an outlet that is much easier for her to tempt individuals to climb on her wheel.

Pandarus tempts Troilus by trying to anger him, in order to make him admit whether he is repenting from sin in fear, but Troilus instead goes into a discussion about Fortuna. Troilus converses with Pandarus about the ill will of Fortune and how she has become his foe. He notes her cruel wheel and that, as Fortune pleases, she plays with wealthy people and slaves, no matter what their status.<sup>97</sup> Pandarus comforts him, telling him that Fortune's treatment is common to everyone, reflecting Egeus's speech in "The Knight's Tale":

... "Than blamestow Fortune  
For thow art wroth; ye, now at erst I see.  
Woost thow nat wel that Fortune is comune  
To everi manere wight in som degree?  
And yet thow has this comfort, lo, parde,  
That, as hire joies moten overgon,  
So mote hire sorwes passen everechon.  
For if hire whiel stynte any thyng to torne,  
Than cessed she Fortune anon to be.  
Now, sith hire whiel by no way may sojourne,  
What woostow if hire mutabilite

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<sup>96</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer and Giovanni Boccaccio, *Troilus and Criseyde with facing page Il Filostrato / Authoritative Texts/ The Testament of Cresseid / by Robert Henryson / Criticism*, ed. Stephen A. Barney (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006) I. 554-557.

<sup>97</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 837-840.

Right as thyselven list wol don by the,  
Or that she be naught fer fro thyn helpynge?”<sup>98</sup>

Pandarus’s discussion of Fortune holds the same types of philosophical wisdom that Egeus presented to Theseus, but Pandarus is not a philosopher, nor is he old enough to have witnessed the world’s changing in the same way Egeus did. This speech suggests that Fortune is speaking through Pandarus because she would know of the changeability of the world and the impossibility of her wheel stopping. This speech is also very different from the wisdom of Egeus, because while Pandarus at first talks of the comfort one feels when they realize that Fortune’s infliction of sorrow can only last so long, he ends his speech by saying how Fortune may also be able to help Troilus. Pandarus is setting up his test for Troilus by offering the prospect of trusting Fortune to help him in the situation he is in. Trusting in Fortune was seen to be an incredible mistake because “Fortuna is deceitful, there is probably no faith in her; he is a fool who trusts in her.”<sup>99</sup> Troilus trusts Pandarus, a mistake since he is the agent of Fortune, and confesses why he is suffering so profusely. When Troilus tells Pandarus about his affection for Criseyde, Pandarus says, “A ha! .... Here bygynneth game,”<sup>100</sup> a rather curious manner of reaction to a love confession. This triumphant expression is added by Chaucer because Fortune is known for getting the utmost enjoyment out of playing games with humans.<sup>101</sup> This game that Pandarus is so happy about is an opportunity for him to really push events into motion. He tells Troilus that he will help him, and Troilus gives his thanks to Pandarus,

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<sup>98</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 841-853.

<sup>99</sup> Patch 50.

<sup>100</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 868.

<sup>101</sup> Patch 81.

wishing to repay him in the future. Troilus unknowingly trusts in Fortune through Pandarus and is now confined to the wheel's drastic turning.

Criseyde also makes this same decision and trusts in Pandarus. He is described as a figure whom she loves and trusts the most: "But for the love of God I yow biseche, / As ye ben he that I love moost and triste."<sup>102</sup> Since he is a person in whom she puts all her faith, she is a person who may be easier to tempt in the wrong direction. This trust she has for Pandarus permeates her mind and reaches into her dreams. She tells of how she has dreamed of Pandarus three times the night before meeting him that day. The significance of the number three reaches into the Christian religion and is important in Criseyde's dream of Pandarus. Chaucer does not include this number without any reasoning behind it. In Christian tradition, the number three serves for many important meanings: one is that the number usually indicates some sort of importance in God's plan of salvation; second is the holy trinity, three being the number associated with the Holy Ghost; and lastly the number three is connected to time through past, present, and future. Any one of these can be attributed to Criseyde's dream, but I believe that her dream suggests the significance of time, a subject discussed by Lady Philosophy in *Consolation of Philosophy*. She explains to Boethius how fate worked in relation to time: "Fate is the ever-changing web, the disposition in and through time of all the events which God has planned in His simplicity."<sup>103</sup> Criseyde dreaming of Pandarus the night before she meets him demonstrates his connection to Fortune through the unfolding of events and trials.

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<sup>102</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* II. 246-247.

<sup>103</sup> Boethius Book IV, Section VI, 142.

Pandarus's connection to Fortune is presented once more when Chaucer includes a crucial moment in the second book where Fortune's wheel depends on a single decision. Pandarus is working through his mind for the best way to convince Criseyde to acknowledge Troilus's existence and talk to him. By her acknowledging Troilus, events would be set into motion. Chaucer writes that Pandarus thinks of the best way to compose his tale of Troilus's love for her, but he is concerned about making his tale too long because she might start to suspect that he is trying to deceive her:

Than thought he thus: "If I my tale endite  
 Aught harde, or make a proces any whye,  
 She shal no savour have therin but lite,  
 And trowe I wolde hire in my wil bigyle,  
 For tendre wittes wenen al be wyle  
 Theras thei kan nought pleynly understonde;  
 Forthi hire wit to serven wol I fonde."<sup>104</sup>

Pandarus is doing his best to find the most effective method of deceiving Criseyde, a behavior that is very much relatable to Fortune. Patch details Fortune's behavior to be "deceitful and dishonest" in effecting her will.<sup>105</sup> Fortune will do whatever must be done to test mankind, and Pandarus uses this same tactical method.

He builds up Troilus by mentioning how Troilus is a second Hector, "alle trouthe and alle gentillesse, / Wisdom, honour, freedom, and worthinesse."<sup>106</sup> Pandarus hopes that Criseyde will be impressed and consider talking to Troilus, but Criseyde does not fully accept this. Pandarus, therefore, has to find another way to push the wheel into motion.

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<sup>104</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* II. 267-273.

<sup>105</sup> Patch 47.

<sup>106</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* II. 160-161.

Pandarus tries to make Criseyde feel guilty so she will allow Troilus to pursue her by telling her that he will die, and Troilus as well, if she doesn't talk to him:

“Doth what yow lest to make hym lyve or deye.  
 But if ye late hym deyen, I wole sterve  
 Have here my trouthe, nece, I nyl nat lyen  
 Al sholde I with this knyf my throte kerve.”  
 With that the teris breste out of his yen,  
 And seide, “If that ye don us bothe dyen  
 Thus gilteles, than have ye fisshed fayre!  
 What mende ye, though that we booth apparire?”<sup>107</sup>

Pandarus tells Criseyde to do what she wishes, to let Troilus either live or die, but she must know that if Troilus dies, so will Pandarus. He claims he will have to cut his own throat with a knife and cries in front of her. In this passage we are allowed to see Pandarus changing personalities, like Fortune, in order to get his way in effecting his will to push events into motion. He appears at first kind and happy in building up Troilus, and then he is cold and manipulative in detailing how Criseyde will be responsible for two deaths. Criseyde is unsure of what to do, but as luck, or Fortune, would have it, after Pandarus takes his leave, Troilus rides by her window in all his heroic glory:

With that com he and al his folk anoon  
 An esy pas rydyng, in routes tweyne,  
 Right as his happy day was, sooth to seyne,  
 For which, men seyn, may nought destourbed be  
 That shal bityden of necessitee.  
 This Troilus sat on his baye steede  
 Al armed, save his hed, ful richely<sup>108</sup>

Here the reader is given a description of how richly Troilus is decorated, a sign that these are Fortune's gifts. He rides by slowly, and Chaucer writes that it is Troilus's lucky day.

