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Vincent Carretta

*The Kingis Quair and
The Consolation of Philosophy*



Interpretation of *The Kingis Quair* has gone through essentially two stages in the last forty years: the autobiographical stage and the Boethian stage.¹ The autobiographical view makes much of the attribution of *The Kingis Quair* to James I of Scotland,² and in combination with some apparent internal evidence, this view comes to the conclusion that the originality of the work lies in the "fact" that "the poet presents us with a real event, his own personal love."³ C. S. Lewis finds that "in it [*The Kingis Quair*] the poetry of marriage at last emerges from the traditional poetry of adultery; and the literal narrative of a contemporary wooing emerges from romance and allegory. It is the first modern book of love." But there is a major problem here: there is no explicit reference to a marriage within the poem.⁴ What Lewis and others of the autobiographical stage have done is to take the external information of the historical James I's marriage, subsequent to imprisonment, and impose it on the poem in order to read it autobiographically.

Later critics have de-emphasized the autobiographical approach in an attempt to show that *The Kingis Quair* is not such an unusual courtly-love poem after all, and they argue that its originality lies in the prominence of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. One critic goes so far as to call the poem James I's "Consolation of Philosophy,"⁵ but all the critics of this school of interpretation would agree with John MacQueen's judgment that the *Consolation* is "perhaps the main controlling factor in the narrative of the *Quair*."⁶ The difficulty of this approach lies in the impossibility of reconciling

Boethius' view of the goods of this world and the relationship between man and Fortune with the view espoused by the speaker of the poem. In order to have Boethius sanction courtly love, as he supposedly does in *The Kingis Quair*, a gross distortion of the *Consolation* is necessary. But this distortion will remain as long as the poem is read as one of courtly love told by a reliable historical figure. I suggest that the author very carefully discredits his narrator-persona's reliability and that Boethius is used not to support this persona but rather as a moral touchstone against which the persona's folly is to be judged. The poem is not one in which "the speaker discovers by stages that his lady is indeed Cupid's princess come to free him, the goddess of nature and agent of Providence";⁷ it is, rather, the poem of a man, in Minerve's words, "wayke and feble" (st. 149) who, through use of free will and love of worldly things (the woman), binds himself to the very wheel of Fortune that Boethius in the *Consolation of Philosophy* learned to overcome.⁸

Of course, fundamental to this reading is the assumption that the author, whether he was James I or not, understood the *Consolation* in much the same way as other medieval authors, including Chaucer, did. Boethius, lamenting his bad fortune in being imprisoned and ruined by evil men, is visited by Lady Philosophy, who counsels him about the nature of Fortune, the role of Providence, free will, and the true Good worth pursuing. He learns that in the past he foolishly put too much value on worldly things, which are merely gifts of Fortune. Philosophy tells him that he cannot justly accuse Fortune of deceit because Fortune is by her nature unstable (Bk. II, Prosa 1). Later in the *Consolation*, Philosophy assures Boethius that "al outrely...alle fortune is good" (Bk. IV, Prosa 7) within the context of Providence, a context that mortal man cannot truly understand.⁹ But to gain true happiness man must not seek the gifts of Fortune for their own sake. Rather than valuing physical beauty he should consider the one true Good (Bk. III, Prosa 8). Since the narrator of *The Kingis Quair* is speaking in the present time during the first nineteen stanzas, and the bulk of the poem (sts. 20-181) is told in retrospect, he has already undergone both bad fortune (exile and imprisonment) and supposedly good fortune (the love for the lady and the "larges" of stanza 181). What has he learned? By introducing the *Consolation* at the very beginning of the poem, the author invites us to compare his persona's earlier experience with that of Boethius, a comparison that is to be implicit throughout the poem.

