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CHAUCER'S "MONK'S TALE."

LEHIGH UNIVERSITY, PH.D., 1978

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THE PHILOSOPHIC AND ARTISTIC PURPOSES
OF CHAUCER'S MONK'S TALE

by
Douglas Lee Lepley

A Dissertation
Presented to the Graduate Committee
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Abstract

Recent criticism of Chaucer's Monk's Tale presents two views of this narrative that are uncomplimentary to the Monk. One group of critics believes that Chaucer continues the satiric treatment of the Monk initiated in the General Prologue by giving Daun Piers a philosophically uninformed tale. The Monk's tragedies, they contend, suggest that the universe is chaotic and malicious, a view that Chaucer, as a good Boethian and Christian, would have deemed a misconception. A second group of critics thinks that the Monk's Tale is artistically unrefined. They argue that Chaucer gave the Monk a tedious narrative either to show the unimagination of medieval tragedy or to provide humor when the Host complains about the Monk's performance. Both of these views, furthermore, help to explain the Knight's and Host's reactions to the Monk's stories: the Knight recognizes Daun Piers's uninformed philosophy, and the Host sees the inadequacy of the Monk's narrative art.

Although these views may seem plausible, they in fact miss Chaucer's philosophic and artistic purposes in the Monk's Tale. Comparison of the Monk's narratives with Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy reveals

numerous parallels between these two works and suggests that in his tale the Monk teaches the sound Boethian lesson that true felicity lies not in the accumulation of worldly goods but in perfected spiritual existence. Moreover, an examination of Chaucer's works other than the Monk's Tale shows that by considering the nature of true and false felicity, Daun Piers presents a typically Chaucerian theme. The Monk's tragedies, therefore, were meant not to reflect a bad clergyman's misunderstanding of the nature of creation but to teach a respected philosophic lesson.

The Monk's Tale may also be more artistically refined than the critics believe. Despite some claims to the contrary, Chaucer admired the genre of medieval tragedy and frequently incorporated its elements into his works, including the Monk's Tale. Indeed, the Monk's narratives reflect a concentrated effort to develop an element of medieval tragedy that was especially appealing to Chaucer--the evocation of pathos. This pathos, furthermore, is part of the Monk's message: although he moralizes about the imprudence of seeking permanent happiness in the accumulation of worldly goods, Daun Piers also encourages his listeners not to scorn those people who indulge in this folly but to have compassion for them in their blindness and

suffering.

The view that the Monk's Tale is a respectable narrative makes it necessary to reconsider the significance of the Knight's and Host's criticisms of the Monk's performance and the appropriateness of this tale to the Monk. Indeed, in reacting to the Monk's tragedies the Knight exhibits his own limited philosophy, implied in his tale, and the Host demonstrates some literary prejudices that typify his responses to the pilgrims' stories. Also, the Monk's accomplishments and education show that he is worthy of a serious tale. A reading of the Monk's Tale, therefore, as philosophically and artistically sound not only rehabilitates the Monk and his tale, but also indicates Chaucer's true intentions in this narrative.

I. A Bad Tale by a Bad Teller

Most critics who have recently published on the Monk's Tale find the Monk's tragedies philosophically unsound, according to our best notion of what Chaucer himself believed.¹ These critics base their interpretations on a comparison of the Monk's Tale with other works by Chaucer and with Boethius's The Consolation of Philosophy, a work Chaucer respected enough to translate. Specifically, they maintain that the Monk's narratives contain one or more of three elements philosophically unacceptable to Chaucer. These three elements are the Monk's characterization of Fortune as

¹Robert Kaske, "The Knight's Interruption of the Monk's Tale," ELH, 24 (1957), 249-68; E. Talbot Donaldson, ed., Chaucer's Poetry: An Anthology for the Modern Reader (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1958), pp. 937-40; John F. Mahoney, "Chaucerian Tragedy and the Christian Tradition," Annuaire Medievale, 3 (1962), 81-99; Jack B. Oruch, "Chaucer's Worldly Monk," Criticism, 8 (1966), 280-88; William C. Strange, "The Monk's Tale: A Generous View," The Chaucer Review, 1 (1967), 167-80; Rodney Delasanta, "'Namore of this': Chaucer's Priest and Monk," Tennessee Studies in Literature, 13 (1968), 117-32; David E. Berndt, "Monastic Acedia and Chaucer's Characterization of Daun Piers," Studies in Philology, 68 (1971), 435-50. (The views of these critics will be discussed in the text of this chapter.)

a wholly fickle goddess whose actions are senseless, his "rejection" of the Christian and Boethian belief that God seeks to bring men's souls to their heavenly home, and his apparent despair over what he thinks is a chaotic universe. Such attitudes, the critics say, conflict both with the traditional Christian beliefs reflected in other works by Chaucer and with Philosophy's assurance in Book V of the Consolation that all events in the universe are part of an ordered creation directed by a benevolent God. The Monk's Tale, they conclude, expresses the quite un-Chaucerian belief that the universe is unjust and meaningless.

This reading of the Monk's Tale is suggested to the critics by the character of the Monk as he is presented in the General Prologue. Those critics who find the Monk's tragedies philosophically uninformed usually begin their discussions of the Monk's Tale by noting that the portrait of the Monk in the General Prologue is largely satiric. They point out that although St. Benedict demanded in his Rule that a monk observe the vows of propertylessness, labor, claustration, and diet, Daun Piers obeys none of these restrictions. He owns horses, greyhounds, and fine clothes (A 168, 190, and 193-203); he refuses

to work or study (A 184-86); he thinks that claustration is foolish (A 182); and he eats delicacies such as roast swan (A 200). The Monk, these critics believe, is a bad ascetic who has forsaken his religious devotion to indulge his desires for worldly pleasures.²

²The belief that Chaucer is severely satirizing the Monk in the General Prologue is quite common. Robert White, for example, maintains that the Monk has violated every vow required by Benedict's Rule and concludes that "Daun Piers is comprehensively everything a monk should not be." See his "Chaucer's Daun Piers and the Rule of St. Benedict: The Failure of an Ideal," JEGP, 70 (1971), 13-30. Edmund Reiss, in his "The Symbolic Surface of the Canterbury Tales: The Monk's Portrait," The Chaucer Review, 2 (1968), 254-72, believes that, among other hints, the appearance of the words "venerie" (A 166) and "prikyng" (A 191) in the Monk's portrait is a certain indication that the Monk is lustful. The jingling bells on the bridle of the Monk's horse (A 170), adds Reiss, are "meant to be associated with wordly merriment and represent what is opposed to the contemplative life." Muriel Bowden, in her A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), pp. 108-114, finds the description of the Monk "an accumulation of stereotyped charges made against monks in other medieval works of literature." She points out that the lines describing Daun Piers' lust for hunting, his fondness for excellent food, and his fine clothing are closely paralleled by satiric passages in the works of such writers as Langland and Gower. Among the critics who find the Monk's Tale philosophically unsound, Robert Kaske maintains that in the General Prologue Chaucer is consciously contrasting the faults of the worldly Monk with the virtues of the more devout Knight. David Berndt believes that the Monk's distaste for study and his desire to roam are signs that the Monk is suffering from monastic Acedia, a spiritual

Having noted Daun Piers's worldliness and his lack of study, the critics look for manifestations of these faults in his tale. Ever since Professor Kittredge argued that in the Canterbury Tales "the Pilgrims do not exist for the sake of the stories but vice versa,"³ scholars have tried to show how each tale helps to illuminate further the nature of its teller as he is described in the General Prologue. The result in Monk's Tale scholarship has been the attempt to show that the Monk's Tale is part of a continuing satiric treatment of the Monk. The critics read Daun Piers's tragedies looking for indications of his worldliness and his laxness in his studies. What they find, they maintain, is that indeed Chaucer has incorporated passages into the tale which show that the Monk's materialism and lack of study have led him into some misconceptions about the nature of the universe and the God who created it. Chaucer,

(Footnote 2 continued.)
disorder which causes an ascetic to become listless in his religious devotion. (A fuller discussion of Kaske, Berndt, and others will be incorporated into the text of this chapter.)