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<sup>107</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* II. 322-329.

<sup>108</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* II. 619-625.



Jill Mann claims, “This first encounter is dictated by nothing more than chance; Chaucer makes this clear by using the adjective ‘happy,’ whose root is the noun ‘hap’ meaning ‘chance.’ As Chaucer presents it, Troilus’s riding past the window at that particular moment is nothing more than a “piece of good luck.”<sup>109</sup> This piece of good luck, or chance, is more significant than Mann acknowledges. Fortune intervenes to complete what Pandarus has begun, in order to move events forward at a quicker pace. This event causes Criseyde to be overcome with such desire for Troilus that she exclaims, “Who yaf me drynke?”<sup>110</sup> The sight of him dressed so richly has caused her to feel as if she has swallowed a love potion. However, this is still not enough for her to come to a decision to talk to Troilus, but she considers how it would be a waste to slay him if his intentions toward her are indeed true.

Fortune creates the first window scene, and then it is created a second time through Pandarus, when he convinces Troilus to write Criseyde a love letter. He tells Troilus to do as he says and he will go with it, demonstrating that Pandarus will help in moving events forward. Pandarus struggles with pushing the wheel when he encounters Criseyde again. The two meet in the garden to discuss the letter, but she does not take it from him. It is important to pay attention to this scene because of where it takes place and the wording of the passage:

“Into the gardyn go we, and ye shal here,  
 Al pryvely, of this a long sermoun.”  
 With that they wenten arm in arm yfeere

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<sup>109</sup> See Jill Mann’s chapter “Chance and Destiny in Troilus and Criseyde and the Knight’s Tale” in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Piero Boitani (New York.: Cambridge UP, 2003) 93-111, especially 95.

<sup>110</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* II. 651.

Into the gardyn from the chaumbre down;  
 And whan that he so fer was that the sown  
 Of that he spak no man heren myghte,  
 He seyde hire thus, and out the lettre plighte.<sup>111</sup>

Fortuna is sometimes depicted as a serpent,<sup>112</sup> and the fact that it is Pandarus who is in the garden with Criseyde, attempting to persuade her to take the letter (one that will fill her head with the knowledge of Troilus's affection), is no coincidence. Here Pandarus resembles the serpent, a nod from Chaucer to Christianity since the serpent is also a representation of Satan with Eve. In this garden, Pandarus forcefully makes Criseyde take the letter, since she will not accept it from him. She reads the letter, but still does not follow through with any course of action. She only muses over her emotions in her mind.

At this point, Pandarus has plotted to duplicate the window scene that happened previously. This is evident in the fact that he draws Criseyde to the window to look at a neighbor's decorated house: "Nece, who hath araied thus / The yonder hous, that stant aforyeyn us?"<sup>113</sup> This simple and rather empty question is enough to summon Criseyde to the window, where they then sit and fall into a deep conversation:

And right as they declamed this matere,  
 Lo, Troilus, right at the stretes ende,  
 Com rydyng with his tenthe som yfere,  
 Al softly, and thiderward gan bende  
 Ther as they sete, as was his way to wende  
 To paleis-ward; and Pandare hym aspide,  
 And seyde, "Nece, ysee who comth here ride!  
 O fle naught in (he seeth us, I suppose),  
 Lest he may thynken that ye hym eschuwe."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* II. 1114-1117.

<sup>112</sup> Patch 52.

<sup>113</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* II. 1188-1189.

<sup>114</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* II. 1247-1255.

This scene further depicts Pandarus and his manipulation of Criseyde in order to push her to submit to Troilus. Mann suggests that “In doubling the window-scenes, Chaucer is emphasizing chance as the crucially important determinant in the course of the love-affair.”<sup>115</sup> Troilus rides past the window on horseback, dressed gallantly, tempting Criseyde into believing that Troilus is always this glamorous. With this esteemed vision of Troilus, Criseyde has the opportunity to look at him as an idol, one who deserves undivided devotion. Criseyde attempts to flee from the sight of him, perhaps as a means to save herself, but Pandarus stops her by admitting that Troilus must have seen them. He claims that if she flees now, it will surely insult Troilus. Pandarus convinces her to stay and Troilus looks up from the street:

With that he gan hire humbly to saluwe  
 With dredful chere, and oft his hewes muwe;  
 And up his look debonairly he caste,  
 And bekked on Pandare, and forth he paste.<sup>116</sup>

Troilus salutes Criseyde humbly and casts a look up at Pandarus with a nod as he passes. This scene can be interpreted that Troilus’s gaze is directed upwards because the wheel is turning in his favor, casting him up in what he presumes is good fortune. The significance of this scene is the reoccurring theme of up and down, resembling Fortune’s wheel. Criseyde stares down at Troilus, not that she is subjected to the bottom of Fortune’s wheel yet, but because affiliation with Troilus most certainly will lead to her being cast down eventually. This scene also offers a possible analysis that Troilus is looking up and nodding at Pandarus because he is acknowledging Pandarus and the help he is offering

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<sup>115</sup> Mann 95.

<sup>116</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* II. 1257-1260.

him. Pandarus previously told Troilus that it is possible Fortune would help him, and Fortune most notably resides in dealings with the court, so this is Troilus recognizing this assistance and the boosting of his fortune. Here, although Troilus is a prince, he is not the one being observed from a lowered perspective; rather his attention is directed towards Pandarus as if he is a servant instead of a prince. Pandarus becomes a figure of high esteem in Troilus's eyes, embodying Fortune and her affairs with royalty, prompted to push the wheel based on the love affair.

The doubling of the window scene works drastically in Pandarus's favor because Criseyde becomes even more impressed by the presentation of Troilus: "Criseyde, which that alle thise thynges say, / To telle in short, hire liked al in-fere / His persoun, his aray his look, his chere."<sup>117</sup> She begins to like everything about Troilus, from the way he looks to his good manners and noble nature, but it is still not enough for her to choose to pursue him, only to respond to his letter. Pandarus must once more attempt to manipulate others around him in order to push the wheel. He comes up with an opportunity to push the lovers into another interaction.

Pandarus suggests that Troilus go to his brother's home and feign sickness. In turn, Criseyde will be invited over to dine with them and will be asked to go and speak to Troilus, as an attempt to soothe his aching heart and his illness. This passage details another of Pandarus's schemes to manipulate figures around him, and Troilus accepts the proposition if it means that Criseyde may at last be his. Pandarus tells Troilus in the last

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<sup>117</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* II. 1265-1267.

line of the passage for him to lie down and await his fortune, or “aventure.”<sup>118</sup>

“Aventure” suggests a form of chance, but Troilus awaiting “aventure” is ironic because Pandarus is the one who is clearly manipulating the entire ordeal.

This addition furthermore reflects how much Troilus’s life has come to depend on Fortuna, in the form of Pandarus, since the beginning of the tale. He depends on Pandarus, not God, to do everything in his power in order for any event to move forward. If Pandarus/Fortune had never appeared before Troilus, he might still be suffering from love-sickness in his chamber. Troilus now must lie back and await his fortune, proving that he has become completely subject to Fortune’s rule, now lost in servitude towards her. Criseyde, however, still makes her own decisions, but she continues to be manipulated. Pandarus is described as leading Criseyde into the room where Troilus is pretending to be sick: “And Pandarus, that ledde hire by the lappe, / Com ner, and gan in at the curtyn pike.”<sup>119</sup> Pandarus is again acting as a shepherd, leading the lamb, and pushing events into motion by attempting to manipulate Criseyde into feeling sorry for Troilus. He hopes her sympathy will turn to devotion if she is prompted with immense guilt:

And Pandare wep as he to water wolde,  
 And poked evere his nece new and newe,  
 And seyde, “Wo bygone ben hertes trewe!  
 For love of God, make of this thing an ende,  
 Or sle us both at one er ye wende.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* II. 1519.

