Chaucerian Synthesis: the Art of The Kingis Quair

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WALTER SCHEPS

Chaucerian Synthesis:
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Lady Philosophy: "Thou hast bytaketh thiself to the gov-
nanence of Fortune and forthe it byvovert the to ben
obesaunt to the maneris of thi lady."

Chaucer's Boece, II, prose 1.

What is most striking about Chaucer's rendering of Boethius's
"Foruntes te regendum dediisti; dominae moribus oportet obtrem-
peres" is its palpable courtliness—"it behoveth the to ben obeisaunt to
the maneris of thi lady"—, a quality alien to the intent, if not the
sense, of the original. Manipulation of this kind characterizes Chaucer's
use of Boethius in his poetry, most of the famous Boethian passages
occurring in an explicitly courtly context. Similarly, The Kingis Quair
utilizes Boethian elements, especially the Boethian concept of Fortune,
in combination with courtly material based on the Knight's Tale. The
situation itself is quite simple: lamenting his unjust incarceration, the
prisoner sees a beautiful lady, is immediately stricken with love for
her, and complains with renewed vigor of his imprisonment. We have
here the potential for effective poetry in the movement from general
to specific despair and the counter movement from literal to meta-
phorical confinement; i.e., the desire for freedom generally becomes
a specific desire for access to the lady, and, at the same time, the literal
thraildom of the prisoner is amplified to include the freely-chosen

1. This and all future textual references are to The Works of Geoffrey

and E. K. Rand (London and New York, 1926), p. 177. All references are to
this edition.

3. It is pointless to argue that other translations render "domina" as "lady,"
since for a 14th-century audience the connotations of "lady" in the context
in which it appears would be no more innocent than "mistress" would be to a
20th-century audience.

4. E.g., in Troilus and Criseyde and in the Knight's Tale. Notable excep-
tions are the passages in the Nun's Priest's Tale in which the usual Boethian
questions are raised for comic purposes. For a list of the relevant passages, see
B. L. Jefferson, Chaucer and the "Consolation of Philosophy" (New York,
1965), pp. 137-40; 142-43; 145.

[143]
thralldom which the courtly lover assumes for the sake of his beloved. The very fact of imprisonment makes the situation, at least nominally, Boethian; the presence of the lady establishes the courtly context; the dream-vision episode introduces Macrobian elements, and the overall treatment is typically Chaucerian. It will be my purpose in this essay to examine in turn each of these aspects of The Kingis Quair in order to demonstrate the skillful way in which the poet, by synthesizing diverse traditional materials, has produced a coherent and extremely well-constructed poem.

(i) THE BOETHIAN SITUATION

There is not to my knowledge any recent critic of The Kingis Quair who does not recognize, or at least claim to recognize, the pervasive influence of Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy. John MacQueen considers the Consolation to be "perhaps the main controlling factor in the narrative of the Quair," and Mary Rohrberger goes so far as to call the poem, James I's "Consolation of Philosophy." The influence of the Consolation is noted by John Preston and by M. F. Markland who sees Fortune as the subject of the poem, a view judiciously modified by MacQueen: "Fortune in isolation... is not the central subject of the poem, but rather Fortune in the context of divine government as a whole." James himself gives us good reason to seek out Boethian echoes in The Kingis Quair; the book which prompts his musings is

5. A somewhat different view is given by Andrew Von Hendy, "The Free Thrall: A Study of The Kingis Quair," SL, II, (1964-65), 141-51, to whose essay I am nonetheless indebted. He says, "the speaker discovers by stages that his lady is indeed Cupid's princess come to free him, the goddess of nature and an agent of Providence" (p. 144).


7. "The Kingis Quair: An Evaluation," TSIL, II (1960), 292-302. Pp. 301-02. At this point let me explain that although I refer to the author as "James" I do so only for the sake of convenience. In spite of all the post-factum arguments intended to prove his authorship—see, for example, W. A. Craigie, "The Language of the Kingis Quair," E&O, XXV (1939: collected 1940), 22-38—the fact remains that the attribution of The Kingis Quair to King James I of Scotland rests upon a single, and not wholly trustworthy, manuscript ascription.


10. P. 120.
Boethius's *Consolation* (stanzas 3-4) which, he suggests, he has read in Latin (st. 7). His brief summary of the *Consolation* is illuminating: after suffering reversals at the hands of Fortune (st. 3), Boethius took comfort in philosophy (st. 4) and "in him-self the full recover wan/ Off his Infortune, poverti and distresse,/And in tham set his verray sekerne" (st. 5). The description ends as follows:

And so the vertew of his yowth before
Was in his age the ground of his delytis:
Fortune the bak him turnyt, and thercfore
He maketh loye and comfort, that quit is
Off this unseker warldis appetitis;
And so aworth he takith his penance,
And of his verrnew maid It suffisoaunce[.] (st. 6)

In Boethius's fall from "wele to wo," a descent which is checked by Philosophy in the *Consolation*, we see what comes to be identified as the typical medieval view of tragedy, a view explicitly stated in Philosophy's question: "Quid tragediarum clamor aliud deflet nisi indiscrcto ictu fortunam felicis regna vertentem?" But the point of the *Consolation*, as *The Kingis Quair* tells us, is that a state of felicity more nearly permanent than any based upon Fortune alone can be "recovered" by the individual who allows himself to be ruled by Philosophy. The structure of Boethius's life as it is described in the *Consolation* then is roughly circular, wele to wo to wele, a description which applies even more forcefully to the narrator of *The Kingis Quair*; as Von Hendy says, "the free thrall concludes where he began; the first line of his narrative is the last, and it recalls the paradox of human fate suggested by the stars."13

The first two lines of stanza six provide the impetus for the narrator's thoughts concerning his own youth which, as we might expect, he describes in Boethian terms. For him, as for Chaucer's Troilus, Palamon, and Arcite, youth is the time when man is most likely to come under Fortune's sway:

So uncouthly hit werdes sche [i.e., Fortune] devidith,


12. II, prose 2, p. 180. Chaucer adds the gloss, "Tragedeye is to seyn a dite of a prosperite for a tyme, that endeth in wrecchidnesse."