The narrator's appreciation of Boethius is immediately cast in doubt when we know that originally "...I in purpos at my boke/To borowe a slepe at thilke tyme began" (st. 5). The

narrator's confession that Boethius is "So full of fruyte and rethorikly pykit,/Quhich to declare my scole is ouer yong" (st. 7) may mean simply that his own rhetorical powers are weak, a meaning that would fit the poem's conclusion; or it could be a confession that the narrator is unable to appreciate Boethius' "fruyte." Ironically, the narrator's own "sentence" will be so different from that of Boethius that the latter's is only "incidence" by comparison. Although the narrator grasps the *sense* of the *Consolation* as a story about Fortune, he fails to understand the *sentence* that teaches us how properly to overcome Fortune. The narrator's admission that his "scole is ouer yong" to appreciate the "fruyte" of the *Consolation* would almost definitely indicate to a medieval audience a certain lack of spiritual understanding, just as such a lack of learning does early in *Piers Plowman* when Holicherche at the beginning of Will's spiritual education reprimands him for his ignorance (Passus I, B text, 137-48).¹⁰

The author casts doubt on the narrator-persona's reliability as a spiritual guide by emphasizing how limited his classical knowledge is. In the first stanza the conventional "hornis" of Cinthia, the moon, are attributed to Citherea, or Venus, by the narrator. Skeat contends that this is merely a scribal error, a contention Mackenzie disputes.¹¹ I suggest that the error is a conscious one made by the author to illustrate a major theme of the whole poem--the intimate relationship, represented by the moon, between Venus and Fortune. The moon is a common symbol of Fortune in medieval literature. Henryson also attributes Fortune's quality of fickleness to Venus.¹² In *The Kingis Quair* worship of Venus leads directly to subjugation by Fortune, just as Boethius learns, but the latter begins his spiritual journey with this knowledge while the narrator of *The Kingis Quair* ends on the wheel.

Another error by the narrator may be intended to cast further doubt on the worthiness of the object of his love, particularly since the moral context of the *Consolation* has been established for the poem. In stanza 19, the fury Thesiphone is invoked as one of the muses. As D. W. Robertson has reminded us, "Alanus makes the furies leaders of all the vices that attack the New Man."¹³ The obvious error of ascribing the wrong torments for Tantalus ("known to every schoolboy")¹⁴ in stanza 70 is yet another example of the author's emphasis on the narrator's ignorance of learning and, by extension, of the dubious validity of his "sentence." This use of a kind of Chaucerian narrator, whose personal judgment we must carefully inspect, is found not only in several of the best *Canterbury Tales* but also, as Denton Fox has shown, in Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*.¹⁵ And our author had an excellent precedent in the works of Chaucer for the use of the *Consolation*

as a touchstone or control against which to judge a character's actions or thoughts. Bernard F. Huppé and Robertson have argued that characters like Arcite in the *Knight's Tale* and Troilus in *Troilus and Criseyde* ironically compel judgments by the reader when they paraphrase misunderstood or incomplete Boethian concepts.¹⁶

Similarly, the reader familiar with Boethius is at first surprised by the apparent spiritual difficulties the narrator confesses in stanza 17:

With doutfull hert, amang the rokkis blake,
 My feble bote full fast to stere and rowe,
 Helples allone, the wynter nyght I wake,
 To wayte the wynd that furthward suld me throwe.
 O empti saile! quhare is the wynd suld blowe
 Me to the port, quhar gynneth all my game?
 Help, Calyope and wynd, in Marye name!

The reader, alerted by the narrator's previous mention of Boethius, might reasonably expect the speaker to be alluding to the important and pervasive boat and sailing metaphor found in the *Consolation*. We naturally expect the speaker to be aware of Philosophy's advice in Book II, poem 4 about how to avoid spiritual shipwreck by not seeking the gifts of Fortune, but instead we are struck by the narrator's surprisingly humorous allegory:

The rokkis clepe I the prolixitee
 Off doubilness that doith my wittis pall:
 The lak of wynd is the deficultee
 In enditing of this lytill treti small:
 The bote I clepe the mater hole of all:
 My wit unto the saile that now I wynd,
 To seke connyng, though I bot lytill fynd.
 (st. 18)

With this final reminder that the reader must consider what the narrator is unaware of, the tale of "quhat befell" him begins.