<sup>119</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* III. 59-60.

<sup>120</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* III. 115-119.

Pandarus claims that Criseyde should end the aching hearts of both Troilus and himself, if only for the love of God. His continuous onslaughts of manipulation begin to take their toll on Criseyde, and she finally decides to let Troilus serve her: “Myn honour sauf, I wol wel trewely, / And in swich forme as he gan now devyse, / Receyven hym fully to my servyse.”<sup>121</sup> Criseyde finally allows Troilus to be involved in some part of her life, and Pandarus tells Troilus it is through his might and his wit that he has brought him joy out of distress, reinforcing the reoccurring theme of high and low: “That I, with al my myght and al my loore, / Have evere sithen don my bisynesse / To brynge the to joye out of distresse.”<sup>122</sup> Fortune’s role is to constantly give and take away to maintain the high and low balance, otherwise she ceases to be anything other than distant history,<sup>123</sup> and because of this Pandarus continues his quest to turn the wheel by attempting to close any gap between the lovers.

Criseyde is invited to stay with Pandarus, and rather curiously, rain prevents her from leaving. Chaucer explains that the rain occurs because of Fortuna, but he writes that it is Fortuna, who under God, is our shepherd and that the beasts are not to know the hidden causes for the occurrence of events:

But O Fortune, executrices of wierdes,  
 O influences of this hevenes hye!  
 Soth is, that under God ye ben oure hierdes,  
 Though to us bestes ben the causez wrie.  
 This mene I now: for she gan homeward hye,  
 But execut was al bisyde hir leve  
 The goddess wil, for which she most bleve.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* III. 159-161.

<sup>122</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* III. 243-245.

<sup>123</sup> Patch 36.

<sup>124</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* III. 617-623.

Fortune is noted to have influence over the high heavens, perhaps because from the sky comes rain at her request. This passage presents the coexistence of Fortune and God, and the question of how much power Chaucer assigns to Fortune. The text details that as beasts, mortals are not to know of the greater plan, but this exact paragraph depicts the possibility that in certain circumstances when the wheel is needed to turn, Fortune may have influence over the Heavens to help events move more quickly, without the assistance of God. God, however, would have desired for Criseyde to remain chaste, especially in her widowhood, but yet Criseyde is made to remain on the property by the aid of Fortune.

Criseyde is made to stay by the will of a higher power for a distinct purpose, and that is for Troilus to obtain what he desires, so in the end he may be dropped to the bottom of the wheel. Pandarus gives Criseyde a room to stay in and he allows Troilus to sneak into the room so he can be alone with Criseyde, though she knows nothing of their plans:

“Now stant it thus, that sith I fro yow wente,  
 This Troilus, right platly for to seyn,  
 Is through a goter, by a pryve wente,  
 Into my chambre come in al this reyn.”<sup>125</sup>

Stephen A Barney claims that Troilus’s method of entry is most likely an invention of Pandarus’s.<sup>126</sup> This invention reiterates the need to push events into motion. Pandarus continues to maintain control of every situation, even through extreme measures such as

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<sup>125</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* III. 785-788.

<sup>126</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* 177n. The footnote reads: “Has through a gutter (perhaps an eavestrough), by a secret passage or perhaps, by a sewer passage, if the stewe is a bathroom. In any case Troilus’s method of entry seems to be Pandarus’s invention.”

hiding Troilus and allowing his passage into his niece's room. He lies and deceives Criseyde with the invention of a rumored lover, claiming Troilus has appeared through the rain to hear of her heart's intention.<sup>127</sup> Pandarus is beginning not only to push events, but he is starting to drive Troilus even further now by stripping off his clothes in order to, rather violently, force the two lovers together:

For this or that, he into bed hym caste,  
And seyde, "O thef, is this a mannes herte?"  
And of he rente al to his bare sherte,  
And seyde, "Nece, but ye helpe us now,  
Allas, youre owen Troilus is lorn."<sup>128</sup>

This passage reflects the stripping away of goods, as demonstrated previously in "The Clerk's Tale." For Troilus, however, the stripping of his clothes does not appear to be bad fortune. Instead, the scene appears to be working out in his favor because he is near Criseyde and he is gaining the opportunity to become closer with her. However, it is good fortune which deceives and bad fortune which enlightens an individual. Neither Troilus nor Criseyde can see that Pandarus is pushing them together to consummate their relationship. Pandarus has to strip off Troilus's clothing in order to move events further into motion, tempting them. The two decide to experience and feel the fullness of love, "I kan namore, but thus thise ilke tweye / That nyght, bitwixen drede and sikernesse, / Felten in love the grete worthynesse."<sup>129</sup> The couple is portrayed as feeling love in all its worthiness and Troilus is in complete bliss because he has Criseyde. Pandarus's

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<sup>127</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* III. 794-812.

<sup>128</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* III. 1097-1101.

<sup>129</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* III. 1314-1315.



manipulation of the two lovers promotes events to move into action, and is the primary reason for why Troilus falls.

It appears to the reader that Troilus is experiencing everything good fortune has to offer, but, similar to Arcite in “The Knight’s Tale,” those who are at the top must fall down again. Fortune is claimed to “[be] particularly noted for separating lovers.”<sup>130</sup> It is Pandarus who warns Troilus that joy hangs by a thread: “For worldly joie halt nought but by a wir’/ That preveth wel, it brest al day so ofte; / Forthi need is to werken with it soft.”<sup>131</sup> Pandarus is warning the young lover not to celebrate in his joy for too long because it can be taken away very quickly. He recounts to Troilus the dangers of being too comfortable with worldly happiness and if he becomes too rash, it will certainly ruin him. It is Pandarus, once again, who offers philosophical advice to Troilus, but his affiliation with Fortune is the cause of his knowledge; it is not the wisdom obtained through aging, but through his assistance in turning the wheel and his role as an agent of Fortune. Pandarus’s advice is not heeded by Troilus, and his predictions about the fall of Troilus become true when Fortune knocks him to the bottom of the wheel:

From Troilus [Fortune] gan hire brighte face  
Awey to writhe, and tok of hym non heede,  
But caste hym clene out of his lady grace,  
And on hire whiel she sette up Diomed.<sup>132</sup>

When Criseyde is traded to the Greeks she gains the opportunity to be free from manipulation, much like when Grisilde returns to her farm. Criseyde chooses to become friends with Diomed, and then more than that, thus raising him to the top of Fortune’s

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<sup>130</sup> Patch 96.

<sup>131</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* III. 1636-1638.