13. P. 151. The line referred to is, "Heigh In the hevynnis figure circulare" (1. 1)—the repetition of the word "circulare" is worthy of notice—which reappears at the end of st. 196. Von Hendy attributes the circularity of the poem to "the poet's realization that all things are encircled in the golden chain of love" (p. 151), but the golden chain is merely one aspect of the system described in the *Consolation*.
Namly in yowthe, that seldin ought providith. (st. 9)
As is typical of the narrative movement in *The Kingis Quair*, this general reflection leads the narrator into autobiographical revelation—

Among thir thoughtis rolling to and fro,
Fell me to mynd of my fortune and use;
In tendry yet how she was first my fo,
And eft my frende, and how I gat recure
Off my distresses, and all myn aventure
I gan oure-hayle. . . . (st. 10)

—which in turn produces the apostrophe to youth in general and to his own youth in particular:

Thou [sely] yowthe, of nature Indigest,
Unrypt fruyte with windis variable;
Like to the bird that fed is on the nest
And can nocht flee; of wit wayke and unstable,
To fortune both and to infortune habile;
Wist thou thy payne to cum and thy travaille,
For sorrow and driele were myght thou wepe and waille. (st. 14)

This stanza, it should be noted, begins the poem proper, and it is significant that the apostrophe to youth is so conspicuously placed, since what follows (st. 15-17) is an extended simile in which the youth subject to fortune is compared to a rudderless boat and in which the concept of freedom and the related Boethian concept of free will are implicitly called into question.

The narrator begins by establishing the point of contact, i.e., "unsekeness," between the two things being compared (st. 15). In the case of the young man, "unsekeness" causes him to drift aimlessly, a fit subject for Fortune; in the case of "the schip that sailith stereles," "unsekenes" may cause the vessel to come "Upon the rok[kis] most to harms hye." The rhetorical structure of the stanza, "Thus stant thy confort . . . Ryght as the schip . . . So standis thou here" exhibits in microcosm the circularity of the poem as a whole. More importantly, however, it answers perfectly to the sense, as like the rudderless boat and the free but aimless young man, it drifts, from assertion to metaphorical explication and back again to assertion. At the risk of belaboring the obvious, I should also like to note here the propriety of this circular structure in the context of Fortune and her "tolter quhele" (st. 9) which has just been the center of attention.

In stanza 16, the simile becomes metaphor. No longer is the young man merely *like* the rudderless boat, he is the "schip . . . stereles":

I mene this by my-self, as In party;
Though nature gave me suffissance In yowthe,
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The rypenesse of resoun lak[it] I,
   To governo with my will; so lyte I couth,
Quhen stereles to travaile I begouth,
Amang the waives of this world to drive;
And how the case, anon I will discrive.

The internalization of the comparison enables the narraror once again
to move from a general statement to a specific instance of it, i.e., his
own youth. The next stanza (17) amplifies the metaphor by reintro-
ducing in this subjective context most of the elements which had been
part of the original simile:

    With dourfill hert, amang the rokis blake,
    My feble bote full fast to stetle and rowe,
    Helples alone, the wynter nyght I wake,
    To wayte the wynd that forthward suld me throwe.
    O empi sail! qhare is the wynd suld blowe
    Me to the port, qharath all my game?
    Help, Calliope, and wynd, in Marye name!

Quite suddenly, and without warning, the frame of reference has been
completely changed. Gone are Fortune and the young man; in their
place is the ubiquitous flotsam of medieval exegesis:

    The rokis clepe I the prolitite
    Off doublinesse that doith my wittis pall:
    The lak of wynd is the deficitee
    In enditing of this lylit trelys small:
    The bote I clepe the matere hole of all:
    My witt, unto the sailte that now I wynd,
    To seke connyag, though I bot lytell fynd. (st. 18)

What have become of Fortune and youth? In the movement from simile
to metaphor to allegoric they have been abandoned for the purpose of
parody. "The prolitite of doublinesse," i.e., the wordiness occasioned
by the original comparison, has caused the poem, like the aimless
youth and the rudderless boat, to drift, and the poet here establishes
his intention to regain control of "The bote," i.e., "the matere hole of
all." The extended comparison has driven the boat-poem perilously
close to the rocks of mere verbiage, and the "lak of wynd," i.e., of
inspiration both in the literal and figurative senses, has emptied the
sail, i.e., has dulled his wit and his will to continue "this lylit trelys
small." Thus, the plea in the previous stanza to Calliope for wind, or
inspiration, and the reference to "wynter night" in the same stanza
which suggests that the poet intends to return to his present task of
writing the poem.

Calling attention to one's poetical shortcomings, as the poet has
done here, may be merely a sign of incompetence; he can, after all,
rewrite, or delete altogether, the passage in question. The situation
under discussion, however, is radically different. The comparison, at
least initially, is handled with consummate skill, and there is certainly
no suggestion of incompetence in the movement from simile to
metaphor. I believe that it is precisely the excellence of stanzas 15
and 16 which accounts both for the poet's dilemma and his unique
method of solving it. In terms of their immediate context as well as
their relationship to the poem as a whole, these two stanzas are simply
too good to be cast aside; on the other hand, the poet realizes that
he can bring the comparison to its logical, but unfortunately allegorical,
conclusion only at the expense of the forward movement of the narra-
tive. Therefore, in a stroke of brilliance, he manages to solve his
problem by stating it; that is, he retains the allegorical form towards
which the comparison has led him, but, at the same time, changes the
allegorical significance of each element in the comparison. That there
has been no preparation for these changes is exactly the point of the
parody, their arbitrary nature emphasizing the point which Chaucer
makes so effectively in his use of multiple morals at the end of the
Nun's Priest's Tale:14 namely, that in symbol allegory15 the relationship
between the signifier and the thing signified is rarely more than
gratuitously apparent, and is in fact perceived at all only because the
author explicitly states it. Having simultaneously explained the allegory
and stated the poetic problem related to it, the poet is free of both
and is able, once again, to begin his narrative. And this is precisely
what he does in stanza 19.