The narrator's imprisonment is similar to that of Boethius, a condition symbolic of being under Fortune's control.¹⁷ The narrator of *The Kingis Quair*, speaking of his situation, declares that "Fortune it schupe non othir wayis to be" (st. 24). Just as Boethius at the beginning of the *Consolation* laments his condition, so too does our narrator, but Boethius almost immediately has as his guide Philosophy, who drives away the only comforts--the Muses of poetry--he thinks he has left (Bk. I, Prosa 1).

Unlike Boethius, our narrator looks not to Philosophy for guidance and relief; he turns to the world (st. 30). By his own admission, the narrator of *The Kingis Quair* "...in youth,/ The rypeness of resoun lak[kit] I,/To governe with my will" (st. 16); consequently he receives not Philosophy but his own personal "mermaydene" in the form of a "lytell suete nyghtingale" (st. 33). Significantly, the "nyghtingale" is located in a hedged, or perhaps walled, garden, another common symbol of Fortune.¹⁸ We must ask to what kind of "lufis use" the bird's "ympnis" are "consecrat," especially in light of the religious imagery found in the bird's cantus (st. 34). The reader strongly suspects that these birds are about to "maken melodye," in the same way that Chaucer's birds had earlier done. As one critic has pointed out, "The nightingale...is enacting the role of priest in calling the other birds to the proper service of the god of love."¹⁹ This love, however, does not at all suggest the divine love Boethius learns to desire but rather the earthly love Alain de Lille associates with the nightingale.²⁰ The medieval reader would quickly recognize the season, the setting, and the birds as conventions of *dits amoureux*.²¹ We need only look at a representative sample of medieval secular love poetry to realize that May is a conventional time for the arousing of erotic love, often described in such religious terms as "bliss," "hevynnis," and "merci." But we must recall the Boethian alternative of divine love: May was also the season of spiritual awakening, as in the first lines of *Piers Plowman*.

The narrator's reaction to the nightingale's song suggests that he takes the earthly rather than the divine alternative. Instead of the consolation divine love would give him, he desires the love that makes birds free. Earlier he had complained that "The bird, the beste, the fisch eke in the see,/ They lyve in fredome everich in his kynd;/And I a man, and lakkith libertee" (st. 27), and after the song he questions the power of love (st. 38). He has no conception of Philosophy's teaching that a man's mental and spiritual state and not his physical condition renders him free or enthralled. Instead, he pleads in stanza 39 to a god whose nature is revealed by the fact that the immediate "grace" he grants is a woman. As the first line of stanza 43 suggests, he is Cupid, whose power "To bynd and lous, and make thrallis free" is quite different from that of St. Matthew, xvi, 19; xviii, 18. Lady Philosophy would hardly have approved of how the narrator uses his "wittis all" and "free wyll" after he sees the gift of "grace" that is "The fairest or the freschest yong floure":

And though I stude abaisit tho a lyte,
No wonder was, forquhy my wittis all

Were so ouercom with plesance and delyte,
 Onely throu latting of myn eyen fall,
 That sudaynly my hert become hir thrall
 For ever of free wyll; for of manace
 There was no takyn in hir suete face.
 (st. 41)

In stanzas 46 to 48 the lady herself is described as a combination of jewels and flowers, two sets of images frequently associated with Fortune and her worldly goods.²² Within *The Kingis Quair* itself, the first use of the "flore" image (stanza 3) is as one of impermanence, and Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation* uses the image to describe the impermanence of physical beauty: "But the schynynge of thi forme (*that is to seyn, the beute of thi body*), how swyftly passynge is it, and how transitorie! Certes it es more flyttnye than the mutabilite of floures of the somer sesoun" (Bk. III, Prosa 8). The "...ruby, without faille,/Lyke to ane hert" worn by the lady in the poem is reminiscent of Criseyde's "broche" and probably signifies the capture of the narrator's heart by the lady, an action that distorts his nature by leading him into a "lufis dance" similar to the "amoureuse dance" the lovers enjoy in Book IV of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Philosophy cites jewels as an illustration of worldly goods that are of no value when compared to their Creator (Bk. II, Prosa 5). But this woman, who is described as if she were an emblem of Fortune herself with her flowers and jewels, has, for the speaker, "Beautee enuech to mak a world to dote" (st. 47).