³George Lyman Kittredge, Chaucer and his Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1915), p. 155.

the critics conclude, created a philosophically flawed tale to reveal the faults of its teller.

The most common criticism of the Monk's Tale is that it embodies an uninformed concept of Fortune. In The Consolation of Philosophy (IV, pr. 6 and V, pr. 1), Philosophy tells Boethius that the acts of Fortune are really part of a divine plan which is beyond the comprehension of humans. She explains that even apparently evil Fortune has its ultimate good effects: it punishes the wicked and it tests, and thus strengthens, the character of good men (IV, pr. 7). Although Fortune may appear to operate according to caprice, she really is God's agent. The Monk's Tale, say the critics, contradicts this Boethian assurance of universal order by its characterization of Fortune as a wholly capricious goddess and by its failure to show that the acts of Fortune, including the apparently "evil" ones, have ultimate good effects.

Robert Kaske originates this interpretation. He praises the Knight as a wise Boethian and argues that the Knight interrupts the Monk because the Monk's Tale is "a philosophically inadequate

representation of 'evil' Fortune."⁴ Kaske wonders why Chaucer chose the otherwise polite Knight to interrupt the Monk's tragedies. The reason for the Knight's interruption, Kaske suggests, lies in the philosophical content of the Monk's narratives. Rather than proceeding directly to a consideration of the Monk's Tale itself, however, Kaske begins his discussion by examining the portrait of the Monk in the General Prologue. What he discovers is that in Daun Piers's portrait Chaucer was consciously depicting the Monk as an antithesis of the perfect Christian Knight described earlier.

Kaske points out that the Knight and the Monk represent the great medieval ideals of chivalry and monasticism. He adds, however, that the portraits of these two men in the General Prologue form a "consciously elaborated parallelism," which shows that while the Knight is the fulfillment of his ideal, the Monk is the negation of his.⁵ In particular, Kaske finds four contrastive parallels

⁴Kaske, p. 261. (The following discussion is a summary of Kaske's views.)

⁵Ibid., pp. 251-52.

in the portraits of the Knight and the Monk. First, the opening lines of the two portraits are similar with the exception that while the Knight "loved chivalrie" (A 45), the Monk "lovede venerie" (A 166).⁶ The Monk's love of hunting, says Kaske, strikes a comic note when it is juxtaposed with the Knight's devotion to his glorious chivalry. The second difference between these two men is that whereas the Knight is loyal to the ideals of knighthood (A 45-50), the Monk is outspokenly rebellious against his monastic vows (A 173-88). The Knight loves "honour" and "curteisie" (A 46), but Daun Piers does not care to do what "Austyn bit" (A 187). The third point of contrast is the difference in the willingness of these two men to serve God. The long list of battles in the Knight's portrait (A 61-66), shows

⁶F. N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), p. 18. (All quotations from Chaucer are from this edition. Quotations from The Consolation of Philosophy are from Chaucer's Boece because this translation best represents Chaucer's understanding of Boethius. Italicized lines within parentheses in quotations from Boece represent glosses added by Chaucer.)

the Knight's ceaseless attempt to do God's will in the world. In the corresponding section of the Monk's portrait, however, Chaucer merely mentions that the Monk refuses to work and study but instead spends his time hunting rabbits (A 184-92). A final point of contrast is that whereas the Knight wears plain garb (A 75-76), the Monk is dressed in some of the finest clothing worn in the Middle Ages (A 193-97 and 203). Kaske believes that these correspondences, "occupying practically the whole of each description, following the same order in each, and forming a pattern paralleled in none of the descriptions of the other pilgrims," point to the description of the Monk as "a deliberate parody on that of the Knight."⁷ Chaucer, Kaske concludes, had in mind in these two portraits the idea of the worldly, hunting Monk as a comic imitation of the crusading Christian Knight.

Believing, furthermore, that this contrast of the bad Monk and the good Knight is extended beyond

⁷Kaske, pp. 257-58.

the portraits to the tales these two men tell, Kaske notes that of all of the Canterbury Tales the Knight's Tale and the Monk's Tale have by far the greatest number of borrowings from Boethius's The Consolation of Philosophy.⁸ Kaske maintains, however, that while the Knight understands the Consolation and correctly represents Boethian thought in his tale, the Monk misapprehends Boethius's message and tells a tale at odds with Boethian belief. Chaucer is continuing his contrast of the Knight and the Monk by having them tell tales on the same general theme, but making the Knight's Tale philosophically sound and the Monk's Tale philosophically flawed.

Kaske's argument specifically is that whereas the Knight's Tale is a philosophically true representation of "good fortune apparently evil," the Monk's Tale is "in Boethian terms a philosophically inadequate representation of 'evil'".

⁸Ibid., p. 261. Kaske reports Bernard L. Jefferson's findings in Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1917) that 48 passages in the Knight's Tale and 61 passages in the Monk's Tale show verbal influence from Boethius.

fortune."⁹ This view is based on a passage from Chaucer's translation of the Consolation:

. . . so as al fortune, whethir so it be
joyeful fortune or aspre fortune, is yeven
eyther bycause of gerdonyng or elles of
exercisyng of goode folk, or elles bycause
to punysshchen or elles chastisen schrewes;
thanne is alle fortune good, the whiche
fortune is certeyn that it be either
ryghtful or elles profitable.

(IV, pr. 7, 7-14)

This passage reflects Boethius's belief that Fortune is an agent of God and helps to serve Him. Thus, although Fortune may cause men to suffer materially, she is always good on the spiritual level because the adversity she causes can convert a bad man by punishing him for his sins or it can test a good man and thereby strengthen his character. Fortune may seem wholly capricious and malicious, but one who understands Boethius's lessons in the Consolation can see that Fortune is only doing the will of God and is working ultimately for men's good.

The Knight's Tale, Kaske continues, shows an awareness of this Boethian attitude toward Fortune. In his tale, the Knight tells of the calamity which

⁹Ibid.

befalls Arcite, but his point is that Arcite's death is only an apparent tragedy. He explains, through the speech of Theseus, that the universe is bound together by the "faire cheyne" of God's love and that consequently all events including calamities are part of a divine order which is working for the good of everyone, even though men cannot perceive that order (A 2987-3046). The Knight could never accept the belief that the world is controlled by a capricious goddess named Fortune, who causes men to suffer merely at her whim. The Knight's Tale, Kaske concludes, expresses faith in the order and justice of creation.

When he considers the Monk's Tale, however, Kaske thinks that he finds an outlook which conflicts with Boethian belief in that, for him, the Monk makes no attempt to place Fortune in some divine heirarchy which will make her acts meaningful. Instead, Daun Piers depicts Fortune as a fickle creature, who causes adversity simply because she is pleased to make men suffer. This attitude is evident in the Monk's warning that men cannot avoid adversity "whan that Fortune list to flee" (B² 3185) and in his

characterization of Fortune as "blynd" (B² 3187). Furthermore, in those narratives which describe the tragedies of innocent people, the Monk's main point is that Fortune is "False" (B² 3859) and given to "crueltee" (B² 3603). Daun Piers, concludes Kaske, has a "limited human concept" of Fortune as "a meaninglessly shifting" goddess.¹⁰

In addition to criticizing the Monk's concept of Fortune, Kaske also says that the Monk seems ignorant of Boethius's lesson that suffering can have ultimate good effects. A few narratives such as those about Balthasar, Nero, Holofernes, and Antiochus suggest that bad fortune is punishment for vice. Not one of the narratives, however, about the falls of good men indicates that adversity is part of the divine testing and strengthening of character. Instead, Daun Piers merely laments the tragedies of these innocent men without showing any "real Boethian orientation."¹¹ Because the Monk is so worldly, he organizes his tale around "the antithesis between

¹⁰Ibid., p. 262.