Before leaving our discussion of these stanzas, we have one addi-
tional factor to consider,16 a factor which will help to explain the
poet's reluctance to eliminate them. At the very beginning of his
extended comparison, James had briefly compared the aimless youth
with "the bird that fed is on the nest,/And can notht flee" because of
its "wit wayke and unstable" (st. 14), perhaps a fore-shadowing of
the prisoner's lament in which he complains that he is denied the
freedom granted to the birds he sees from his window. Similarly, the
youth-rudderless boat comparison may be interpreted as preparing us
psychologically for the capture of the narrator while on board a ship
(st. 24). But these correspondences, although they impart a kind of
casual relevance to the young man-rudderless boat stanzas, are essentially
trivial; of much greater significance is the relationship of the com-

14. See my essay, "Chaucer's Anti-fable: Reductio ad absurdum in the
15. As opposed to personification allegory. See R. W. Frank's illuminating
essay, "The Art of Reading Medieval Personification-Allegory," ELH, XX
(1953), 237-50.
16. The relationship between these stanzas and similar passages in Troilus
and Criseyde will be discussed in part 4 of this essay.
parison to the central Boethian situation of exile and imprisonment, and, as MacQueen puts it, of "the unconditional and happy acceptance by the individual of his place in an ordered universe that is Christian. . . ."17

If we examine the image of the rudderless boat, we see that it, like the aimless young man, enjoys a kind of freedom which is utterly useless. There is neither control nor direction; the boat and the youth simply drift. (When the simile becomes metaphor and the youth and the boat are one, it is interesting to note that in the literal description of the boarding on the high seas, both the young man and the boat are taken into custody, as though the poet could not forebear from retaining the identity of the two until the last possible moment.) When the metaphorical young man turns finally and irrevocably into the narrator as a youth, and when he is captured and imprisoned, he predictably enough laments the circumscription of his freedom and asks that it be restored to him. But his imprisonment is really no more grievous a hardship than his earlier freedom had been a benefit. It is only after he is smitten with love for the young woman whom he sees walking in the garden, that his plea for freedom takes on substance. Now he has a specific reason for desiring his freedom; i.e., he has acquired at least a modicum of "The rypenesse of resoun" (st. 16) which he had earlier lacked.

It does not require more than a passing acquaintance with The Consolation of Philosophy to recognize implicit in the poet's treatment of freedom and imprisonment the Boethian problem of free will as opposed to foreordination. How, Boethius asks, can man's free will operate within the context of God's foreknowledge? Philosophy's answer is clear and to the point:

Atque deus ea futura quae ex arbitrii libertate
proveniunt praesentia contueetur. Hae igitur
ad intuitum relata divinum necessaria fiant per
condicionem divina notionis; per se vero considerata
ab absoluta naturae suae libertate non desinunt.*

Earlier discussions of this problem, Chaucer's for example, had concentrated on volentia, whereas James in the youth-boat comparison and in the prison scenes focuses on libertas, his point being that freedom is worthless without "governance." The forms which this "governance" ought to take are suggested, but not imposed, in the course of the poem by the narrator's advisers, Venus, Minerva, and Fortune. And it is his desire for governance which makes him receptive to

17. P. 131.
their suggestions, just as Boethius's desire for governance enables him to accept the consolation which Philosophy brings.

Like Boethius, the narrator of The Kingis Quair is imprisoned unjustly, bemoans his fate, and, as Miss Rohrberger says, "moves from conditions of despair to optimism, from doubt to faith, from questioning to acceptance."19 With the appearance of the young woman, the narrator realizes that libertas and "governaunce" are, in fact, not the mutually exclusive contraries he had thought them to be, and this realization is to be affirmed in the conversations with the three goddesses.20

The first of these dialogues proves inconclusive. Venus suggests that he place himself under her governance—"Abye, and serve, and lat gude hope the gye" (st. 106),—but informs him that she alone cannot help him:

... now thy mater so in balance hangith,
That it requirith, to thy sekernesse,
The help of othir mo that bene goddes,
And have In thame the menes and the lore,
In this materse to schorten with thy sore. (st. 111)

She thereupon says that she will send him to Minerva and suggests that he "hir hestis wele conserve" (st. 112). That the narrator seeks counsel of Venus before being sent to Minerva is highly appropriate. He is as yet uncertain as to which deity actually has the "governaunce" of his own situation, and Venus seems to him, as she does to Palamon and Troilus, the external agency whose assistance would be most useful, prima facie.

As has often been noted, the narrator's conversation with Minerva, whom MacQueen perceptively identifies with Philosophy in the Consolation,21 is the most explicitly Boethian section of the poem. Minerva's chief porter is Patience (st. 125), the point being that the narrator cannot gain access to wisdom without first making the acquaintance of patience, a quality in which he has heretofore been lacking. Before giving her advice, Minerva makes a point of telling the narrator that he is free to reject it and can even refuse to hear it: "And gif thou durst unto that way enclyne [i.e., unto "grete worship and prise"]/1


20. The reason for the realization is the introduction of courtly elements which amplify the Boethian situation, a matter which we will take up in some detail shortly. Suffice it to say at this point that the narrator's statement, "my hert became hir thrall/For ever of free will" (st. 41), indicates, among other things, his sudden awareness of the nature of libertas, the importance of governance, and the paradoxical relationship of the two.

21. P. 121.
will the geve my lore and disciplyne" (st. 128; cf. st. 138). She continues:

Tak him before In all thy governaunce,
That in his hand the stere has of ȝou all,
And pray unto his hye purveyance,
Thy lufe to gyve, and on him traist and call,
That corner-stone and ground is of the wall,
That failis nought, and trust, withoutin drede,
Unto thy purpose sone he sall the lede. (st. 130)

The young man-rudderless boat comparison is here brought to a conclusion. If the narrator will voluntarily allow himself to be guided by Him "That in his hand the stere has of ȝou all," he will immediately be led "Unto thy purpose." Minerva goes on to extol the virtues of patience and the importance of joining wisdom and will (st. 133). After hearing the narrator's plea, Minerva tells him that she "will [hir] pray full faire,/That fortune be no more thereto contraire" (st. 140); the mention of Fortune provides Minerva with an opportunity to explain, in patently Boethian terms, the function of that goddess and her relationship both to God and man. Minerva's conclusion is that Fortune is strongest, "Qvahre lest foreknowing or intelligence/Is in the man" (st. 149), i.e., that man's will operates most freely when he acts under the governance of wisdom. And since the narrator, in spite of what he has learned, is still "wayke and feble" of wit (st. 149), Minerva dispatches him to Fortune. Since Book II of the Consolation is entirely taken up with Philosophy's injunctions against Fortune, Minerva's behavior here certainly requires explanation. Minerva, as we have seen, clearly states in st. 149, that the narrator is incapable of placing himself under her "governaunce," in part because of his intellectual deficiencies which are, as he himself had earlier suggested (st. 14), the natural consequence of his youth. But it is not merely his youth which makes him subject to Fortune. More importantly, it is his courtly desire for the young woman, a desire which is entirely sublunary, which prompts Minerva to return him to the earth whence he had come.