<sup>132</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* IV. 8-11.

wheel and replacing Troilus. Troilus chooses to not make his relationship with Criseyde public, and then complains about being cast away from Fortune's grace and wonders why he has offended her so. Troilus states, "Have I the nought honoured al my lyve, / As thow wel woost, above the goddess alle?"<sup>133</sup> Troilus suffers from feeling abandoned by Fortune and Criseyde. At this time, he curses those around him and chooses to continue to pursue worldly affairs. Pandarus tries to persuade Criseyde to return to Troilus, but she will not leave. His countenance changes towards her rapidly. At one moment he is kind and appears to be worried about the love affair, and the next he is malignant and shows anger in front of Troilus for her lack of obedience: "What sholde I seyen? I hate, ywys, Criseyde; / And, God woot, I wol hate hire evermore!"<sup>134</sup> Pandarus reflects Fortune again with his changing of personality and his anger towards Criseyde. By choosing Diomedes, she is turning from Troilus and is allowing him to fend for himself. As Fortune's agent, Pandarus escapes any harm; Criseyde as well escapes from harm only after she is in the Greek camp and is away from Pandarus and his manipulation.

It is through his death, however, that Troilus is finally to escape from the wheel that Pandarus was so skilled at turning:

But weilawey, save only Goddes wille,  
 Despitously hym slough the fierse Achille.  
 And whan that he was slayn in this manere,  
 His lighte goost ful blissfully is went  
 Up to the holughnesse of the eighthe spere,  
 .....  
 That is in hevene above; and at the laste,  
 Ther he was slayn his loking down he caste,  
 And in hymself he lough right at the wo

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<sup>133</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* IV. 267-268.

<sup>134</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* V. 1732-1733.

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.<sup>135</sup>

Despite loving and having Criseyde, it is only after his death that Troilus experiences true bliss through his separation from earthly concerns. Robert Costomiris argues that “Troilus dies lashing out against Criseyde’s infidelity. Only in death does Troilus understand his earthly folly, which the last part of Book Five makes clear through the poem’s condemnation of earthly love.”<sup>136</sup> Through his death he is able to curse worldly possessions and is finally allowed to truly see how his actions and worship of Fortune had been foolish. His actions helped Pandarus to turn the wheel in order for Troilus to finally meet his end, a redemption through death’s suffering. Troilus mocks those who mourn over his death because it is here that realizes that he has filled his life with trifles, at Pandarus’s urging. Fortune all at once had turned from him, casting him down, but in the end despite his bad fortune, he was allowed to be enlightened in Heaven.

Fortune’s behavior is said to be sudden and always changeable, as Patch notes: “Fortuna ceaselessly changes her aspect and turns the tide of mankind.”<sup>137</sup> The goddess, as presented in Chaucer’s works changes the tides of man’s destiny through the creation of obstacles and opportunities for human action. Through these trials Fortune presents, she is bodiless to restrict her power, but she maintains this sort of power through servants who aid in the turning of the wheel. The characters, Walter in “The Clerk’s Tale,” Theseus in “The Knight’s Tale,” and Pandarus in *Troilus and Criseyde* each demonstrate

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<sup>135</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* V. 1805-1809, 1819-1824.

<sup>136</sup> Robert Costomiris, “Criseyde’s Swoon and the Experience of Love in Troilus and Criseyde,” *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 65.4 (2013: 248-266, especially 250-251.

<sup>137</sup> Patch 50

a resemblance to Fortuna's behavior and the ability to manipulate others. The role of chance in these individuals' lives becomes much more than just a piece of good or bad luck. Chaucer's Fortune becomes a shepherdess who helps usher chosen individuals toward their anointed paths, deciding ultimately what happens to them.

## CHAPTER 3

## THE PURSUIT OF LOVE AND THE LACK OF REASON:

## FORTUNA'S CONTROL OF LOVE OBJECTS AND GIFTS

In Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's text, *The Romance of the Rose*, as well as Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, the quest for love is a dire one for the main character in his pursuit of his love object. In *Romance*, the Lover falls in love by seeing a rose reflected in the pool of Narcissus. Once he does so, the Lover's desire permeates his mind and dulls all sense of reason. Lady Reason attempts to persuade him back by detailing the different types of love, and she warns him that the love that he is experiencing is the love that comes from Fortune because it is "diseased with the covetous desire for gain."<sup>138</sup> Fortune is infamous for withholding, bestowing and repossessing gifts, and mortals become desperate for the opportunity to gain what is not theirs. Since Fortune dominates Reason's discussion of love, I believe that love is one of the gifts that Fortune can give, and as such, the love relationship becomes the wheel of Fortune for the Lover. This gift of love that is fueled by desire leads to the abandonment of reason, and once abandoned, Fortune turns her wheel based on that person's actions, as represented by the fates of the Lover and Troilus, respectively. Reason is considered a virtue and is associated with the Christian God, especially in *Romance*, since Lady Reason is said to be His daughter, so the abandonment of reason ultimately means that an

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<sup>138</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Frances Horgan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1944) 73.

individual will turn away from God. The relationship love brings serves as the wheel of Fortune, and these characters are not on the wheel until they freely make errors for love. Fortune tempts individuals with the promise of love, and once the promise is accepted, the individual is trapped to her wheel during the pursuit of the relationship. Fortune deals primarily with love because she herself behaves like a jealous lover who offers these “gifts” of love to men as a sort of test so they will either choose the enlightened path towards God, or make errors in reason and become trapped on her wheel, worshipping her, and fueling her existence.

The skills of reasoning are an important attribute for humans, especially in relation to their interactions with Fortune. Boethius made it very clear in the *Consolation of Philosophy* that those who have no reasoning left are considered less than mortal beings. Reason is held in the highest regard by Boethius, and is associated with God as made clear by Boethius, Guillaume de Lorris, and Jean de Meun. This relationship and affiliation with God may mean that reason is a virtue because of the purity God maintains. Boethius believed that once mortals began to descend away from reason, they wandered away from God and became less free:

“Human souls are of necessity more free when they continue in the contemplation of the mind of God and less free when they descend to bodies, and less still when they are imprisoned in earthly flesh and blood. They reach an extremity of enslavement when they give themselves up to wickedness and lose possession of their proper reason. Once they have turned their eyes away from the light of truth above to things on a lower and dimmer level, they are soon darkened by the mists of ignorance. Destructive passions torment them, and by yielding and giving in to them, they only aid the slavery they have brought upon themselves and become in a manner prisoners of their own freedom.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Boethius. Book V, Section II, 156.

Once men begin to lose their sense of reason, they become slaves to Fortune and her wheel. They still maintain free will, but their decisions are what enslave them because they choose the incorrect path away from God. By choosing this path, the individual becomes more constricted and controlled by Fortune and eventually lose their free will.

Since Boethius's writing was a significant part of the foundation for the transformation of Fortune, in Christian society, I believe that this idea of humans choosing to enslave themselves to Fortune's wheel is what Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, as well as Chaucer, had in mind for their characters in relation to love. Boethius mentions how passion torments individuals into surrendering to their baser selves and adds to their slavery. As one manifestation of passion, carnal love debases a man, causing him to act from impulse instead of reason. Boethius also comments on this sort of behavior by stating, "A man wallowing in foul and impure lusts is occupied by the filthy pleasures of a sow. So what happens is that when a man abandons goodness and ceases to be human, being unable to rise to a divine condition, he sinks to the level of being an animal."<sup>140</sup> In the Christian religion, animals do not have a soul, so they have no opportunity for redemption. By acting on animalistic passions, a man will choose to look away from Heaven, and instead, concentrate on worldly concerns. Reason becomes very important because it is what encourages a human to maintain the health of his soul, but once this virtue is abandoned, he becomes like an animal. Boethius frowned upon the abandonment of reason, and I believe that Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun and Chaucer all utilize Boethius's ideas for the important themes in their texts. The characters

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<sup>140</sup> Boethius. Book IV, Section III, 131.

in *Romance of the Rose* and *Troilus and Criseyde* exemplify unreasonable behavior in pursuit of love affairs, and are consequently trapped on Fortune's wheel for the remainder of their mortal lives.