¹¹Ibid., p. 263.

material prosperity and adversity" and consequently never considers the moral and spiritual reasons for physical suffering mentioned by Boethius.¹²

The final effect of the Monk's Tale, Kaske believes, is that it offers an "implicit 'nay'" to the order of things in the universe.¹³ The Monk's characterization of Fortune as a malicious goddess obedient to nothing but her own whim and his belief that the only effect of human calamity is suffering make the world a vale of tears without justice and without order. This is just the sort of attitude that one might expect from a monk who has scorned his studies and his religious devotion to seek earthly pleasures. Not only has Daun Piers not learned his philosophy well, according to the commentators, but also his love of the world has blinded him to spiritual truth. Furthermore, it is the Boethian Knight's recognition of this limited philosophical outlook that leads him to interrupt the Monk. Chaucer not only has made the Monk's Tale appropriate to its teller, concludes Kaske, but he has also

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 264.

shown, through the Knight's interruption, his disapproval of a materialistic outlook such as the Monk has.

Similar objections to the Monk's philosophy have been raised by other critics. E. Talbot Donaldson, for example, thinks that the Monk's Tale reflects "a genuine misunderstanding" of the nature of the universe.¹⁴ Donaldson approaches the Monk's Tale as an example of the genre of medieval tragedy. He notes that writers of medieval tragedies did not attempt to make a connection between a man's fall and some "tragic flaw" in his character. Rather, says Donaldson, medieval tragedy is "centered in the concept of the goddess Fortune," who governs a great wheel on which human beings ride.¹⁵ It is characteristic of the medieval tragic figure that he should achieve the highest position on Fortune's wheel, remain there for a time, and then be hurled to the bottom where he ends his days in misery.

¹⁴Donaldson, pp. 938-39. (The following discussion is a summary of Donaldson's views.)

¹⁵Ibid., p. 938.

Donaldson continues, however, by explaining that in the Middle Ages the concept of Fortune had two essential aspects: "from the point of view of finite fallen man, the goddess seemed merely whimsical; but from the philosophic point of view, she executed divine will."¹⁶ Tragedies which utilize only the first concept of Fortune contradict basic Christian doctrine by suggesting that the world is controlled by a wholly capricious goddess. Tragedies which utilize the second aspect of Fortune still do not necessarily make any clear connections between falls and human faults, but they suggest at least that the falls are part of some divine plan and do have purpose, although that purpose is not known to men. These tragedies, therefore, would be more representative of Christian doctrine than those which characterize Fortune as merely whimsical. They would also be, remarks Donaldson, more consistent with Boethian thought, which teaches that the universe is ordered.

Turning to the Monk's Tale, Donaldson maintains that the Monk incorporates only the first aspect of

¹⁶Ibid.

Fortune into his tale. In the Monk's tragedies, "God disappears entirely," and "Fortune appears to exercise full control and exercises it malignantly."¹⁷ Daun Piers makes little distinction between virtuous and wicked men, and his narratives consequently suggest that the universe is guided by an unjust and malicious power which delights in the suffering of men regardless of their moral character. In fact, Donaldson continues, although the Monk may set out to teach scorn of material prosperity, he finally succeeds only in producing an "inversion of the basic doctrine" of worldly contempt and suggests that in this chaotic and malignant universe "the only good in life is the period, however short, that one is allowed at the top of the wheel."¹⁸

The Monk subscribes to such a view, Donaldson says, because he is a materialist. He seeks happiness in the blessings of this world, but when he is confronted with examples of people's falls from prosperity, he finds the world a disagreeable place

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

and he becomes disillusioned with life. If the Monk were a good ascetic, he would see "spiritual values" that are of "a higher order than worldly values" and that transcend earthly suffering.¹⁹ Daun Piers, however, has shown himself to be a bad ascetic, and consequently when he renounces the world as a disagreeable place, he has no alternative existence to which he can turn. He sees no divine order which he can serve and which can sustain him. Confronted with tragedy, therefore, he can only lament what seems a chaotic creation. The Monk's Tale, Donaldson concludes, reflects "a real pessimism" and "a despairing disgust with life"; it reveals "a vital defect" in the Monk's understanding of the nature of the universe.²⁰

Although Donaldson wrote his essay independently of Kaske's influence, several other critics follow Kaske's lead in arriving at their understanding of the Monk's Tale. These critics, however, frequently come to even more extreme conclusions about the Monk's bad

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., p. 939.

philosophy than Kaske does. One such critic is Jack Oruch, who finds the Monk's Tale an expression of "dignified hedonism."²¹

Oruch contends that the primary purpose of the Monk's tragedies is their "irony of unintentional self-revelation."²² On the pilgrimage Daun Piers is affronted by four incidents: the Shipman's tale about a monk who cheated and cuckolded his best friend, the Host's warning at the end of the Shipman's Tale that men should beware of scheming monks, the Prioress's remark about what monks should be (B²642-43), and the Host's disrespectful speech to the Monk in the Prologue to the Monk's Tale (B² 3114-54). Insulted in these ways, Daun Piers believes that he has lost the respect of his fellow pilgrims and decides to tell a serious and proper tale that will help him to reestablish his dignity. He will show his listeners that although he has not been zealously devoted to his study and

²¹Oruch, p. 287. (The following discussion is a summary of Oruch's views.)

²²Ibid., p. 281.

asceticism, he is still exceptionally learned and quite capable of preaching an effective sermon.

Despite his intentions, though, the Monk soon reveals his lack of study. Daun Piers has read enough to be familiar with Boethius, for he takes his definition of tragedy from The Consolation of Philosophy:

What other thyng bywaylen the cryinges
of tragedyes but oonly the dedes of
Fortune, that with unwar strook
overtuneth the realmes of greet
nobleye? (Glose. Tragedye is to
seyn a dite of a prosperite for a
tyme, that endeth in wrecchidnesse.)
(II, pr. 2, 67-72)

The Monk, however, has not learned the broader Boethian lesson that whatever appears to happen by chance is actually the result of secret causes in the larger order of things. Not once does he indicate that Fortune is an instrument of God but instead depicts her as a blind goddess who delights in the falls of men.²³ The Monk further denies Fortune a sense of justice when he fails to emphasize in the

²³Ibid., p. 283. Oruch supports his discussion of the Monk's incorrect concept of Fortune by citing R. W. Babcock's findings that the concept of Fortune in medieval literature existed in two distinct forms, a clerical and a non-clerical Fortune. Clerical

tragedies of such wicked characters as Nero and Holofernes, the Christian and Boethian belief that these men invited punishment because of their sinfulness. Finally, in his tragedies with virtuous protagonists the Monk completely ignores Boethius's lesson that Fortune, as well as punishing evil men, also tests and thus strengthens the character of good men. In fact, instead of drawing any moral in this group of tragedies, Daun Piers merely laments the falls of his innocent characters with his repeated use of "Allas, Fortune" (B² 3557, 3603, 3858). Although the Monk intends to teach contempt of the world, he succeeds only in making one long complaint against what he believes is a hostile universe.