The process the speaker is undergoing parallels a conventional process of falling into sin, described by Chaucer's Parson: "For certes, ther is no deedly synne, that it nas first in mannes thought, and after that in his delit, and so forth into consentynge and into dede."²³ It is not our narrator's fault that he is unable to put his desires "into dede." Several stanzas later, the folly of his thoughts increases after he has decided to yield "homage and sacrifis" (st. 52) to Venus. Formerly he had desired the "freedom" of a bird and now, having seen the lady's "lytill hound" (st. 53), he exclaims "A! wele were him that now were in thy plyte!" His desire to take the animal's place is hardly commendable when we recall Philosophy's warning to Boethius that "Wherfore, when thei ben perverted and turned into malice, certes, thanne have thei forlorn the nature of mankynd.... Than folweth it that he that forleteth bounte and prowesse, he forletith to ben a man; syn he ne may not passe into the condicion of God, he is torned into a beeste" (Bk. IV, Prosa 3). Ironically, the speaker has already admitted that this transformation from free human nature to determined bestial nature has occurred,

and he is glad of it: "My hert, my will, my nature, and my mynd, / Was changit clene ryght in an othir kynd" (st. 45).

While the implications of the narrator's thoughts and actions are always serious, they are often presented in a humorous manner, as if to establish and maintain a comic distance between him and the reader. He falls so immediately and completely in love with the lady that he is able to discern at distant sight alone qualities which are normally known only through more personal contact (st. 50). Somehow he recognizes mental and moral qualities in her that give her religious value in his eyes (st. 62). But even his clearly un-Boethian version of religious imagery is lightened by the narrator's excess of emotion, expressed in the oxymorons Alain de Lille used to describe the madness of love (st. 71). The narrator of our poem is so foolish that he does not really consider where this earthly love may lead:

Bot, hert! quhere as the body may noght throu,
Folow thy hevin! quho suld be glad bot thou
That suich a gyde to folow has undertake?
Were it throu hell, the way thou noght forsake!
(st. 63)

Instead of pledging himself to the true "gyde" described throughout the *Consolation*, he will follow an earthly one in order to have the same kind of "hevin" on earth Chaucer's January desired.

After firmly committing himself to the guidance and service of Venus and the lady, the narrator is ready to embark upon his long allegorical dream--a dream that is essentially a recapitulation of the process he has just undergone with each of the three goddesses corresponding, at least in general terms, to his movement from desire to worldly love (Venus) to his surrender to this pursuit (Fortune) through his own free will (Minerve). I think it no accident that whereas Boethius moved from a recognition of Fortune through Philosophy to embracing Divine Love, the narrator of *The Kingis Quair* undergoes an inversion of Boethius' progress.

The author of *The Kingis Quair* is apparently trying to make us very suspicious of the validity of this dream's meaning by the warning hints with which he frames the dream. If we try to apply Macrobius' dream classifications to it, it seems to fall into the category of the enigmatic dream or somnium, "one that conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the true meaning of the information being offered, and requires an interpretation for its understanding."²⁴ But just before the dream commences, the situation may be intended to suggest the half-state "between wakefulness and slumber" of

one of the two classifications of assuredly deceptive dreams, the apparition: "half sleping and half suoun in such a wis:/ And quhat I met, I will you now devis" (st. 73). Then, after the dream is over, the narrator wonders whether it might have been a member of the other class of deceptive dreams, a nightmare or insomnium in which "the patient experiences in dreams vexations similar to those that disturb him during the day": "Is this of my forethoght impressioun,/Or is it from the hevin a visioun?" (st. 175).