To begin, it will be important to detail how exactly Fortune involves herself in love affairs, since she seems to deal primarily with other situations outside of love's realm. Fortune actually is a significant element of many different cults, such as that of war, and according to Howard R. Patch, "Fortune and Love [are] associated in work. They are both accused of causing trouble for lovers, and their names are linked."<sup>141</sup> Fortune is noted to have power in love, not by *replacing* the God of Love, but by giving and taking away gifts that would bring the lovers together.<sup>142</sup> Fortune at times plays with the lives of lovers by providing obstacles so that there is "inaccessibility [to] the love object."<sup>143</sup> We see this feature, for example, in the *Romance of the Rose*, when a wall is built around the rose that the Lover is trying to obtain:

Love is so capricious that he robbed me of everything at once, just when I thought that I had won. It is the same with Fortune, who fills men's hearts with bitterness but at other times flatters and caresses them. Her appearance changes swiftly, smiling one moment and sad the next. She has a wheel that turns, and when she wishes, she raises the lowest to the very highest place, while he who is at the top is plunged with one turn into the mud. And it is I who am thus brought down! It was the worse for me when I saw the walls and the ditch that I dare not and cannot cross.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Patch 92.

<sup>142</sup> Patch 90.

<sup>143</sup> Sylvia Huot, "Guillaume de Machaut and the Consolation of Poetry," *Modern Philology* 100.2 (2002): 169-195, especially 170.

<sup>144</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 60.



Incidentally, Fortune can also be linked to Venus as well, exchanging roles with Venus, so Fortune can rule over love for a time and Venus can turn the wheel.<sup>145</sup> In *Romance*, Venus is also noted to be the mother of the God of Love and aids in the Lover's pursuit of the rose, fueling his desire.<sup>146</sup>

By granting love and other gifts, Fortune maintains her power on earth, as Patch notes: "She is a goddess only while she remains in power as such, that is, while she actually bestows."<sup>147</sup> In this chapter I will explore the function of Fortune in these texts as an agent of Love, who uses Love as a lure to entrap a lover on her wheel in his pursuit of the beloved.

#### Fortuna in *Romance of the Rose*

The love that Fortune uses to lure lovers to her wheel is a differing type of love than the one Lady Reason in *Romance of the Rose* invokes. The love that Fortune gives and takes is the type frowned upon by Lady Reason. Because she describes it as "diseased with the covetous desire for gain,"<sup>148</sup> the Lover knows even before he sees the rose in the reflection of the spring of Narcissus that the sort of desire Narcissus felt for himself by gazing into the pool is a love to stay away from. The Lover demonstrates a sense of reason through his recognition and retreat from the potential danger that this spring possesses. However, he abandons part of his sense of reason when he decides that

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<sup>145</sup> Patch 96.

<sup>146</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 52-53.

<sup>147</sup> Patch 36.

<sup>148</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 73.

he can approach the spring “without fear of ill fortune.”<sup>149</sup> It is interesting that the word “fortune” is included in relation to the spring that creates desire from a gaze, and it is not merely by coincidence. The Lover describes the spring to be a place where men are changed and where they become trapped by Love:

Here new and violent feelings spring up in men, and their hearts are changed; here sense and moderation are of no use, and there is only the total will to love; here no one knows what to do, for Cupid, Venus’ son, Sowed here the seed of Love which covers the whole spring; here he set his nets and snares to trap young men and maidens, for Love wants no other birds.<sup>150</sup>

Remembering Fortune’s connection to the God of Love, this spring that allows men to be suffused with desire also traps them, reiterating the idea that Fortune traps men on the wheel by their desire for her gifts of Love. The Lover makes his choice to approach and gaze into the spring, but he is deceived by the mirror, an attribute all too relatable to Fortune and her fickle behavior and illusory gifts. As Heller-Roazen argues, “What Fortune brings is not what it seems; the true outcome of Fortune’s gift, indeed, is in each case precisely the contrary of what it appears to be.”<sup>151</sup> This “gift” of the sight of the rose is a curse disguised as a blessing. Lady Reason admits to the Lover at a later time that “when Fortune is gracious and gentle, she lies to people and deceives them into madness ... She pretends to be true ... and placing them on her wheel, she promises them stability where all is changeable.”<sup>152</sup> The Lover initially had realized the danger of desire and the yearning for more, especially in relation to the spring. He tells the reader, “Whoever looks at himself in this mirror can have no help or remedy against seeing something

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<sup>149</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 24.

<sup>150</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 25.

<sup>151</sup> Heller-Roazen 71.

<sup>152</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 74.

which promptly causes him to fall in love.”<sup>153</sup> He knows the consequences of his actions, but just as in the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, one look can prove fatal, especially in the abandonment of reason and trusting in Fortune, which the Lover does by gazing into the spring.

The spring represents for the Lover the same type of danger as the pool of Narcissus he encountered previously. The reflection in the spring causes the Lover to see an abundance of roses. He details how beautiful they are and how he chooses the most beautiful one of all. The Lover notes the sweet scent coming from the rose, resembling a perfume that makes him want to stay: “When I became aware of this scent, I had no wish to depart, but drew nearer and would have plucked it had I dared stretch out my hands. But sharp, pointed thistles forced me to draw back, while barbed, keen-edged thorns and prickly nettles and brambles prevented me from advancing, for I was afraid of hurting myself.”<sup>154</sup> As in his experience at the pool of Narcissus, the Lover maintains a sense of his reason here. He does not readily go and touch the rose because of the thorns that encase it. The perfume welcomes him to stay and reach further towards the rose, but he chooses not to, afraid of wounding himself. This moment of reason only lasts for a fleeting moment, however, because of the Lover’s choice to observe a particular rose. This choice begins his descent into covetous gain, and he is then wounded by the God of Love with one of his arrows. The God of Love is mentioned to be an individual who can make those he chooses subservient: “He it is who rules over lovers and humbles men’s

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<sup>153</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 25.

<sup>154</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 26.

pride, making lords into servants.”<sup>155</sup> The Lover chooses to devote his attention to one of the roses, which causes him to start to lose his ability to reason; although he does not lose free will entirely.<sup>156</sup> By being struck with the arrow, this causes him to begin his journey to becoming more subservient to love, in turn condemning himself to the machinations of Fortune, since Love is a gift Fortune uses to entrap her victims.

The God of Love proceeds to strike the Lover with arrows, wounding him, but he continues trying to approach the rose, now not afraid of being hurt: “My longing was now increased, and as the pain grew more intense, so also did my desire continually to approach the little rose ... It would have been better for me to draw back, but I could not refuse the bidding of my heart.”<sup>157</sup> Previously, the Lover had been afraid to even pierce the skin of his fingers on the thorns of the roses, but now he continues on in his pursuit of the rose even after being struck with arrows. The Lover suffers from the wounds inflicted by the God of Love, and wishes to die,<sup>158</sup> perhaps as a means of escaping Fortune’s wheel. Eventually, however, he betrays the Christian God and gives himself up to the God of Love:

“In God’s name, I give myself up willingly, and will never defend myself against you. God forbid that I should ever think of so defending myself, for it would be neither reasonable nor right. You may do with me whatever you like, hang me or kill me, for I know that I am helpless, my life is in your hands. I cannot live until tomorrow unless it is your will. I hope for joy and health from you, for I shall never have them from anyone else, but only if your hand which wounded me, provides a remedy.”<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 15.