Hoping to show himself a proper monk, then, Daun Piers merely reveals further that he is in love with earthly pleasures and that he despairs of losing the wealth that he has accumulated. His tragedies contain "not one warning to eschew ambition,

(Footnote 23 continued.)
Fortune was always shown to be an agent of God, but non-clerical Fortune was always characterized as a whimsical goddess. See Babcock's "The Medieval Setting of the Monk's Tale," PMLA, 46 (1931), 205-213. Oruch believes that the Monk shows his doctrinal ignorance by choosing to use the non-clerical Fortune in his tale.

to put aside luxurious clothes and fancy foods, or to abjure worldly pleasure."²⁴ Instead, Oruch concludes, the Monk "seems to advocate a dignified hedonism"; his tale implies that "since Fortune is unpredictable and irrational, one might as well follow his own desires."²⁵

Also influenced by Kaske's reading of the Monk's Tale, William Strange finds Daun Piers's narratives a representation of the workings of a guilt-ridden mind.²⁶ Noting the Monk's statement that he will not present his tragedies in chronological order, Strange sees the Monk's Tale as a product of the free association of Daun Piers's thoughts as they vacillate between two concepts of Fortune, at times establishing her as an agent of God and at other times as a malicious goddess acting only according

²⁴Ibid., p. 288.

²⁵Ibid., p. 287.

²⁶Strange, p. 170. (The following discussion is a summary of Strange's views.)

to her own caprice. This vacillation is caused by the Monk's guilt about his worldliness and his fear that he will be punished for his sins.

Strange believes that the Monk's Tale has five sections, marked by the concept of Fortune contained in each. The first is comprised of the first six tragedies, which show God or Fortune punishing those who have transgressed against God's laws. In these tragedies the Monk is presenting the doctrinal concept of an ordered world where suffering is just retribution for sin. But here, Strange adds, the Monk suddenly recognizes his own case, seeing that he has become too worldly and that he is liable to be punished. Seeking to escape the thought that he will have to pay for his sins, he chooses in the next five tragedies to tell about good characters (Zenobia and the four "modern" men) who have suffered at the hands of whimsical Fortune. By conceiving of Fortune as a capricious goddess operating without God's guidance, the Monk, Strange maintains, can convince himself that since Fortune strikes whimsically, it need not necessarily strike him, even though he has sinned. Furthermore, if he

experiences bad fortune, his suffering will have been caused by an unjust goddess rather than by a just God who is punishing him. He will seem an "innocent" victim crushed by an unfair universe. Daun Piers thus attempts to free himself from worrying about both the course of his earthly life and the fate of his soul as well.

But, Strange continues, the Monk cannot entirely free himself from his guilt. Although he has tried to console himself by telling about the falls of innocent people in the second section of his tale, in the next three narratives (Nero, Holofernes, and Antiochus) the Monk tells the stories of bad men who were punished for their wickedness by a just Fortune. Daun Piers has returned to the doctrinal concept of Fortune that he has probably been taught as a monk. However, he simply cannot rid himself of his fears, and in his next two tales (Alexander and Caesar) he describes falls in which innocent men are destroyed by malicious Fortune.

The Monk, says Strange, is not able to make a decision about the true nature of Fortune. He is afraid to accept Fortune as God's agent and yet he

cannot convince himself that Fortune is merely a capricious goddess who might overlook him if he is lucky. Furthermore, the Monk never does make up his mind, for in the Croesus tragedy, where he might resolve his tensions, he only decides that Fortune is dangerous and makes an end (B², 3949-56). Strange concludes that this tale is quite appropriate to the Monk because it shows that the worldly Daun Piers thinks so much in material terms that he has forgotten God's all-forgiving grace which can save him from his dilemma.

In addition to the belief that the Monk fails to properly define Fortune's role in the universe, a second major criticism of the Monk's Tale is that it denies, or at least ignores, salvation and heavenly redemption of earthly suffering. Fundamental to the Christian religion is the doctrine of grace, and Boethius also teaches that spiritual union with God awaits those who try to live moral lives. Philosophy repeatedly states that the man who strives to be virtuous will return eventually to his true home (III, m. 9, m. 10, m. 11; IV, pr. 1, m. 1), and she says that God seeks to bring

souls back to Him, their starting point and goal (III, m. 9). The Monk, according to the critics (discussed below), never mentions this heavenly life and in fact seems to deny it outrightly when he says that there is "no remedie" (B² 3183) for earthly falls. This thought, again, the critics believe, is appropriate to the Monk, who is described in the General Prologue as a man concerned primarily with earthly rather than with spiritual matters.

Robert Kaske implies this interpretation of the tale when he says that the Monk's tragedies are organized around an antithesis between material prosperity and adversity.²⁷ In fact, Kaske believes that the Monk is not concerned with moral qualities because he fails to emphasize consistently that some of the people in his narratives are evil and that others are virtuous. "In the materialistic world of the Monk's Tale," remarks Kaske, "all fall with something like an equal crash."²⁸ The Monk recognizes no order, either material or moral, in

²⁷Kaske, p. 263.

²⁸Ibid., p. 264

the universe. Kaske never says that the Monk doesn't believe in salvation, but according to his reading of the tale, the Monk would lack the faith in a good creator needed to accept the Christian promise of redemption or the Boethian belief that God wants every soul to be reunited with Him.

Although Kaske may not go so far as to say that the Monk doesn't believe in heaven and grace, John Mahoney does contend specifically that the major flaw of the Monk's Tale is Daun Piers's failure to mention either Christ's promise of salvation or Boethius's belief that God seeks to bring men to their heavenly home.²⁹ Among the other works by Chaucer that can be considered tragedies (Knight's Tale, Man of Law's Tale, Nun's Priest's Tale, and Troilus and Criseyde), each may be interpreted as showing that joy can follow the woe of this world. They reflect the Boethian and Christian belief that God will redeem men's suffering. Egeus in the Knight's Tale, for example,

²⁹Mahoney, p. 98. (The following discussion is a summary of Mahoney's views.)

observes that men can experience "Joye after woe . . ." (A 2841), and the conclusion of the Man of Law's Tale makes the same point:

Now Jhesu Crist, that of his myght may sende
Joye after wo, goverene us in his grace,
And kepe us alle that been in this place! Amen
(B¹ 1160-62)

In the Nun's Priest's Tale, furthermore, Providence rescues Chauntecleer, an Adam-like character (and hence appropriate for redemption), from certain death when he replaces his pride and his love of the world with spiritual alertness. The point of this narrative, Mahoney believes, is that through repentance and by the power of God's grace, a man can be restored ". . . wiser and resolved to fall no more, to the position from which he fell."³⁰ Finally, Troilus's ascent to the eighth sphere (V, 1807-27) also reflects a belief in a spiritual life that can redeem earthly suffering.

The Monk's Tale, however, contains no passages which indicate a belief that the joys of heaven and union with God follow the misery of this world.

³⁰Ibid., p. 89.

Like Kaske, Mahoney believes that the Monk thinks merely in material terms and that consequently he sees in human tragedy only the physical suffering a man must endure. Typical of the Monk's belief is the attitude he expresses in his definition of tragedy:

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
As olde bookes maken us memorie,
Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,
And is yfallen out of heigh degree
Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly.

(B² 3163-67)

Such passages as this one may be true in physical terms, but they fail to recognize the important Boethian and Christian message that eternal joy can follow the woe of this world. The Monk's Tale, therefore, expresses a more limited view of human calamity than do Chaucer's other tragic tales, which are careful to show that the miseries of this fallen world can be redeemed by God's desire to bring men's souls into union with Him.

Arriving at an even more extreme conclusion than Mahoney's, Rodney Delasanta thinks that the Monk actually denies belief in Christ's redemption

of man.³¹ Contrasting the Monk's Tale with the Nun's Priest's Tale, Delasanta contends that the Nun's Priest recognizes in Daun Piers's tragedies two contradictions of Christian, and to some extent Boethian, belief. The Nun's Priest sees both the Monk's failure to mention that Fortune is subject to God's governance and his doubt of Christ's promise of salvation. These attitudes are reflected not only by the absence of any reference to Christ in the Monk's Tale but also by Daun Piers's apparent "denial" of Christ's promise that human suffering will be redeemed:

I wol biwaille, in manere of tragedie,
The harm of hem that stode in heigh degree,
And fillen so that ther nas no remedie
To brynge hem out of hir adversitee.