Upon his arrival at Venus' palace (sts. 86-7), we almost immediately recognize this "hevin" and "paradis" to be those of physical love because of the many inversions of that true Heaven the dreamer should be seeking. "A voce" shows him the various inhabitants of this "hevin" and the dreamer does not understand the reality of the place. The stability of the lovers' happiness is precarious at best and then only while they are young (sts. 86-7). Lovers' joy is shown to be completely at the mercy of Fortune's whim (st. 93). Because of his worldly desires, the dreamer is too blind to see the truth. In stanza 88, the distinction between the spiritual love that the dreamer should be seeking and the physical, worldly love sanctified in this "hevin" is made clear, at least to readers of *The Kingis Quair*. The "lufe" that is "frely servit" is "with thair bodyis and thair gudis" and the whole place, rather than being a Heaven of harmony, is filled with complaints and discord (sts. 91-2).

It is to Venus that the dreamer appeals for guidance and "benigne grace" in stanzas 99 to 102, in an address whose "rhetoric echoes prayers to the Virgin Mary."²⁵ Here the inversion of Christian and specifically Boethian images is striking. The dreamer in *The Kingis Quair* does not speak to the Love that is the subject of the famous poem ending Book II of the *Consolation*; he recognizes the goddess of physical love as the harmonizer of the universe and addresses her as the "appesar of malice and violence." He seeks the "remedye" and "cure" of his physical distress from the guide ("O anker and keye of our gude aventure") instead of from "God, governour and lechere of thoughtes" (Bk. IV, Prosa 6). Venus is the dreamer's "suete well," but God is Boethius's "well of god" (Bk. III, Metrum 9).

In stanzas 102 to 104 we are given strong indications that Venus is very limited in her powers and that men must come under her control by their own choice. Clearly she is subordinate to some other power, a power she is either unwilling or unable to identify (st. 107). Only when men give up their liberty and bind themselves to her does Venus rule as a goddess (st. 115), and the dreamer is told that he must seek Minerve if he is to enter Venus's heaven. Entrance to this

non-Christian heaven of discord is gained by submission to Fortune. Before the dreamer can merit Venus's "grace," to "Atteyne unto that glad and goldyn flour" (st. 114) of his lady, he must first acquire some wisdom, but not the Wisdom that enables Boethius to overcome Fortune through his new knowledge of Providence and free will. The worldly wisdom of Minerve shows the persona how to "become hir [Fortune's] thrall/For ever of free wyll." Similarly, Pacience, Minerve's "maister portare" (st. 125), is not a Virtue but rather like Pacience in *The Parliament of Fowls*, "that is, worldly patience which leads man to go on seeking, no matter what the difficulty, the satisfaction of his passions."²⁶ By speaking Christian and specifically Boethian truths as means to misguide the dreamer, Minerve herself functions as the most direct inversion of Philosophy in *The Kingis Quair*. For example, she tells him that he must "ground and set in Cristin wis" (st. 142) his love for the lady, and she gives apparently sound advice about God in stanzas 130-1. However, we immediately discover that in "Cristin wis" merely means that he should beware of soiling the lady's "worschip," or honor, and when Minerve reminds him of God it is not with the intent of warning him to subordinate earthly to divine love. He is to take the worship of God as an example of how to treat the lady (st. 132).

Ironically, Minerve briefly summarizes part of Philosophy's discussion with Boethius about free will and fate to show the dreamer that he is free to enslave himself to Fortune (sts. 145-7). She even tells him what Philosophy had told Boethius about Fortune's having the most influence over fools (st. 149). Instead of trying to lead the dreamer to rise above Fortune, Minerve agrees to help him come under her sway (st. 150).