<sup>156</sup> I say he has not lost his free will entirely yet because Lady Reason appears later to try and save him, suggesting that he still has the ability to choose for himself. 89.

<sup>157</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 27.

<sup>158</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 28.

<sup>159</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 29-30.

Because the Lover gives himself up to the God of Love, and accepts the gift of love, he surrenders to Fortune. The Lover mentions how his life is in the God of Love's hands and that he will only be able to live if this entity decides it to be so. This does not sound at all like the job title that the God of Love would have, but instead this speech details what Fortune is normally associated with doing. She permits joy and woe, health and sickness, and remedies. These are all gifts but the Lover does not realize he is speaking to Fortune.

The God of Love admits to the Lover:

“Do not be distressed. Since you have placed yourself in my following, I will readily accept your service, and will raise you to high rank, provided that you do not forfeit by wickedness ... If you remain loyal, I shall give you a sweet salve that will heal you of your wound, but by my head, we shall see whether or not you serve me wholeheartedly.”<sup>160</sup>

If the Lover remains in the service of love, he will be granted what he desires. This idea of staying in Love's good graces, is similar to what happens to those who worship Fortune. They expect that if they remain loyal, they will always be permitted what they desire and will never experience any woe.

The Lover begins to gain what he desires and is eventually granted a kiss from the Rose, aided by Venus to deepen his desire: “Such was the power of Venus and her torch that Fair Welcome accorded me the gift of a kiss without further delay.”<sup>161</sup> As mentioned before, Fortune is a jealous goddess, and although she may ensnare men with desire to be on her wheel, she yearns to be worshipped. Fortune is meant to seem just and unjust at all times. She gives and takes away almost instantly. Only after the Lover gains the kiss

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<sup>160</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 31.

<sup>161</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 53.

from the Rose does Fortune strike again to deepen his desire and take the rose away. She dangles the rose in front of the Lover's eyes, tempting him more in order to prompt him to venture further in his desire for the Rose both physically and mentally. Jealousy builds a castle around the roses so that the Lover cannot obtain the one he desires, teasing him by keeping him away with a barrier. By taking away the Rose, Fortune demonstrates her ability to give and take away gifts; she uses the Rose as a way to dominate the situation and deepen the Lover's desire. Fortune works here to tempt the Lover further and further away from reason, so that he will suffer and continue to want her gifts since he is trapped on her wheel.

The temptation of Fortune's gifts leaves the Lover on her wheel, but Reason tries one last time to save the Lover, proving that perhaps one can be saved from the wheel (before the Lover completely damns himself forever to the wheel by a sexual act of pleasure and not procreation). Reason states:

“I have no wish for you to remain without a sweetheart. If it pleases you, fix your thoughts on me. I would like to be your beloved, and if you will be true to me, do you know what my love will be worth to you? So much that you will never lack anything you need, whatever misfortune may befall you.”<sup>162</sup>

Reason attempts to persuade the Lover away, not from the Rose necessarily, but away from carnal desire, which the Lover interprets as “love” and Fortune's wheel. Reason does not mention loving the Rose; her entire speech is about abandoning Fortune, creating the idea that perhaps it is not the love object that lovers enter into a relationship with, but Fortune herself.

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<sup>162</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 89.

This worldly desire is enough for the Lover; although he realizes that he is rather ignorant for pursuing it, he does so anyway: “Reason explained it clearly to me, and I may count myself a madman for not taking her advice and renouncing love at once.”<sup>163</sup> This realization signifies that the Lover is too far gone to ever come back into the realm of reason. He knows the path he is choosing is wrong, but he continues along it because he is already trapped on Fortune’s wheel. Worldly values are now more than enough for him since he chooses to consummate his relationship with the Rose, but then leaves.

The Lover’s departure symbolizes the inconsistency of Fortune’s gifts and that the relationship he is involved in is with Fortune and not the Rose, proving the joys of the body can only last so long. In the end, the Lover thanks all who have helped him, the God of Love, especially, but he does not care to thank Reason, who is noted to have “wasted so much effort upon [him].”<sup>164</sup> The reader is not permitted to know anything further about the Lover, other than his thankfulness, his departure and his previous journey through the garden. The reader is left to assume that Fortune continues to be a dominant entity in the Lover’s life, since he has abandoned the Rose, but not for Reason. This is clarified by a previous speech from Lady Reason. Reason tells the Lover before he makes the final decision to pursue the Rose, “Hearts drunk with love are given up to great misfortune; you will know this in the end, when you have wasted your time and ruined your youth in this unhappy delight. If you live long enough to see yourself freed from Love, you will bewail the time you have wasted but will be unable to recover it.”<sup>165</sup> This

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<sup>163</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 63.

<sup>164</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 335.

<sup>165</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun 70.

decision to pursue the Rose symbolizes the final tie the Lover had to his ability to reason. Through his actions and his choices of pursuing the Rose, he loses his reason and becomes a servant to Fortune, unable to recover from previous actions. Fortune is a force that can give and take love away, and although the Lover gains the love of the Rose, and then abandons it at the conclusion of the story, the relationship still forces him to remain trapped to Fortune's wheel.

#### The Gift of Carnal Love in *Troilus and Criseyde*

The theme of love as a gift from Fortune of dubious value is readily apparent in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, through the experiences of Troilus. Troilus is an interesting character who goes from mocking lovers to being a servant of love/Fortune, and then, after his death, finally mocking those who are left to be unwitting victims of the wheel. Troilus, surprisingly, acts more cautious about abandoning reason than does the Lover in *Romance*, but this doesn't save him in the end. Troilus is convinced and tempted by events that test his restraint by his friend Pandarus, who acts as the "voice of Fortune." Even though Pandarus helps to set certain events into motion, as detailed more thoroughly in the previous chapter, Troilus exercises his free will, and suffers as a result of his own folly. Costomiris points out that "It is not hard to accept the view that *Troilus and Criseyde* is at least in part about the right and wrong uses of human reason. Nor is it difficult to see Troilus as guilty of succumbing to lust and as a knight ennobled by



love.”<sup>166</sup> As mentioned before, it is Troilus and his decisions that prompt him to enter into a relationship with Fortune and Criseyde.

Troilus realizes the foolishness of carnal love because he witnesses it all around him from his fellow knights. Troilus considers lovers to be fools who perform an extreme amount of labor to win and keep love by their side. He mentions that eventually their “prey” is lost and they are left to wallow in their foolishness. Troilus’s description of the effort it takes to keep love foreshadows his future descent from virtue and his eventual loss of love. The only reason Troilus experiences any sort of desire in the first place is because he mocks the God of Love, who strikes him with an arrow of love, and then Criseyde happens to be in his line of sight.<sup>167</sup> Criseyde’s appearance in front of Troilus is a great moment of chance, an encounter presented by Fortuna. Fortune is credited with doing the work of the God of Love<sup>168</sup> and Troilus so happens to be struck by the God of Love.<sup>169</sup> Chaucer includes a short snippet about Bayard the horse, who is whipped and is left to think about how he is only an animal and must endure what is meant for a subservient horse.<sup>170</sup> Chaucer places this right after Troilus is struck by the arrow and additionally says, “So ferde it by this fierse and proude knight.”<sup>171</sup> Chaucer leaves the reader to question if Bayard is being compared to Troilus. If we accept this to be true, then it may also be a possibility that Troilus himself is to become a pet, a subject of Fortune. He is like a prized steed, especially so because he is a prince who has duties in

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<sup>166</sup> Costomiris 263.

<sup>167</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 273-274.