(B² 3181-84)

Delasanta maintains that the line "And fillen so that ther nas no remedie" shows that the Monk has not accepted with faith the doctrine of salvation. In fact, this line also denies Christian free will because it doesn't admit that men can choose to

³¹Delasanta, p. 125. (The following discussion is a summary of Delasanta's views.)

reject the world and put their trust in God's mercy with any effect. The Monk's belief that there is no remedy for human suffering implies that all men are irrevocably doomed to suffer and die and can expect nothing more.

This incorrect doctrine, argues Delasanta, is what the Nun's Priest tries to amend in his own tale when he has Chauntecleer escape death. Chauntecleer is a symbol of the "spiritual alertness," which can save a man's soul from eternal damnation by teaching him to reject his pride and worldliness and to devote himself to God.³² Furthermore, when the Nun's Priest says, "Lo how Fortune turneth sodeynly" (B² 4593), he rejects the Monk's statement that bad fortune has "no remedie" (B² 3183) and teaches the proper Christian doctrine that men who strive to live virtuous lives and who trust in Christ's forgiveness will attain an eternal bliss that easily redeems earthly suffering.

This belief that spiritual happiness can lie beyond physical calamity is also in keeping with

³²Ibid., p. 128.

the Boethian concept of an ordered universe in which a benevolent God seeks to turn all events to good purpose. Boethius could not subscribe to the belief that men were created only to suffer and die, the implication of the Monk's comment that there is no remedy for human falls. Although the Monk may believe that he is telling a proper doctrinal tale, concludes Delasanta, he succeeds only in showing that he is "a philosophical and theological simpleton."³³

The Monk's depiction of Fortune as wholly capricious and his failure to express faith in salvation lead some critics to find yet a third major flaw in Daun Piers's philosophical and theological outlook. These critics believe that the Monk despairs over an apparently malicious and chaotic universe. A good monk and a good Boethian would have told a tale that extols faith in God and His goodness. Biblical passages admonishing men to have faith in God are exceedingly

³³Ibid., p. 119.

numerous,³⁴ and again Boethius believes that men should have trust in a benevolent creator. In fact, the main point of Philosophy's consolation is that the suffering Boethius should have faith in God's order and mercy. Her attitude is summed up best when she tells Boethius that those people who put their hope in God will not have lived their lives in vain:

Ne in ydel ne in veyn ne ben ther put
in God hope and preyeris that ne mowen
nat ben unspedful ne withouten effect
whan they been ryghtful.
(V, pr. 6, 300-303)

Human life devoted to God, Philosophy teaches, can never be meaningless or without its share of happiness.

According to the critics, however, trust in God's benevolence never becomes an important theme in the Monk's Tale. Instead, the Monk's tragedies repeatedly reflect utter despair over what the Monk believes to be a malicious and chaotic existence. Jack Oruch notes that a number of passages in the

³⁴See, for example, Hebrews 11; Matthew 14:31, 15:28, 17:20; I Corinthians 2:5; and Mark 11:22-23.

Monk's Tale are given over to lamentation.³⁵ When Ugolino's children are locked up in the tower with their father, the Monk complains, "Allas, Fortune! it was greet crueltee / Swiche briddes for to putte in swich a cage!" (B² 3603-04), and in the tragedy of Peter of Spain the Monk apostrophizes on Peter's fall:

O noble, O worthy Petro, glorie of Spayne,
Whom Fortune heeld so hye in magestee,
Wel oghten men thy pitous deeth complayne!
(B² 3565-67)

Similar lamentations appear in the tragedies of Alexander (B² 3858-60), Peter of Cyprus (B² 3587-88), Pompey (B² 3883-84), and Zenobia (B² 3557-59). The Monk never attempts to see any reason for these falls, nor does it even occur to him to recommend a virtuous life as the Physician does at the end of his tale:

Beth war, for no man woot whom God wol smyte . . .
Therefore I rede yow this conseil take:
Forsaketh synne, er synne yow forsake.
(C 278 and 285-86)

The Monk, maintains Oruch, merely complains about

³⁵Oruch, p. 286.

what he thinks are unjust tragedies caused by a malicious universe.

Other critics also believe that the Monk despairs over the apparently disordered and evil nature of existence. E. Talbot Donaldson, noting Daun Piers's failure to characterize Fortune as an agent of God, believes that the Monk is "infected with a real pessimism, a despairing disgust with life."³⁶ The Monk's concept of the world as a place governed by whimsical Fortune has caused him to doubt God's goodness and consequently has left him nothing to trust as stable and benevolent. William Strange thinks that the Monk's beliefs concerning the distribution of worldly goods have shown him that he is sure to suffer. Fearing both God's justice and Fortune's caprice, Daun Piers sees that either God will punish him by depriving him of his earthly possessions or that Fortune, in her whim, will cast him down from his position of prosperity. Because the Monk's materialism has caused him to forget spiritual reward, Strange remarks, he has

³⁶Donaldson, p. 939.

deprived himself of the only true happiness there is, the happiness of heaven. Daun Piers, consequently, becomes despondent and only "fingers his own wound" in his tragedies.³⁷ Rodney Delasanta also believes that the worldly Monk measures happiness and suffering only in material terms and has forgotten therefore that spiritual reward can redeem physical suffering. Daun Piers is disillusioned and depressed because he has forgotten Benedict's lesson, "Never despair of the mercy of God."³⁸

The fullest treatment of the Monk's despair, however, is offered by David Berndt, who notes that several medieval writers comment on a spiritual disease, common to ascetics, called monastic Acedia.³⁹ This condition affected primarily those monks who were distracted from their religious devotion by an inordinate desire to live in the world. The sure signs of Acedia were said to be indulgence of bodily desires, listless study, and

³⁷Strange, p. 177.

³⁸Delasanta, p. 125.

³⁹Berndt, p. 437. (The following discussion is a summary of Berndt's views.)

a longing to roam from the cell. The most serious danger of Acedia, though, was that it led to severe melancholy and despair. Berndt explains that when a monk no longer prayed and studied and when he had left the cloister to live in the world, he became distracted from spiritual concerns by his love of material pleasures. He soon forgot God's governance of creation and the divine grace that saves men's souls. When such a monk looked about him and saw calamities depriving men of earthly delights, he lapsed into melancholy and despaired because he could find nothing that would bring him permanent joy. He could see only that the future held certain physical misery for him.

Daun Piers, Berndt contends, suffers from this monastic Acedia. In the General Prologue the Monk is characterized as a roamer who scorns study and labor and who delights in earthly pleasures. (A 173-207). He thus exhibits most of the traditional signs of Acedia. Berndt admits that in the General Prologue Daun Piers seems quite happy and energetic, but he also maintains that this apparent enthusiasm for life is merely a facade fabricated

by a man anxious to defend his way of living. Beneath his seeming happiness, the Monk is melancholy. Having recognized the inevitability of material misfortune and having forgotten God, Daun Piers can find no source of contentment in life and despairs. Furthermore, it is this profound inner sadness that Chaucer has the Monk reveal subconsciously in his tragedies, which lament the loss of earthly prosperity without recognizing either a divine order in the universe or the possibility of salvation.

Berndt finds the Monk's Tale directly opposed to Boethian thought. The Monk's narratives form an "inconsolatio" which expresses all of the fears about the injustice and meaninglessness of the universe that Boethius tried to dispel.⁴⁰ Daun Piers has no faith in the important Boethian lesson that "God governeth alle thinges by the keye of his goodnesse" (III, pr. 12, 87-88). Berndt concludes that Chaucer used the Monk's Tale to show the utter despondency that can befall a man when he turns

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 445.

from love of God to love of the world.