Minerve is clearly not Lady Philosophy, but neither is she a malevolent deity. Her wisdom is as limited as Venus' power. Rather than actually guiding the dreamer, Minerve merely offers him alternatives; for example, she takes no position on the disputes among the "clerkis" as to the nature of providence and free will. However, recognizing from the first that the dreamer seeks to be controlled by Venus, Minerve sends him to Fortune, where he can act out the submission he has willingly made much earlier. Having given up control over his life by freely willing himself to Fortune, he immediately descends to earth and finds himself among the "bestes" because he now has as much free will and reason as the "lytill hound" he had envied earlier. All that remains is to climb allegorically on the wheel of Fortune to receive his reward. The setting and person of Fortune herself are described conventionally to emphasize the fact that the foolish lover is not about to get any special treatment. He sees Fortune "hufing on the

ground" in a "round place wallit" (st. 159). Once again she is associated with flowers (st. 160) and both her clothing and "chier" (sts. 160-1) prove her to be "ay in variance." Not even the fool can keep from being at least temporarily dismayed by what he sees (sts. 162-4). Despite undeniable evidence of Fortune's fickleness, the fool begs for her "grace" and "cure" (st. 167) just as he had done with Venus. From his first direct encounter with Fortune he is rendered ridiculous and the object not of her mercy but of her mirth (st. 166). He is so weak and stupid that she helps him on the wheel and actually tells him the truth about his future condition (sts. 171-2).

He immediately makes a complaint that at first seems to be a conventional Christian lamentation about the separation, by the world, of the individual soul from God (st. 173). But, just as he had earlier done in stanzas 17 and 18, he surprises us when he tells us what he means (sts. 173-4). As Troilus had done in the source of stanza 173, the speaker of *The Kingis Quair* has substituted for the immortal God a worldly one.²⁷ Of course Lady Philosophy has quite different advice concerning where and why a "besy goste" is to find quiet and rest (Bk. III, Metrum 10).

Fearing lest his dream be merely of his "forethought impressioun" (st. 175), the narrator of *The Kingis Quair* begs to "have more takenyng" (st. 176). He quickly receives his answer from a dove ("turtur") carrying a bunch of inscribed gillyflowers ("jorofflis"). Since the "hevyn" he has been trying to enter is that of Venus and not God, I believe the dove is one of the Venusian variety, similar to one depicted on the garment of Nature: "The dove, drunk with the sweet Dionean evil, labored at the sport of Cypris."²⁸ Any suggestion of Noah's dove or that of the Holy Ghost is by inversion.²⁹ Uses by other authors of the gillyflower image support an emphasis on amorous, earthly life. For example, it is one of the flowers found in the garden of Cupid in *The Romaunt of the Rose* (l. 1368) and Spenser clearly links the flower with lovers.³⁰

Soon after receiving this florid message, the speaker of *The Kingis Quair* gains some kind of "larges," the nature of which is never made completely clear (st. 181). Perhaps it is only the delusive "freedom" to love his lady from his cell. Why else does he "lay in bed allone waking" in stanza 2, at a point in time presumably coming after the experience of this "larges"?

In his closing comments on how he is fulfilling his pledge to Venus to preach her gospel on earth as payment for her beneficence, we are reminded several times of the distinction between his love and the Love he should have. The "goldin

cheyne" (st. 183) of his god of love is the same "bond Love" that Troilus bound himself to. In a long paraphrase of Boethius on Divine Love, Troilus had also substituted lust for Love: it is this lust which gives the speaker of *The Kingis Quair* the "curage at the ros to pull" (st. 186).³¹ Consequently, the "glad and goldyn flour" (st. 114) of his desire is of the same erotic nature as the object of desire in *Le Roman de la Rose*. Instead of seeking the true Christian's good rose--Mary--the obtuse narrator of *The Kingis Quair* prides himself on having the "ros" that is clearly associated with Venus earlier in the poem: "And on hir hede, of rede rosis full suete,/A chapellet sche had, fair, fresch, and mete" (st. 97). He carefully thanks all of his guides to his "floure" in stanzas 189 to 192 and tells us in stanza 193 of his present happiness: "In lufis yok, that esy is and sure." Just as he is oblivious to the true "lufis yok, that esy is and sure,"³² so too his "sentence" is so far removed from the *Consolation's* that he ignores Philosophy's implicit warning of his future: "And yit more over, what man that this town-blynge welefulnesse ledeth, eyther he woot that it is changeable, or else he woot it not. And yif he woot it not, what blisful fortune may ther ben in the blyndnesse of ignorance?" (Bk. II, Prosa 4).