Returning to earth, the narrator is led by his guide, Good Hope, to the goddess Fortuna, the description of whom is perfectly traditional. She promises her aid (st. 170), but in attempting to help him mount the wheel she pulls him by the ear "so ernesty" that he awakens (st. 172). It is perhaps significant to note that the narrator awakens before he is able to climb on Fortune's wheel. What this seems to suggest is

22. Before taking leave of the rudderless boat motif, we ought to note the possibility that it was suggested by Philosophy's admonition in the Consolation: "Si ventis vela committeres, non quo voluntas peteret sed quo flatus impelleret, promoveres." II, prose 1, p. 176.
that the narrator has absorbed more of Minerva's wisdom than had been apparent in his conversation with her.

With only minor exceptions, the Boethian influence terminates at this point. It has, however, served its purpose, first by universalizing the specific situation described in the poem and thereby providing for the poet the ideological framework within which the situation is to be interpreted. Further, and perhaps more important, it has suggested to the poet the rhetorical structure of the poem as a whole. Finally, it has given the poet the inspiration for one of the most finely wrought passages in Middle English poetry. Were we to eliminate all evidence of Boethian influence from *The Kingis Quair*, what remains would stand in the same relation to *The Kingis Quair* as *Il Filostrato* does to *Troilus and Criseyde*, a poem conventionally modish and sophisticated but episodic and flimsy as well. For James, as for Chaucer, the Boethian material adds dimension and weight to the narrative.

(ii) THE COURTLY CONTENT

If the basic situation of *The Kingis Quair* is Boethian, the means by which the situation is resolved are courtly. Although the narrator attributes his release from prison to Jupiter (st. 25), the deities he prays to and consults, Venus, Minerva, Fortune, are all goddesses; as is typical of courtly poetry, *The Kingis Quair* presents a situation in which women, or female personifications, occupy the positions of authority and exercise almost absolute control over the male supplicant. Once the narrator voluntarily places himself in the power of the young woman he has seen walking in the garden, his world, like that of the knight in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, becomes one in which women are dominant.

It is instructive to examine the way in which James introduces this world into his poem. After the narrator's Boethian lament concerning his imprisonment (st. 26-30), he tells us that he went to the window "to se the world and folk that went forby" (st. 30); this world, as we immediately discover, is a courtly one containing a garden within which is an arbor (ss. 31-32), whose sole inhabitant, a nightingale, sings "the ympnis consecrat of lufis use" (st. 33). Both literally and figuratively, the courtly world which the narrator sees from his window is

23. One of the more interesting of these occurs in the envoy (st. 194), in which the poet expresses the hope that the reader will "reule and... stere" his "tong" so that the faults of the poem "helit may ben here."

24. Although it is true that the knight enters the courtly world from one direction, and the narrator of *The Kingis Quair* from another, their experience in it are similar, both he and the narrator being entirely at the mercy of women, and both achieving freedom only through submission.
one from which he is excluded; and when other birds join the nightingale to sing the praises of love (st. 35), he begins to wonder whether love can, in fact, "oure hertes setten and unbynd" (st. 37), and, what is more important to him at this juncture, whether love can "bynd and louse, and maken thrallis free" (st. 39). His internal débat concerning the power of love is short-lived; in the very next stanza (i.e., 40) he sees "The fairest or the freschest song[e] floure/That ever I sawe," and immediately surrenders his heart to her (st. 41).

Because he has been thinking about love in terms of its power to "bynd and louse," the narrator speculates that the young woman may be "god Cupidis owin prinsesse,/ . . . cumyn . . . to louse me out of bond," or perhaps "verray nature the goddesse/That have depaynted with your heavily hand/This garden full of flouris" (st. 43). Both guesses are, as Von Hendy notes, in part correct; the prisoner is to be freed by his love for the young woman, herself a kind of dea ex horte whose presence in the garden seems to some extent dependent upon the love song of the birds which immediately precedes it.

The description of the lady has been criticized by Speirs who says: "There is more life in the garden than in her; she is less deeply felt than the leafage of the trees." But what the description lacks in spontaneity it gains in relevance. The jewels which the lady wears, pearls, emeralds, sapphires, etc. (st. 46) contrast with the natural beauty of the garden and sustain the narrator's doubts as to whether the lady is goddess or woman, or, if goddess, which one; the chaplet of plumes rather than the usual flowers, serves to emphasize and amplify the uncertainty of the narrator as to the nature of the young woman. When Speirs accuses her of seeming lifeless he is correct, but it must be asked whether "that impression of freshness, naturalness, and simplicity," which we get from Chaucer's description of Emily is really what James is after here. The glittering lady is, in a series of similes, likened to her natural surroundings, but the narrator's own confusion renders him incapable of turning the similes into metaphors, i.e., of identifying the lady as an actual young woman:

Full of quaking spangis bright as gold,
Forgi of schap like to the amorettis,
So new, so fresch, so pleasant to behold,
The plumys eke like to the floure ionettis,
And othir of schap like to the [round crokettis],
And, above all this, there was, wele I wote,
Beautee eneuch to mak a world to dote. (st. 47)

25. P. 144.
27. Speirs, p. 35.
The artificial ornaments which adorn the lady represent one kind of beauty, the flowers to which they are likened another, just as the lady herself, like a jewel in its setting, exhibits a kind of beauty different from that of the garden which surrounds her.

In the next stanza, the relationship between the narrator and the lady is established symbolically:

About hir nek, quhite as the fyre amaille,
A gudely cheyne of smale orfeyre
Quhareby there hang a ruby, without faille,
Like to ane hert[e] schapin verily. . .  (st. 48)

The "gudely cheyne" is metaphorically the chain of love, referred to later in the poem (st. 183), and the heart-shaped ruby is, of course, a symbolic representation of the narrator's heart, freely offered to the lady and eventually accepted by her. As though the symbol is, in some causal way, antecedent to the fact, the narrator's perception of the ruby is quickly followed by his decision that the lady is nature's child (st. 50) and therefore a "worldly creature" (st. 51) whose love is perhaps attainable by the usual means of prayer to Venus (st. 52). It is significant that once the lady's reality and mortality are established, the lapidarian images which had been used to describe her disappear from the poem and are replaced by references to her as a "floure" (e.g., st. 114) or rose (st. 186).