According to recent Monk's Tale criticism, then, Daun Piers's tragedies embody a philosophy wholly unacceptable to Chaucer. The Monk's doubt in the order of the universe, his disbelief in the spiritual redemption of physical suffering, and his despair all conflict with the Christian and Boethian attitudes that Chaucer extols in his other works. It is obvious, therefore, the critics conclude, that Chaucer did not intend his readers to admire the philosophy of the Monk's Tale but deliberately assigned Daun Piers philosophically unsound stories to further satirize his lack of devotion to his ideal. In short, Chaucer gave a bad tale to a bad teller.

II. The Monk's Boethian Tale

The theory that Chaucer wrote a philosophically uninformed tale to further expose the Monk's worldliness offers an ingenious solution to the problem of the tale's appropriateness to its teller. Such a reading of the Monk's Tale, however, may miss Chaucer's intended philosophical meaning. Although the critics maintain that the Monk contradicts the cosmic order outlined in Book V of the Consolation, comparison of the Monk's tragedies with other sections of the Consolation suggests that the Monk has successfully represented Boethian thought in his narrative.

Numerous parallels between the Monk's Tale and Books I-IV of the Consolation¹ show that the

¹Bernard Jefferson finds sixty-eight passages in the Monk's Tale that have been influenced by the Consolation. Jefferson concludes "that the Monk's Tale is Boethian in spirit and that Chaucer had the Consolation definitely in mind in writing it" (87). Jefferson, however, never gives a thorough exposition of the tale in light of his findings. It is the purpose of this dissertation to fill this gap in Chaucerian scholarship.

Monk's stories, rather than reflecting despair over an apparently chaotic universe, actually illustrate an important Boethian lesson. Both the Monk and Philosophy teach that true felicity lies not in the accumulation of material goods but in perfected spiritual existence.² Furthermore, the elements of

²The idea that the Monk's Tale teaches contempt of the world is not new. George Lyman Kittredge, for example, in his The Date of Chaucer's Troilus and Other Matters, (New York: Chaucer Society, 1909), p. 43, believes that the Monk's tragedies "teach the lesson that Fortune is so fickle and full of malice that no man should trust prosperity." Bertrand Bronson, in his In Search of Chaucer (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1960), p. 75, states that the Monk's stories "teach contempt of the world," and Joella Owens Brown, in her "Chaucer's Daun Piers: One Monk or Two?" Criticism, 6 (1964), 49, maintains that the Monk is "a preacher against the vanities of the world. . . . a Jeremiah pointing the finger of doom at reckless sinners who trust in Fortune." Estelle Taylor also finds the Monk's narratives ". . . a delightful, artistic fitting together of reminders of the uncertainty of this life even for those who for a while seem specially favored." See her "Chaucer's 'Monk's Tale': An Apology," College Language Association Journal, 13 (1969), 181. Similar views are expressed by other critics. See, for example, Edwin J. Howard, Geoffrey Chaucer, Twayne's English Author Series (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 94; Jefferson, p. 85; Claude Jones, "The Monk's Tale, A Medieval Sermon," MLN, 52 (1937), 571; and R. M. Lumiansky, Of Sondry Folk: The Dramatic Principle in the Canterbury Tales (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1955), pp. 102-103.

the Monk's Tale that the critics interpret as philosophically unsound appear in the first four books of the Consolation, and none of them, as Philosophy's comments demonstrate, contradicts either the Boethian order discussed in Book V or the universal order esteemed by Christianity.

As the Consolation opens, Boethius is in his prison cell mourning the loss of his powerful position and his separation from his family and friends. He is indulging in self-pity, and he is near despair over the apparent lack of justice in the universe. Philosophy comes to him and tells him that he should not complain since he has caused his own suffering. She explains that he is miserable because he has not perceived what is truly good in existence and has consequently sought lasting

(Footnote 2 continued.)

None of these critics, however, carefully analyzes the Monk's Tale. Furthermore, none of them suggests that beyond showing the false felicity of this world, the Monk's stories reveal the true felicity of heaven. Current understanding of the Monk's Tale, therefore, is somewhat incomplete.

happiness in the wrong places. She then commences a lengthy discussion on the nature of true and false felicity, which is the topic of the first three and one-half books of the Consolation.

Philosophy warns first that men should not seek happiness in the possession of worldly rewards. Such earthly gifts as power, riches, fame, beauty, and strength are false goods because they are transient and are sure to pass away leaving a man miserable over his losses: "'Thise thynges thanne,' quod sche, (that is to seyn, erthyly suffysaunce, and power, and swiche thynges) 'outher thei semen lyknesses of verray good, or elles it semeth that thei yeve to mortel folk a maner of goodes that ne be nat parfyt. But thilke good that is verray and parfyt that mai thei nat yeven'" (III, pr. 9, 171-78). She notes, for example, that physical beauty is as fleeting as a summer blossom: "But the schynyng of thi forme (that is to seyn, the beute of thi body), how swyftly passyng is it, and how transitorie! Certes it es more flyttyng than the mutabilite of floures of the somer sesoun" (III, pr. 8, 35-39). She

also remarks that men who rejoice in fame put their trust in something that is "pleynliche ryght noght" (II, pr. 7, 113), for all earthly glory is fleeting. Men who hoard money cherish, too, that which "mai ben bynomen of hem that han it" (III, pr. 3, 57-58).

Philosophy continues her discussion of the transience of earthly goods by observing that even if a man can somehow maintain his prosperity for the length of his life, he will surely decay and die and thus lose all. Men "preise the goodes of the body" (III, pr. 8, 49-50) such as strength and health, but physical vitality and life itself. "mai ben destroyed or disolvid by the heete of a fevere of thre dayes" (III, pr. 8, 53-54). Experience shows that no man can believe "that any stedfastnesse be in mannes thynges, whan ofte a swyft hour dissolveth the same man" (II, pr. 3, 81-82). Life is but a "schadowe" (II, pr. 3, 80) that passes quickly away.

To emphasize her point that worldly prosperity is sure to pass, Philosophy points out that even kings and great noblemen are not secure in their earthly power and wealth. Many are the

examples of mighty rulers who have fallen from glory into misery: "But certes the olde age of tyme passed, and ek of present tyme now, is ful of ensaumples how that kynges han chaungyd into wrecchidnesse out of hir welefulnesse" (III, pr. 5, 3-7). Philosophy mocks earthly power, which is "nat fownden myghty to kepe itself" (III, pr. 5, 8-9), and she notes that frequently kings suffer what they have inflicted on others. Busiris murdered strangers until he was killed by a stranger in the person of Hercules. Regulus put fetters on many men, but eventually he himself held out his hands to receive the conqueror's chains (II, pr. 6, 61-76).

Philosophy also observes that men of power and rank must die just as poor men do, and she cites examples:

For although that renoun ysprad,
passynge to ferne peples, goth by
diverse tonges; and although that
greete houses or kynredes shynen
with cleere titles of honours; yit
natheles deth despiseth al hey
glorie of fame, and deth wrappeth
togidre the heyghe hevedes and the
lowe, and maketh egal and evene the
heygheste to the loweste. Where

women now the bones of trewe Fabricius:
What is now Brutus or stierne Caton?
(II, m. 7, 10-19)

Earthly power, Philosophy concludes, cannot prevent a man's worldly "blisfulnesse" from being brought to "wrecchidnesse" (III, pr. 5, 12-13).

Philosophy's point, then, is that those men who seek happiness in the accumulation of worldly goods will only end their lives in misery:

The swetnesse of mannes welefulnesse is spraynd with many bitteresses; the whiche welefulnesse although it seme swete and joieful to hym that useth it, yit mai it nat ben withholden that it ne goth away whan it wole. Thanne is it wel seene howwrecchid is the blisfulnesse of mortel thynges, that neyther it dureth perpetuel with hem that every fortune resceyven agreablely or egaly, ne it deliteth nat in al to hem that ben angwyssous.