In this kind of inverted *Consolation*, the author has presented us with a narrative persona who learns essentially the opposite of what Boethius had learned. Guided by Lady Philosophy and his own reason, Boethius was led freely to will his rise above Fortune's control to the Love of God. In *The Kingis Quair* the speaker instead desires earthly love of a good of Fortune and consequently freely wills himself a slave to Fortune when he enters "lufis" maddening dance. Although his own blindness and ignorance keep him temporarily happy at the top of Fortune's wheel, there should be no doubt that he will be an object lesson of Philosophy's teachings about those who enslave themselves to Fortune's wheel, because, as Fortune herself warns him, "the nature of it is evermore,/After ane hicht, to vale and geve a fall" (st. 172).

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NOTES

¹ Matthew P. McDiarmid, ed., *The Kingis Quair of James Stewart* (London, 1973), pp. 28-48 summarizes the evidence for the King's authorship of the poem. See also James Kinsley,

ed., *Scottish Poetry: A Critical Survey* (London, 1955); C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (London, 1936); Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh, 1958). In the second group I would place the following: Ian Brown, "The Mental Traveller--A Study of *The Kingis Quair*," *SSL*, 5 (1968), 246-52; John MacQueen, "Fortunys Exiltree: A Study of *The Kingis Quair*," *RES*, 7 (1961), 339-47; Murray F. Markland, "The Structure of *The Kingis Quair*," *Research Studies of the State College of Washington*, 25 (1957), 273-86; Mary Rohrberger, "The Kingis Quair: An Evaluation," *TSSL*, 2 (1960), 292-302; Andrew Von Hendy, "The Free Thrall: A Study of *The Kingis Quair*," *SSL*, 2 (1965), 141-51. The most recent treatment of the poem--Lois A. Ebin's "Boethius, Chaucer, and *The Kingis Quair*," *PQ*, 53 (1974), 321-41--recognizes that "the differences between the *Quair* and its sources are perhaps more important for an understanding of the poem than are the similarities" (p. 341). But my interpretation differs from her ultimate observation that "James's narrator learns to overcome Fortune while he remains in this world" (p. 341).

² I refer, of course, to the manuscript inscriptions.

³ Wittig, p. 34.

⁴ Lewis, p. 237. The most recent editors of *The Kingis Quair* suggest that by analogy implicit references to marriage may be found in the poem. For example, John Norton-Smith, ed., *James I of Scotland: The Kingis Quair* (Oxford, 1971), p. 82, compares the "lufis yok" of stanza 193 in *The Kingis Quair* to *The Canterbury Tales*, E 113, 1285, 1837. He is certainly correct in saying that in each Chaucerian example the yoke of marriage is explicitly meant. Rather than accepting these analogues as proof that the *Quair*'s "yok" is thus necessarily a marital one, I ask why, given the Chaucerian precedent, does the author of the *Quair* choose not to identify his "lufis yok" explicitly with marriage if he intended only conubial love? To the same phrase in the *Quair*, McDiarmid (p. 139) offers as an analogue "a phrase in *The Cuckoo and The Nightingale* 140 where, as here, it refers to marriage." Walter W. Skeat, ed., *Chaucerian and Other Pieces, Supplement* (Oxford, 1897), p. lvii, reminds us that "the true title of the [*Cuckoo and The Nightingale*] is 'The Book of Cupid, God of Love.'" Like the *Quair*, *The Book of Cupid* is not explicitly about marriage, and the Cuckoo's reference to "loves yok" hardly suggests marital bliss:

For myn entent is neither for to dye,
Ne whyl I live, in loves yok to drawe.

For lovers ben the folk that been on-lyve
 That most diseſe han, and most unthryve,
 And most enduren sorow, wo, and care;
 And, at the laſte, failen of welfare [139-44]

I think that the "yok" allusion far more likely refers to *St. Matthew* xi, 29-30. (See note 32 below.)