The effect which the narrator's sudden consecration to love has on him is to make him perceive everything anew, and to interpret all that he sees in terms of his own deeply felt love for the beautiful young woman. Because love has come to him as a direct result of his having seen the lady in the garden, the narrator begins to scrutinize the garden more closely and to internalize what he sees there. The lady's hound, for example, which had been too insignificant to comment upon earlier now seems more blessed than he because of its proximity to its mistress: "'A! wele were him that now were In thy plyte!' " (st. 53). The silence of the nightingale he construes as a personal affront to his lady (st. 54), and chides the bird querulously (st. 54-59) for having "no mynde of lufe" (st. 58). In these stanzas, James delineates the extreme, almost comic, self-consciousness of the courtly lover for whom all of creation seems impervious to his plight but whose good offices he thinks it essential to secure.

28. Minerva later says to the narrator in "game": "I se wele by thy chere and contenence./There is sum thing that lys the on hert" (st. 167).

29. Speirs, who is usually a most perceptive reader of poetry, seems to have missed the point here. About the jewel imagery in general and the ruby in particular he says: "It is associated indeed with fire . . . but in other respects it is without symbolic significance" (p. 36).
one from which he is excluded; and when other birds join the nightingale to sing the praises of love (st. 35), he begins to wonder whether love can, in fact, "oure hertes seten and unbynd" (st. 37), and, what is more important to him at this juncture, whether love can "bynd and louse, and maken thrallis free" (st. 39). His internal débat concerning the power of love is short-lived; in the very next stanza (i.e., 40) he sees "The fairest or the fresches song[e] floure/That ever I sawe," and immediately surrenders his heart to her (st. 41).

Because he has been thinking about love in terms of its power to "bynd and louse," the narrator speculates that the young woman may be "god Cupidis owin princesse,/ . cunnyn . . . to louse me out of bond," or perhaps "verray nature the goddesse/That have depaynted with your hevinly hand/This garden full of flouris" (st. 45). Both guesses are, as Von Hendy notes, in part correct; the prisoner is to be freed by his love for the young woman, herself a kind of dea ex horte whose presence in the garden seems to some extent dependent upon the love song of the birds which immediately precedes it.

The description of the lady has been criticized by Speirs who says: "There is more life in the garden than in her; she is less deeply felt than the leafage of the trees." But what the description lacks in spontaneity it gains in relevance. The jewels which the lady wears, pearls, emeralds, sapphires, etc. (st. 46) contrast with the natural beauty of the garden and sustain the narrator's doubts as to whether the lady is goddess or woman, or, if goddess, which one; the chaplet of plumes rather than the usual flowers, serves to emphasize and amplify the uncertainty of the narrator as to the nature of the young woman. When Speirs accuses her of seeming lifeless he is correct, but it must be asked whether "that impression of freshness, naturalness, and simplicity," which we get from Chaucer's description of Emily is really what James is after here. The glittering lady is, in a series of similes, likened to her natural surroundings, but the narrator's own confusion renders him incapable of turning the similes into metaphors, i.e., of identifying the lady as an actual young woman:

Full of quaking spangis bryght as gold,
Forgit of schap like to the amorettis,
So new, so fresch, so pleasant to behold,
The plumys eke like to the floure Ionettis,
And othir of schap like to the [round crokettis],
And, above all this, there was, wele I wote,
Beauche euench to mak a world to dote. (st. 47)

25. P. 144.
27. Speirs, p. 35.
The artificial ornaments which adorn the lady represent one kind of beauty, the flowers to which they are likened another, just as the lady herself, like a jewel in its setting, exhibits a kind of beauty different from that of the garden which surrounds her.

In the next stanza, the relationship between the narrator and the lady is established symbolically:

About hir nek, quhit as the fyre amaille,
A gudely cheyne of smale orfeuerie
Quhareby there hang a ruby, without faille,
Like to ane hert[e] schapin verily... (st. 48)

The "gudely cheyne" is metaphorically the chain of love, referred to later in the poem (st. 183), and the heart-shaped ruby is, of course, a symbolic representation of the narrator's heart, freely offered to the lady and eventually accepted by her. As though the symbol is, in some causal way, antecedent to the fact, the narrator's perception of the ruby is quickly followed by his decision that the lady is nature's child (st. 50) and therefore a "worldly creature" (st. 51) whose love is perhaps attainable by the usual means of prayer to Venus (st. 52). It is significant that once the lady's reality and mortality are established, the lapidarian images which had been used to describe her disappear from the poem and are replaced by references to her as a "floure" (e.g., st. 114) or rose (st. 186).

The effect which the narrator's sudden consecration to love has on him is to make him perceive everything anew, and to interpret all that he sees in terms of his own deeply felt love for the beautiful young woman. Because love has come to him as a direct result of his having seen the lady in the garden, the narrator begins to scrutinize the garden more closely and to internalize what he sees there. The lady's hound, for example, which had been too insignificant to comment upon earlier now seems more blessed than he because of its proximity to its mistress: "'A! wele were him that now were in thy pyle!'" (st. 53). The silence of the nightingale he construes as a personal affront to his lady (st. 54), and chides the bird querulously (st. 54-59) for having "no mynde of lufe" (st. 58). In these stanzas, James delineates the extreme, almost comic, self-consciousness of the courtly lover for whom all of creation seems impervious to his plight but whose good offices he thinks it essential to secure.

28. Minerva later says to the narrator in "game": "I se wele by thy chere and contenance, ther is sum thing that lyis the on hert" (st. 167).