(II, pr. 4, 118-27)

She later notes the utter powerlessness of material prosperity to give a man lasting happiness: ". . . thise worldly goodes, which that ne mowen nat yeven that they byheeten, ne ben nat parfite by the congregacioun of alle goodis; . . . they ne ben nat weyes ne pathes that bryngen men to blisfulnesse, ne maken men to ben blisful" (III, pr. 8, 56-61). Men may believe that true

happiness lies in the possession of worldly goods,
but they are only deceiving themselves.

Like the Consolation, the Monk's Tale
demonstrates that those people who seek happiness in
the accumulation of worldly goods are doomed to
become miserable. The Monk recognizes that earthly
prosperity and the joy that accompanies it are
fleeting, and he makes this perception the focus of
his tale. Called upon for a story, the Monk says
that he will tell some tragedies and then gives his
definition of this genre:

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
As olde bookes maken us memorie,
Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,
And is yfallen out of heigh degree
Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly.

(B² 3163-67)

Later, as he is about to begin telling his tale,
the Monk again emphasizes the theme of his
narratives.

I wol biwaille, in manere of tragedie,
The harm of hem that stode in heigh degree,
And fillen so that ther nas no remedie
To brynge hem out of hire adversitee.

(B² 3181-84)

The Monk makes it clear in these two passages that
the emphasis of his tale is on the wretchedness
that can follow earthly prosperity.

In addition to stating the purpose of his tale, the Monk also carefully organizes his tragedies to show the impermanence of earthly power, riches, fame, and beauty. Each of his seventeen characters possesses some of the greatest gifts that the world has to offer, and each is pleased with his good fortune. All of them, however, lose their prosperous positions and become miserable. In each tale, therefore, the contrast of former joys and present suffering is central, and this contrast is the Monk's method of showing his listeners that earthly goods are transient.

The Monk is careful to open each narrative by describing the opulence, power, physical strength, beauty, or glory that his characters possess. Nebuchadnezzar, for example, has a "myghty trone" (B² 3333), "precious tresor" (B² 3333), a "glorious ceptre" (B² 3334), and "roial magestee" (B² 3334). Nero wears clothes ornamented with "rubies, sapphires, and . . . peerles white" (B² 3658), and he has "This wyde world . . . in subjeccioun" (B² 3656). Zenobia has "hardyness" (B² 3440) and "fairnesse" (B² 3443), and she is

"al clad in perree and in gold" (B² 3495). Hercules's name "Thurghout this wyde world . . . ran" (B² 3303), and "in his tyme of strengthe he was the flour" (B² 3287). The Monk also mentions the "roial magestee" (B² 3766 and 3862) of Antiochus and Caesar, and the high "renoun" (B² 3744 and 3825) of Holofernes and Alexander. These four men are also described as conquerors who put other men "in subjeccioun" (B² 3742). Croesus is described as "riche" (B² 3917), Balthasar wears "proud . . . array" (B² 3376), and Peter of Spain is "hye in magestee" (B² 3566). Of Samson the Monk remarks, "Was nevere swich another as was hee,/To speke of strengthe" (B² 3208-09), and of Adam we learn that he had "hye prosperitee" (B² 3203) and that "Hadde nevere worldly man so heigh degree/As Adam . . ." (B² 3201-02). Even this copious list does not exhaust the Monk's description of his characters' good fortune.³ These examples, though, suffice to

³For other examples of the prosperity of the Monk's characters see: B2 3192-94, 3200, 3205-08, 3213, 3242, 3250, 3266, 3286, 3306-09, 3325, 3357, 3374-78, 3437-38, 3442, 3456-58, 3565-66, 3581-82, 3714, 3831-32, 3950.

demonstrate that the Monk was intent on portraying his characters as exceedingly powerful and prosperous. They all possess some of the greatest gifts that this world has to offer.

Like Philosophy, however, the Monk also shows that none of these fortunate people can maintain earthly bliss. Nero is forced to commit suicide, Croesus is hanged, and Zenobia, after her defeat, is paraded in humiliation through the streets of Rome. Ugolino is starved along with his three children, and Hercules is killed by the poisoned shirt that Deianira gives him. Peter of Spain, Peter of Cyprus, Barnabo, and Julius Caesar are assassinated, and Antiochus is struck down by a horrible disease that causes his intestines to decay. Holofernes and Alexander are murdered, and Adam is driven out of paradise. Samson is blinded, and he, too, is killed when he pulls down the temple on his enemies and on himself. Indeed, although all of the Monk's characters have achieved great prosperity, their lives end in misery and death.

As implied by the prominence of his characters,

the Monk also expresses Philosophy's observation that not even kings and other great rulers can sustain their earthly prosperity. The Monk's cast of characters includes seven kings, one queen, two emperors, a count, an earl, and a governor. All of these people, however, lose their positions of power. The Monk thus can conclude, as Philosophy does, "that in lordshipe is no sikernesse" (B² 3430).

In his tale of Zenobia, in fact, the Monk demonstrates Philosophy's point that mighty people often suffer the same cruelties that they inflict on others (see II, pr. 6, 61-76). The Monk describes Zenobia as a powerful queen who defeats many kings and emperors. Her success, however, does not endure. The conqueror becomes the conquered, and the Monk is quick to note the ironic reversal. The woman who "whilom was / Dredeful to kynges and to emperoures" (B² 3557-58) is herself bound in "cheynes" (B² 3554) and is led through the streets of Rome to be mocked. This narrative sounds much like Philosophy's account of the fate of Regulus, who put men in chains until he himself

was put in chains.

The Monk, furthermore, emphasizes the organizing principle of his stories by including passages that specifically contrast former happiness with present woe. In describing Adam's expulsion from paradise, the Monk remarks that Adam "Was dryven out of hys hye prosperitee / To labour, and to helle, and to meschaunce" (B² 3203-04). The Monk is also careful to oppose Samson's once glorious existence with the hero's adversity:

O noble Sampson, strongest of mankynde,
O whilom juge, in glorie and in richesse!
Now maystow wepen with thyne eyen blynde,
Sith thou fro wele art falle in wrecchednesse.

(B² 3265-68)

The tale of Zenobia, too, ends with an extended contrast of Zenobia's former power and the humiliation of her present captivity:

Allas, Fortune! she that whilom was
Dredeful to kynges and to emperoures,
Now gaureth al the peple on hire, allas!
And she that helmed was in starke stoures,
And wan by force townes stronge and toures,
Shal on hir heed now were a vitremyte;
And she that bar the ceptre ful of floures
Shal bere a distaf, hire cost for to quyte.

(B² 3557-64)

Thus, the Monk consistently reminds his readers that his tales are designed to show the instability of

earthly blessings.

In addition to organizing his tales to show that worldly goods are fleeting, the Monk also openly moralizes about the transience of material prosperity and about the wretchedness that will befall those people who trust in earthly goods to sustain their happiness. At the close of his tale of Holofernes, for example, the Monk warns that worldly possessions may prove utterly useless in saving a man's life:

But taak kep of the deth of Oloferne:
Amydde his hoost he dronke lay a-nyght,
Withinne his tente, large as is a berne,
And yet, for al his pompe and al his myght,
Judith, a womman, as he lay upright
Slepynge, his heed of smoot. . . .

(B² 3757-62, italics mine)

In the tale of Balthasar, furthermore, the Monk recalls Philosophy's discussion of the impermanence of all power, including royal majesty (cf. III, pr. 5, 3-7):

Lordynges, ensample heerby may ye take
How that in lordshipe is no sikernesse;
For whan Fortune wole a man forsake,
She bereth away his regne and his richesse.

(B² 3429-32)

In another moralizing passage, the Monk also echoes Philosophy's reference to "ensaumples" from "the

olde age of tyme passed" (III, pr. 5, 4-5) which show that no man can trust earthly prosperity. As a part of the prelude to his tragedies, the Monk states, "Lat no man truste on blynd prosperitee; / Be war by thise ensamples trewe and olde" (B² 3186-87). Finally, the Monk closes his tale of Hercules by warning that the man who ". . . folweth al this world of prees, / Er he be war, is ofte yleyd ful lowe" (B² 3327-28).