The question of whether or not a marriage is referred to is not really central to the argument of this paper. As a gift of Fortune, a wife should no more distract the narrator of the *Quair* from the true Boethian Good than should an illicit love.

⁵ Rohrberger, p. 292.

⁶ MacQueen, p. 118.

⁷ Von Hendy, p. 144.

⁸ James I, *The Kingis Quair*, ed. W. Mackay (London, 1939), pp. 45-101. I quote from this edition because Mackenzie was less willing than more recent editors have been to amend the unique scribal copy of the *Quair*.

⁹ Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophae*, trans. Geoffrey Chaucer, in *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1957). All quotations from the works of Chaucer are taken from Robinson's edition.

¹⁰ William Langland, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts Together with Richard the Redeless*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (Oxford, 1886).

¹¹ Walter W. Skeat, ed. *The Kingis Quair: Together with a Ballad of Good Counsel: by King James I of Scotland*, STS, (Edinburgh, 1884), p. 57; Mackenzie, p. 103.

¹² Howard R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), p. 61, ff. Robert Henryson, *Testament of Cressid*, ed. Denton Fox (London, 1968), ll. 218-38.

¹³ D. W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton, 1962), p. 474.

¹⁴ Mackenzie, p. 103.

¹⁵ Fox, p. 53 ff.

- ¹⁶ Bernard F. Huppé, *A Reading of the Canterbury Tales* (Albany, 1967), p. 62 f. Robertson, p. 493.
- ¹⁷ Patch, p. 67.
- ¹⁸ Patch, p. 136 f.
- ¹⁹ Carl E. Bain, "The Nightingale and the Dove in *The Kingis Quair*," *TSL*, 9 (1964), 21.
- ²⁰ Alain de Lille, *The Complaint of Nature*, trans. Douglas Moffat, *Yale Studies in English*, 36 (New York, 1908), 13.
- ²¹ James Wimsatt, *Chaucer and the French Love Poets* (Chapel Hill, 1968), pp. 16-20.
- ²² Patch, p. 142 ff., 136 ff.
- ²³ Robinson, p. 235.
- ²⁴ Macrobius, *Commentary of the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William H. Stahl (New York, 1952), pp. 88-90.
- ²⁵ McDiarmid, p. 128, note to stanzas 99-103.
- ²⁶ Bernard F. Huppé and D. W. Robertson, Jr., *Fruyt and Chaf*, *Studies in Chaucer's Allegories* (Princeton, 1963), p. 119.
- ²⁷ Bk. IV, ll. 302-8.
- ²⁸ Alain de Lille, p. 12.
- ²⁹ Bain, p. 25.
- ³⁰ In ll. 136-9 of "Aprill" in *The Shepheardes Calendar*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford, 1910): "'Bring hether the Pincke and purple Cullambine,/With Gelliflowres:/Bring Coronations, and Sops in Wine,/Worne of Paramoures.'" It must be noted that the term gillyflower was an inclusive one that subsumed, at a minimum, carnations ("Coronations") as well as clove pinks ("Sops in wine"). The association between gillyflowers and alcohol is made more explicit in ll. 1952-3 of Chaucer's "Sir Thopas." At least in recent times, in certain Yorkshire dialects, 'gillyflower,' when applied to a woman, had the pejorative association of a good of Fortune and of a dubious lover. The *O.E.D.* has the following entry: "1797 Pegge Dervicisms (E.D.S.), Gilliver, a light-heel'd dame."

1855 Robinson Whitby Gloss., A Jilliver, a wanton woman in the last stage of her good looks. A 'July flower' or 'the last rose in summer.' 1882 Lancash. Gloss., Jilliver, a termagant. 1883 Almondbury Gloss., Gilliver, sometimes used as Jezebel, a term of reproach to a woman."

³¹ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Bk. III, ll. 1744-71.

³² *St. Matthew*, xi, 29-30: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."