<sup>168</sup> Patch 96.

<sup>169</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 206-210.

<sup>170</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 218-224.

<sup>171</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 225.

the royal court, a place where Fortune also dwells. It is important to note the passage where Troilus does indeed mention serving a woman who is unnamed:

Thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde  
 In which he saugh al holly hire figure,  
 And that he wel koude in his herte fynde.  
 It was to hym a right good aventure  
 To love swich a oon, and if he dede his cure  
 To serven hir, yet myghte he falle in grace  
 Or ellis for oon of hir servantz pace.<sup>172</sup>

In this passage, Troilus is said to make a mirror of his mind, which connects back to *Romance of the Rose* where the Lover gazes into the pool of Narcissus. This reflecting image in his mind is meant to symbolize inconsistency, a figure who is not as they appear. A mirror distorts; the reflection is not truly the actual figure being reflected on the surface. Fortune is always credited with deceiving others and a mirror image achieves this same result. Troilus hopes that if he serves this unknown figure, then he can fall into her good graces and become one of her followers. Now, Troilus does not mention Criseyde's name here, so it is left up to the reader to determine if he is at all talking about her, or if it is Fortune, or even Venus that he is discussing. Perhaps he believes that if he enjoys Fortune's good graces and is allowed to be one of her followers, he will be granted what he desires: his love object. In accepting the gift of love from Fortune and pursuing Criseyde, however, he will be trapped on Fortune's wheel and become one of her servants.

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<sup>172</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 365-371.

This anonymous woman is also mentioned again after several lines, where Troilus addresses the God of Love and tells him that his own spirit is now the God of Love's and

Troilus thanks him:

“My spirit, which that oughte youres be  
Yow thanke I, lord, that han me brought to this  
But wheither goddesse or womman, iwis  
She be, I not, which that ye do me serve  
But as hire man I wol ay lyve and sterve.”<sup>173</sup>

Troilus is unsure if she is a goddess or merely a woman, he mentions how through the God of Love, he now serves her. Troilus may be referring to Fortuna in this passage, not by name, but by her role as goddess, and we know Fortuna was indeed considered a goddess at one time. I believe that this form of worship applies to Troilus as well, especially since later in the text, he talks about how he was most devoted to Fortune:

“Have I nought honoured al my lyve / As thow wel woost, above the goddess alle?”<sup>174</sup>

Troilus believed that if he worshipped Fortune entirely, he would be safe from any sort of infliction that she could cause. Chaucer, however, knew that the act of worshipping Fortune would not suffice or provide any escape from harm and he alludes to Troilus's descent into Fortune's realm by falling in love with Criseyde:

[He] was ful unwar that Love hadde his dwellynge  
Withinne the subtile stremes of hire yen;  
That sodeynly hym thoughte he felte dyen,  
Right with hire look, the spirit in his herte.<sup>175</sup>

This passage details how with Love's look, which is meant to be Fortune's look, Troilus felt a spirit die within his heart. Troilus was struck by the God of Love, a male figure as

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<sup>173</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 424-427.

<sup>174</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* IV. 267-268.

<sup>175</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 304-307.

Chaucer describes: “He kidde anon his bowe nas naught broken,”<sup>176</sup> but in this passage Chaucer writes that Love has him in *her* eyes. I believe this is meant to signify Fortune, and the spirit that is starting to die in his heart is reason. As Heller-Roazen puts it, “And it is thus correct to say that Fortune is beyond reason. For reason concerns itself with what is always or without exception, but Fortune’s place in what exists is beyond reason.”<sup>177</sup> Troilus maintains a small hold of what is left of his reason, but it proves to be fleeting when he pursues Criseyde, and by doing so becomes trapped to Fortune’s wheel from the relationship with her.

Troilus protects his reasoning skills for a spell when he decides to tell no one about his new found desire for his love object, Criseyde: “But though that I now telle it the ne leste / Be thow naught wroth; I hide it for the beste.”<sup>178</sup> His actions so far have not allowed him to abandon reason fully just yet, since it is through the God of Love that he was struck with desire, but his mind does begin to falter under the desire to fully serve love, not to mention also making himself ill. He knows that in telling of his woes stemming from desire, he will then have to succumb to the possibility of his desire coming true. Troilus eventually realizes, however, that he is caught on the wheel and can’t be free from love: “That whilom japedest at loves peyne / Now artow hent, now gnaw thin owen cheyne.”<sup>179</sup> Realizing he is caught, he knows the only place now to go is further into desire and into Fortune’s influence. Troilus mentions how his mind has erased any form of fear and he does not care about his safety: “N’yn him desir noon other

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<sup>176</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 208.

<sup>177</sup> Heller-Roazen 81.

<sup>178</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 580-581.

<sup>179</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 508-509.

fownes bredde / But argumentes to his conclusioun.”<sup>180</sup> Troilus cares for nothing but desire, reflecting the Lover in *Romance of the Rose* when he continues to be struck with arrows, not caring for his body or soul. Troilus loses himself and gives into temptation completely when Pandarus convinces him to tell him of his desired love object so he may offer his assistance. If Troilus admits whom he loves, then he will be tempted by the possibility of obtaining his gift (Criseyde). In obtaining this object, he will lose his control over his ability to use reason, and thus be trapped on Fortune’s wheel, which in the course of the story he does. Pandarus attempts to tell Troilus that he is ignorant for not telling him who he loves, which would be a source of a remedy for his sickness: “Swych is delit of foles to bywepe / Hire wo, but seken bote they ne kepe. / Now knowe I that ther reson in the failleth.”<sup>181</sup> Pandarus attempts to mock Troilus by telling him that his reason is failing him since he does not seek any remedy, but Troilus is being reasonable in keeping his desires to himself.

Troilus demonstrates a moment of weakness, however, in his deliberation to tell Pandarus the truth: “But tho gan sely Troilus for to quake / As though men sholde han led hym into helle.”<sup>182</sup> These few lines read quite oddly to me as a reader. It is surely understandable to be nervous to tell a friend about a crush, but Troilus is shaking as drastically as if men are about to lead him to hell. This is not just some regular confession from friend to friend, this is Troilus knowing that if he tells, he will place himself on that path to hell on earth which is the loss of reason altogether. Troilus does finally admit to

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<sup>180</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 464-465.

<sup>181</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 762-764.

<sup>182</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* I. 871-872.

Pandarus the object of his desire, and this decision is what lands Troilus on Fortune's wheel because he knew better than to tell. Troilus is easily swayed by Fortune and the gifts he obtains through love, and because of this he becomes subject to Fortune's rule and his relationship with Criseyde does not last.