29. Speirs, who is usually a most perceptive reader of poetry, seems to have missed the point here. About the jewel imagery in general and the ruby in particular he says: "It is associated indeed with fire... but in other respects it is without symbolic significance" (p. 36).
The narrator begins his scolding of the bird by asking it to sing "For Venus sake" in order to "mak my lady chere" (st. 54). His reason for wanting the bird to resume singing is different, and less altruistic, in the next two stanzas:

And eke I pray, for all the paynes grete
That for the love of proigne thy sister dere,
Thou sufferit quhilom, quhen thy brestis were
Were with the teres of thy eyen clere
All bludry ronne; that pitee was to here
The crewteer of that unknystly dede,
Quhare was fro the bereft thy maidenhede,
Lift up thyn hert, and sing with gude entent;
And in thy notis suete the treson telle,
That to thy sister trewe and Innocent
Was kythit by hir husband false and fell;
For quhoois gilt, as it is worthi wel,
Chide thir husbands that are false, I say,
And bid thame mend, In the twenty devil way. (sts. 55-56)

In having the narrator ask the nightingale to sing of Procne, James demonstrates his skill in portraying both the narrator's anxiety and the devious way in which he tries to alleviate it. In the nightingale, the narrator recognizes a kindred spirit, one which has suffered for love. Its complaint, which he sees as being similar to his own, cannot help but move the lady to pity, if not for him, then at least for those who have suffered cruel treatment through no fault of their own. The reasons for the narrator's chiding then, as he makes clear in the next stanza ("O lytill wretch, allace! maist thou noght se/Qhoo commyth 3ond?" st. 57), are first, to attract the lady's attention—perhaps by the sound of his own pleas should the bird remain silent (see st. 60, below)—and second, to enlist her sympathy. The narrator, who had earlier tried pleas, now resorts to _ad aevm_ reproaches (st. 58) and cajolery (st. 59), but finally has to admit his helplessness:

I thought eke thus, gif I my handis clap,
Or gif I cast, than will sche flee away;
And gif I hold my pes, than will sche nap;
And gif I crye, sche wate noght quhat I say;
Thus, quhat is best, wate I noght be this day:
"Bot blawe wynd, blawe, and do the levis shake,
That sum twig may wag, and mak hir to wake." (st. 60)

The incantation is immediately successful, a precursor of the narrator's success in obtaining non-human aid later in the poem, and the nightingale bursts into a song (st. 61) which attracts other birds; their chorus inspires the narrator to add his courtly accompaniment: "Qhuen sall your merci rew upon your man, / Qhoois service is 3it uncouth unto 3ow?" (st. 63). And the birds respond by stating their pleasure at
alludes briefly to physiological and psychological causes (¶ 3-5), and, on the question of how one can distinguish a divinatory from a non-divinatory dream, Macrobius is silent.

For the poet, then, Macrobius, in spite of his reputation as an authority on dreams, could be of but limited assistance. To be sure, some of Macrobius's comments achieve literary prominence, but for the most part, it is Macrobius's general concern with dreams, a concern which the poets exaggerated, rather than his specific observations about them which caused him to figure so prominently in medieval dream allegory.

Generally, the dream in The Kingis Quair follows the outline of the Dream of Scipio: the narrator is taken up into the heavens where he is instructed about his future conduct; having been advised, the dreamer awakens. Just as Scipio is told that “below the moon all is mortal and transitory” (IV, 3), the dreamer in The Kingis Quair must subject himself to Fortune's Wheel once he has returned to earth.

As for the kind of dream which is presented in The Kingis Quair, the information which would enable the dreamer, and the reader, to make any definitive classification is deliberately withheld until the dreamer has awakened. Thus, the significance of the dream is made known not in the dream itself, where it must necessarily be viewed with some suspicion, but in the waking world which the narrator inhabits.

The ambivalence of the narrator with regard to the dream is an extremely effective device for anticipating and deferring the correlative ambivalence of the reader. We are told, for example, that the dream takes place while the narrator is “amaisit verily,/ Half sleping and half swoon” (st. 73). The dream which follows does not in any way dispel the doubts which its occasion has raised; upon awakening, the narrator asks precisely the question which occurs to the reader: “Is this of my forethought impressiou/ Or is it from the hevin a visiou?” (st. 175). The answer is given in the message delivered to the narrator

35. Sohl, pp. 41-42.

36. For example, in the Nun's Priest's Tale, Pertelote's suggestion to Chauntecleer that he purge himself is based on the Macrobian distinction between somnium and insomnium, the latter of which can be the result of overindulgence in eating and drinking (¶ 4).

37. In the House of Fame (1. 26), Chaucer reports that some men believe imprisonment itself is a cause of dreams.
by a turtle dove: "now lauch, and play, and synge,/ That art besid so glad an aventure;/ For In the hevyn decretit is the cure" (st. 179). 38

As we have seen, the virtue which the narrator learns in the course of his dream is patience, the virtue taught to Boethius by Lady Philosophy. That James should choose to have this virtue expounded in the context of a Macrobian dream is evidence of his ability and willingness to synthesize material from diverse sources, a characteristic which will be more fully documented in the last part of this essay. 39

(iv) THE CHAUCERIAN TREATMENT

That The Kingis Quair owes much to Chaucer has been recognized by virtually everyone who has studied it, and its three modern editors, Skeat, Lawson, and Mackenzie, have very carefully called attention to Chaucerian parallels and echoes in The Kingis Quair. Our understand-

38. It is tempting to see the turtle-dove as representative of a kind of love different from, and perhaps, opposed to, the variety of love reluctantly espoused by the nightingale earlier in the poem. However, such an interpretation is highly speculative, especially if one assumes with Carl E. Bain ("The Nightingale and the Dove in the Kingis Quair," TSL, IX (1964), 19-29) that because the nightingale is said to be the reprentative of Venus and, presumably, of courtly love, the dove must represent chastity and marriage (pp. 23-24). For this interpretation, Mr. Bain is obviously relying not upon the poem, which contains not a single reference to the narrator's marriage and which in face describes his realization of his love in terms which are explicitly courtly, but rather upon several highly questionable assumptions concerning the life of the putative author. The narrator, in describing how he came "to blisse with hir that is my souirane" (st. 181), refers to Venus, love's servants, and standing in a lady's grace (st. 184); to the dance of love (st. 185); and to love as "the rose" (st. 186) and the "floure" (st. 187, 192), courtly references all.

With regard to the birds, each is strictly functional rather than emblematic. The nightingale's song foreshadows the narrator's audience with Venus and, with regard to the young woman, beokens a love no different from that suggested in the dove's message. Just as the narrator had chided the nightingale ("me think thou gyynis slepe," st. 57), the dove now implores the narrator to "awak! awak!" (st. 179), and the courtly love which the narrator achieves is described in terms which echo the song of the birds (st. 64-65).