Fortune does not care for men to be happy, especially once they submit to her, so Criseyde is traded to the Greek camp. The episode about the deliberation for the trade of Criseyde for Antenor is interesting, because this is where Troilus listens to Reason and does not stop the trade from happening:

Love hym made al prest to don hire byde,  
 And rather dyen than she sholde go;  
 But Resoun seyde hym, on that other syde,  
 "Withouten assent of hire ne do nat so,  
 Lest for thi werk she wolde be thy fo,  
 And seyn that thorough thy medlynge is iblowe  
 Youre bother love, there it was erst unknowe."  
 For which he gan deliberen, for the beste,  
 That though the lordes wolde that she wente,  
 He wolde lat hem graunte what hem leste.<sup>183</sup>

Troilus does not say a word because Reason tells him that it would be best not to do so without Criseyde's consent, despite his desire that makes Troilus want her to stay. Up until this point, Troilus has abandoned Reason, but it is in this moment he knows if he resists and keeps Criseyde, their relationship could be torn apart. He lets what is supposed to happen to Criseyde happen because he is still concerned about his desire for her, he is stuck to Fortune's wheel, but he does still listen to Reason. Troilus mentions the battle between reason and desire in his speech to Pandarus: "Thus am I with desir and reson

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<sup>183</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* IV. 162-171.

twight: / Desir for to destourben hire me redeth, / And reson nyl nat; so myn herte  
dredeth.”<sup>184</sup> This speech clarifies the ongoing clash of desire and reason in Troilus’s life.  
This is important because although Troilus is trapped to the wheel, he can still hear  
Reason, just as the Lover could in *Romance of the Rose*. However, Reason may be telling  
Troilus to let Criseyde go, so that he may fall to the bottom of Fortune’s wheel, and in  
death, escape her. Pandarus, though, displays his normal trickster attitude and attempts to  
convince Troilus to flee from reason so he will stop suffering,<sup>185</sup> meaning that he would  
forever be stuck to the wheel with no offer of escape, but Troilus does not make a move.  
He ignores Pandarus’s temptation to stop Criseyde from leaving, and he lets her go, only  
to fuel his misery more when she will not return later on even after Pandarus has asked  
her to. Marilyn Corrie argues, “Having learned that Criseyde is to be sent to the Greek  
camp in exchange for the captured Trojan warrior, Antenor, Troilus berates Fortune for  
inflicting misery on him without any apparent justice after letting him enjoy the great  
happiness that he has experienced with Criseyde.”<sup>186</sup> Troilus cannot understand why  
Fortune has betrayed him, but it is in Fortune’s nature to betray those who have been  
elevated on her wheel for so long.<sup>187</sup> In the final battle between Troy and the Greeks,  
Troilus fights very violently, slaying thousands, not completely together in his thoughts.  
Troilus is overcome by wrath and grief from losing Criseyde. He is not in his usual  
mindset for victory and because of this he is killed by Achilles.

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<sup>184</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* IV. 572-574.

<sup>185</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* IV. 589-593.

<sup>186</sup> See Marilyn Corrie. “Fortune and the Sinner: Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate and Malory’s *Morte Darthur*.” *Literature Compass* 5.2 (2008): 207-219.

<sup>187</sup> Patch 68.

It is interesting to note, however, that Troilus does not go to Hell. We are told that he rises to what the reader may assume is Heaven,<sup>188</sup> gazing down at everyone. As readers, we are allowed to know what happens to Troilus, unlike in *Romance of the Rose*. The reasoning for this may possibly be that because Troilus listened to Reason earlier and let Criseyde go, he was spared in the end. I believe that Reason asked Troilus to let Criseyde go, not only because it would cause quarrels with Criseyde, but because this was the way to be free from Fortune's wheel. In his suffering, Troilus was more reckless in battle, and because of this he was slain, saving him. We are told he looks down where he was slain and laughs at those who weep for him.<sup>189</sup> He condemns those who follow after blind pleasure and that individuals should cast their whole heart on heaven. This finale outlines the importance of reason in a mortal's life, especially in relation to their journey in the afterlife.

Thus in the two texts, *Romance of the Rose* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, Fortune's role resembles a jealous lover in man's pursuit for objects of desire. The Lover in *Romance of the Rose* becomes stricken with desire when he is struck by the God of Love, and from there Fortune takes complete hold and allows for the lover to obtain what he desires, but only through his loss of reason. It is only after he has consummated his relationship that Fortune acts in jealousy and takes away his happiness, so she will continue to have a servant with interest only in her and her gifts. Troilus, however, presents a different story. Although he continues to gain what he desires once he chooses

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<sup>188</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* V. 1808-1809.

<sup>189</sup> Chaucer *Troilus and Criseyde* V. 1821-1857.



to play Fortune's game, he eventually listens to Reason and in doing so, he escapes from servitude to Fortune through his death. The two texts demonstrate how love serves to trap lovers on the wheel of Fortune, but when one finally chooses to abandon love for reason, they are able to leave the wheel, as well as the influence of Fortune.

## CHAPTER 4

### FORTUNA REVIVED: A CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, this study has outlined Fortune as a figure that is present in numerous aspects of mortal life. She is embodied by agents propelling events into motion, she is a shepherdess leading mortals down their decided paths like a “choose your own adventure” book. She has been demonstrated to be a creature who grants love as a gift and then takes away again at random. She is a jealous lover, a fickle entity, and most of all, she is a servant who aids in revealing God’s will and moving time into motion. My observations have come to show that the role of free-will in a literary world, where both Fortune and the Christian God dwell, does indeed exist. For the characters previously presented, it is no longer acceptable to blame others for the events which occur. My research and close analysis has shown that no matter what role Fortune plays in the lives of mortal characters in literature, there is always a choice left up to them, a multitude of decisions that will take them down a different path. It is no longer justifiable to blame outside forces entirely for occurrences that happen because it is the power of a decision that moves events forward. Chaucer, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun each present this notion of choice through situations that deal with good and bad fortune. They also each wrote their texts with Fortuna dealing primarily in events with the Christian God, such as providing tests for mortals to either overcome or subdue themselves, and reinventing her purpose through the onslaught of Christianity, reviving her and keeping her name alive.

The transformation of Fortune is possible because of brilliant writers such as the ones mentioned and many more not mentioned. Boethius took an entity who was on the verge of disappearing alongside all the other pagan gods and goddesses and made her into a more vindictive and fickle figure, but he presented her to be a figure who was needed to show mortals good and bad fortune. Chaucer, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun then took this concept of Fortune and transformed her again, providing more characteristics and developing her into a figure who can speak through others and be entirely responsible for the promotion of Providence.

My own study of Fortuna, and her transformation into Fortune in Medieval literature, has created a new interpretation not normally seen by readers and scholars. For most, Fortune is a wheel-spinning tyrant, with no rational thought, but my analysis and research has presented a side of Fortune that demonstrates otherwise. She is now the ultimate test, the fork in the road, the bodiless apparition whispering temptations about her worldly goods in the ears of mortals in order to subdue them. She is the siren luring mortals to join her and journey down the wrong path, but yet at the same time she still allows for them to see through her temptations and use their freedom of choice to decide. My thesis presents a diamond in the rhinestone world of Fortuna research. My own research is unique because it demonstrates the possibility of free will in association with Fortune. The existence of free choice alongside Fortune is rare, since most scholars and readers interpret and present her as a force always in control of others. My study allows for individuals to see the other face of Fortune, the one normally shrouded in mystery. The face I have been allowed to see through my research may be good fortune, or it may

be bad fortune. As Lady Philosophy says to Boethius, “Good fortune always seems to bring happiness, but deceives you with her smiles, whereas bad fortune is always truthful because by changing she shows her true fickleness. Good fortune deceives, but bad fortune enlightens.”<sup>190</sup> It is now up to other scholars and readers to research and see for themselves what face they see of Fortune’s, and if the face I have seen is deceitful or truthful.

As stated previously, another side of Fortune has been discovered. There are possibly still sides of Fortune scholars have not yet been allowed to see. Fortune is credited to have two faces, and because of this Fortune is an entity who can be interpreted differently by multiple readers. For this reason, Fortune will continuously be revived by those who analyze her presence in medieval literature and beyond, proving perhaps, that in the end it is not we who need Fortune’s gifts to survive, but that it is Fortune who needs our skills of reasoning to exist.

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<sup>190</sup> Boethius Book II, Section VIII, 80.

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