39. There are perhaps two instances in The Kingis Quair of direct Macrobian influence: 1) in his ascent to the sphere of Venus, the dreamer passes through each of the four elements (st. 76; cf. Macrobius, XI, 11 8-9); however, the order of the elements in The Kingis Quair is at odds with that in Macrobius, 2) James refers to "my buk in lynis sevin" (st. 197; cf. st. 187), and one of the most important personages in the poem is Minerva. Macrobius (VI, 11) says, "The reputation of virginity has so grown about the number seven that it is called Pallas. Indeed, it is regarded as a virgin because, when doubled it produces no number under ten, the later being the first limit of numbers. It is Pallas because it is born only from the multiplication of the monad, just as Minerva alone is said to have been born of one parent."
ning of the poem has improved substantially in this century, and it is no longer possible to say that James's use of Chaucer is mechanical. However, no attempt has hitherto been made to examine these parallels in any detail, and, what is more important, no one has investigated James's explicitly Chaucerian treatment of even non-Chaucerian elements. It is with these problems that this section will deal.

The one poem of Chaucer's which James most clearly knew is the *Knights' Tale.* Briefly the parallels between the narrator's first glimpse of the young woman in the garden and the first sight of Emily by Palamon and Arcite are as follows: 1) like Chaucer's knights (I/A/, 1042 ff.), the narrator arises early (st. 27); 2) like Arcite (1086) he attributes his imprisonment to Fortune (st. 29); 3) in both poems there is a garden visible from the window of the prison (1065-67; st. 30); 4) and in both there is a beautiful, young woman in the garden who is doing her "Observances" to May (1045 ff.; st. 34, 40); 5) the debate between Palamon and Arcite as to whether Emily is a goddess or woman (1101 ff.; Cf. also, *Troilus and Criseyde*, I, 425) is internalized by the narrator (st. 42-44); 6) who like the Theban knights is stricken with love at first sight (1077-79, 1112-16; st. 40); 7) like Emily, who has consecrated herself to Diana (2273 ff.), the young woman in *The Kingis Quair* is Nature's child (st. 50); 8) like Arcite and then Palamon (1155 ff.), the narrator realizes that the young woman is a "worldly creature" (st. 51), and since like Palamon he is to seek her love successfully, 9) he, like Palamon (2210 ff.), prays to Venus (st. 52) for aid. We might also note that whereas Palamon at first mistakes Emily for Venus (1112), the narrator suspects that the young woman may be "Cupidis owin princesse" (st. 40).

While these parallels are sufficient to indicate the close relationship between *The Kingis Quair* and the *Knights' Tale*, the similarities in technique are even more striking and are, I believe, of greater significance. It is generally agreed that Chaucer's most important departure from the *Teseid* is his addition of Boethian material; it has also been suggested that Chaucer's purpose in the *Knights' Tale* is to raise a


41. It has not to my knowledge been suggested that James also knew Chaucer's source, *Il Teseide*. Only a comparison of the *Teseide* and the relevant stanzas of *The Kingis Quair* would clarify the relationship between the two. Although such an examination lies beyond the scope of the present study, it certainly ought to be undertaken.
de\textit{mande d'amour} of the kind associated with the courts of love.\textsuperscript{42} As we have seen, James attempts a fusion of Boethian and courtly elements in the Chaucerian manner, and his success is at least in part the result of Chaucer's similar fusion in the \textit{Knight's Tale}.

After the \textit{Knight's Tale}, the poem of Chaucer's with which James seems to have been most conversant is \textit{Troilus and Criseyde}. Like the \textit{Knight's Tale} and \textit{The Kingis Quair}, \textit{Troilus and Criseyde} combines courtly and Boethian elements, and the character of Troilus in the first two books is little different from that of Palamon. More particularly, the image of the steerless boat which James puts to such effective use is employed similarly in \textit{Troilus and Criseyde} (I, 416-20; 969; V, 641), and, as James is to do, Chaucer provides for us a detailed allegorical explanation of this image (II, 1-7). The heart-shaped ruby worn by the young woman in \textit{The Kingis Quair} (st. 48) is, as Lawson has noted,\textsuperscript{43} strikingly similar to the brooch which Criseyde gives to Troilus:

But wel I woot, a broche, gold and asure,  
In which a ruby set was lik an herte,  
Criseyde hym yaf, and stak it on hi sherte. (III, 1370-72)

As in \textit{The Kingis Quair}, Macrobian dream-lore is prominent in \textit{Troilus and Criseyde}, but perhaps the most significant correspondence between the two poems has to do with the way in which love is described in each. In medieval poetry generally, one often finds love described in terms of contradictory, even paradoxical, elements. Thus, in the English \textit{Romance of the Rose}, we find the author, possibly Chaucer, describing love as follows:

Love, it is an hateful pees,  
A free acquitaunce, withoute relees,  
A trouthe, fret full of faisheede,  
A sikernes se all set in drede,  
In herte is a dispeiryn hope,  
And full of hope, it is wanhope;  
Wis woodnesse, and wod retoun;  
A swete perell, in to droun;

\textsuperscript{42} J. R. Hulbert, "What Was Chaucer's Aim in the Knight's Tale?" \textit{SP}, XXVI (1929), 375-85.

An hevy birthen, lyght to bere;
A wikked wawe, awey to were.  (4703-12) 44

For another fifty-two lines, the poet in the person of "Raisoun," characterizes the paradoxical, and essentially dualistic, nature of love. The point which Jean de Meun and his redactor seem to be making is that no description of, or statement about, love is more nearly true than its opposite. There is no discussion of the oxymoronic nature of love in the Romaunt. We are not told, for example, whether love embodies these paradoxical qualities simultaneously or over a period of time, nor is any effort made to distinguish among various kinds of love. We have only a rhetorical exercise in which all attempts at description are inherently self-defeating. According to Raisoun, love is no less an indulgence of personal vanity than are attempts to explain it.

In Troilus and Criseyde, love is again described paradoxically, but Chaucer provides if not a resolution at least an explanation, possibly ironic, in Pandarus's doctrine of contraries. Pandarus tells Troilus "By his contrarie is every thyng declared" (I, 637), and goes on to say that "of two contraries is o lore" (I, 645). Thus, the theory of contraries is composed of two dependent propositions: 1) everything is "declared," i.e., made known and therefore understood, by its contrary, 2) of two contraries there is "o lore," i.e., a single resolution or moral.

Although the theory is stated briefly, opportunities for its practical application are virtually unlimited, since contraries in Troilus and Criseyde appear frequently and in almost inconceivable variety. In reading the poem we come upon pleonastic contraries (e.g., "up and down," V, 432 et passim), proverbial contraries (e.g., "wulf ful" and "wether hool," IV, 1374), contraries having to do with topography ("valye" and "hil," I, 950) and horticulture ("wedes wike" and "holsum herbes," I, 946-47). The largest category contains those pairs of opposites which relate directly to the central concern of the poem, the love of Troilus for Criseyde. Thus Pandarus tells Troilus that "joie is next the fyn of sorwe" (I, 952); Troilus, "as do thise lovers," finds

44. The French is:

Amour si est paix haineuse,
Amour est haine amoureuse,
C'est loyauté la desloyalle,
C'est la desloyauté loyalle,
C'est la pasour toute asserée;
Esperance desesperée;
C'est raison toute forcenable,
C'est doux peril à soy noyer,
C'est fois legier à paumoyer ...  

"La Roman de la Rose," Par Guillaume de Lorris et Jean de Meun dis clopinel . . ., ed. l'abbé Lenglet du Fresney, 3 v. (Paris, 1757), 1, 4397-4406.
himself "bi twixen hope and derk desesperance" (II, 1306-07), and later oscillates between "hope and drede" (V, 1207); Criseyde tells Troilus that she will turn all his bitterness to sweetness (III, 179); and Troilus is forced to accept "newe sorwe" in place of his "joies olde" (V, 558).

In addition to the purely descriptive use of contraries which are dependent upon the structural device of antithesis, and which, because they ultimately derive from the concept of Fortune's wheel, are consecutive, we also find instances in which both contraries are simultaneously operative, their simultaneity being indicated by the use of either oxymoron (e.g., Pandaras's "I have a joly wo, a lusty sorwe"; II, 1099) or paradox (e.g., the description of the Trinity and of the Virgin mother in the last stanza of the poem; V, 1863-69).

When we turn to The Kingis Quair, we find that the paradoxical nature of love is once again treated in terms of contraries. The narrator's free thralldom, for example, is anticipated by Troilus's statement: "For myn esst riotal I heres resigne/ Into hire hirend, and with ful humble chere/ Bicome hir man, as to my lady dere" (I, 432-34).45 More specifically, the simultaneity of love's contraries is indicated by the narrator, whose appraisal of his condition is somewhat similar to the complaints of Troilus:

How may this be, that deth and lyf, bothe twayne,
Sall bothe atomis in a creature
Togilder duell, and tument thus nature?

I may nought ellis done bot wepe and waile,
Withth thir calde[...] wallis thus l-lokyn;
From hingesfourth my rest is my trauaille;
My drye thirst with teris sall I slokin,
And on my-self bene ai my harmys wrokin:
Thus bote is none, bot venus, of hir grace,
Will schape remede, or do my spirit pace. (st. 68-69)

After comparing himself with Tantalus (cf. Troilus and Criseyde, III, 593; Book of the Duchess, 708; Boece, III, n. 12, l. 38), the narrator goes on to say that the effect of his complaint is such

That turnyt is my strength In feselnesse,
My wele in wo, my frends all in fone,
My lyf in deth, my lyght into dinknesse,
My hope in feere, in dount my sekernesse,
Sen sche is gone: and god mote hir convoye,
That me may gyde to tument and to loye. (st. 71)

45. We are to'd also that the "fyr of love" held Troilus "as his thral lowe in destresse" (I, 439).
And Venus uses antithesis to point out to the narrator how unworthy he is of the lady's love:

And zit, considering the nakitesse
Bothe of thy wit, thy persone, and thy myght,
It is no mache, of thyne unworthynesse
To hir hir birth, estate, and beautee bryght:
Als like ge bene, as day is to the nyght;
Or sek-cloeth is vnto fyne cremeneye;
Or doken to the fresche daysye.

Vnlike the mone Is to the sonne scene;
Eke lansuere is [yn]like to may;
Vnlike the cukkow to the phylomene;
Thaire tabartis ar noght bothe maid of array;
Vnlike the crow is to the pape-lay;
Vnlike, In goldsmythis werk, a fischis eye
To prise with peril, or made be so heye. (st. 109-10)

It is perilously easy to call James's use of contraries conventional without recognizing the origins of the conventions, in English poetry at least, in Chaucer. In Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer, as in his various discussions of dreams, once again provides a theoretical explanation ("By his contrarie is every thyngh declared") together with its practical application, and once again applies an idea drawn from Boethius to a situation which is patently courtly. It is precisely this process which James imitates in The Kingis Quair, and which explains his reference to Chaucer as one of his "maisteris dere" (st. 197). For James, Chaucer is a teacher not a repository, and therefore his indebtedness to Chaucer resides chiefly in the techniques which Chaucer has taught him rather than in specific passages or motifs in Chaucer which can be borrowed.

46. Philosophy says, "And of thise thinges, ceres, verich of hem is declared and schewed by others. For so as good and yvel ben two contraries, yf so be that good be stefast, thanne scheweth the feblesse of yvel al opynly; and if thow knowe clerly the freelines of yvel, the stefastnes of good is knownen." Chaucer's Boece, IV, prose 2.

47. Although, as we have seen, James's indebtedness to Chaucer does at times extend to these smaller aspects. Instances can perhaps also be adduced from The Cuckoo and the Nightingale (ante 1410) which for quite some time was erroneously ascribed to Chaucer. With the narrator's ambivalence in The King's Quair concerning the nature of his dream (st. 73) we might compare the following: "And the delyt ther-of I wol never now, I fel in suche a slumber and a snow, Not al a-slepe, ne fully wakinge" (C&N, ed. Skeat in Chaucerian and Other Pieces [Oxford, 1897], 11. 86-88). And when the narrator warns the nightingale that "sum bryd may cum and sryve/ In song with the, the maistry to purchase" (st. 59), he may be referring obliquely to the cuckoo's role in the C&N (cf. The Kingis Quair, st. 110 in which Venus cites the cuckoo and the nightingale as being opposites).
and especially in the application of Boethian doctrine to the situations and concerns of courtly poetry. Undoubtedly James would have agreed with Usk's description of Chaucer as "the noble philosophical poete in English."

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