The word prees, according to Bernard Jefferson, is "an expressive word implying . . . all the false felicity which enthralls men."⁴ The Monk's point in this passage, therefore, and indeed throughout all of his narratives, is that men who seek happiness in the attainment of earthly rewards will only come to sorrow. Like Philosophy, Daun Piers recognizes that the felicity of this world is only false felicity.

⁴Jefferson, 108. Jefferson's definition is based on Chaucer's use of this word in "truth" (1), The House of Fame (1633), and the Monk's Tale (B² 3327).

In addition to expressing Philosophy's views on the impermanence of worldly joys, the Monk also borrows one of the most criticized elements of his tale from Boethius--the fickle goddess Fortune. In the Consolation, Philosophy reinforces her discussion of the false felicity of this world by portraying deceitful and capricious Fortune as the governor of earthly events. Philosophy describes Fortune as a beguiler who has "flateryd" and "desseyved" men with transitory rewards, only to "forsaken" them at her whim (II, pr. 1, 55-59). Her work is but "false trecherie." (II, pr. 1, 64) She is "not feithful" in her promise of happiness but quickly withdraws the gifts that she has given and "bryngeth a wyght in sorwe" (II, pr. 1, 76-78). Philosophy knows well Fortune's deceptions and the pain that she causes: "I undirstonde the felefolde colours and desceytes of thilke merveyulous monstre Fortune and how sche useth ful flaterynge famylarite with hem that sche enforceth to bygyle, so longe, til that sche confounde with unsuffrable sorwe hem that sche hath left in despeer unpurveied" (II, pr. 1, 14-20).

Philosophy warns further that Fortune is unjust and sadistic. Fortune is a "blynde goddess" (II, pr. 1, 58), in whose realm good men are as likely to suffer physical torment as bad men are (IV, pr. 6, 178-280). Men may "writen a lawe of wendynge and of duellynge to Fortune," but they only "makest Fortune wroth and aspre" (II, pr. 1, 96-99) and she destroys them. Moreover, when men fall, Fortune actually revels in their misery: "Ne sche neither heereth, ne rekketh of wrecchide wepynges; and she is so hard that sche laugheth and scorneth the wepynges of hem, the whiche sche hath maked wepe with hir free wille. Thus sche playeth, and thus sche proeveth hir strengthes" (II, m. 1, 10-15). The image of Fortune as a heartless creature who plays whimsical games with men's physical existence is representative of her nature as she is portrayed in the Consolation.

This description of Fortune as a cruel and capricious goddess seemingly contradicts Philosophy's later argument that all creation is part of a divine order. Studies of the concept of Fortune in classical and medieval literature, however, reveal

that this contradiction is only apparent. It is important to note first that by Boethius's day writers did not believe in Fortune as an actual goddess.⁵ Howard Rollin Patch shows that among the pre-Christian Romans, Fortune was worshipped as a real divinity.⁶ She was thought to control

⁵Bernard Jefferson notes that for Boethius, Fortune was an allegorical figure used to represent "the ups and downs of life" (pp. 49-51). Howard Rollins Patch, in his "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna in Roman Literature and in the Transition Period," Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, 3 (July, 1922), 132, also remarks that for writers in the transition period following classical literature, Fortune was "a symbol, an embodiment of a force rather than a goddess actually worshipped." In his The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1967), p. 150, Patch again comments that for Christian writers Fortune and her wheel were merely symbols of earthly mutability. D. W. Robertson, Jr., in his "Chaucerian Tragedy," rpt. in Chaucer Criticism II, ed. by Richard Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), p. 87, notes that in the Middle Ages ". . . one did not 'believe in' Fortune any more than one believed in the goddess Venus."

Boethius's theological tracts show that he was a Christian, and suggest that he would not have been likely to consider Fortune a real goddess. See Elizabeth Barret's Boethius: Some Aspects of His Times and Work (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), chapter 8.

⁶Patch, "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna," 137-139.

men's earthly lives, bringing them to either success or disaster according to her whim. With the advent of Christianity, however, Fortune's existence as an actual celestial being was denied. St. Augustine, for example, repudiated the belief that such a goddess could exist in the Christian universe.⁷ In the Roman de la Rose (1179-86), also, Jean de Meun pauses in his discussion of the cruel goddess to remind the reader that Fortune has no real being.

In the works of Christian writers, therefore, Fortune was not meant to be seen as a real divinity. Instead, she was used as a literary device, a symbol of various realities of human existence. Some writers, for example, used her to symbolize the earthly treasure that men accumulate.⁸ Most Christian authors who discussed the goddess, however, seized upon Fortune's reputation for whimsicality and used her to signify the instability of earthly

⁷Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature, p. 16.

⁸Ibid., pp. 17 and 36.

prosperity. They made inconstancy the essence of her nature, and emphasized that although she could make men rich, strong, and powerful, she would inevitably deprive them of all of these gifts.⁹ Boethius reflects this concept of Fortune's nature in the Consolation: "Sche hath rather kept, as to the-ward, hir propre stablenesse in the chaungynge of hirself. . . . Yif Fortune bygan to duelle stable, she cessede thanne to ben Fortune" (II, pr. 1, 52-54 and 114-15).

In addition to describing Fortune's ceaseless changing, Christian writers also frequently adopted the classical images of her as deceptive, malicious, and unjust. They characterized her in this manner to show the danger of trusting in worldly goods, and to show that all men, including the good ones, are sure to suffer

⁹Patch, in "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna," 186-95, discusses the characterization and use of Fortune in works by clergymen. Willard Farnham also notes that ecclesiastics as well as poets depicted Fortune as an unstable goddess who brought men to prosperity and then cast them down. See Farnham's The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936), pp. 28-29.

physically.¹⁰ As mentioned above, Philosophy characterizes Fortune as cruel and capricious, and notes the fact that virtuous men cannot expect to escape worldly afflictions. Later, Philosophy also remarks that Fortune's purpose is to show the certain passing of earthly prosperity: "What other thyng is flyttyng Fortune but a maner schewyng of wrecchidnesse that is to comen?" (II, pr. 1, 81-83).

This comment is also important because it treats Fortune not as a goddess but as a rhetorical device used to demonstrate the instability of worldly success and thus to warn men against seeking happiness in the accumulation of temporal gifts. Such a treatment of Fortune reflects not paganism but an imaginative use of a classical goddess to demonstrate a Christian truth.

¹⁰On the clerical depiction of Fortune as malicious and unjust, see Patch, "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna," 186-95 and The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature, p. 17. Patch notes that clergymen apparently did not feel that they were expressing ideas opposed to Christian belief by portraying Fortune as capricious. (See discussion below in text.)

Although post-classical writers saw Fortune only as a literary figure, their characterization of her as malicious and fickle still may seem inconsistent with the Boethian and Christian belief that human existence is part of an ordered universe created by a benevolent God. Examination, however, of some other concepts of Fortune familiar to many writers during the early and late Middle Ages shows that the depiction of Fortune as cruel and capricious is compatible with Boethian and Christian belief.

Willard Farnham notes that classical and medieval authors often expressed the idea that Fortune had power only beneath the moon.¹¹ These writers believed in a dichotomy comprised of the ordered heavens and the disordered earth, with the ever-changing moon as an appropriate boundary between the two existences.¹² This cosmic view, Farnham

¹¹Farnham, pp. 27-31 and 106-110. (The following discussion is from Farnham.)

¹²This idea appears, for example, in Cicero's De Re Publica (VI, xvii).

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continues, influenced writers' thinking about Fortune. First, they associated the fickle goddess with the moon, the celestial divider between order and disorder: ". . . Fortune was compared with the moon in attempts to elucidate her changeableness. Like the moon she waxed and waned, like the moon she raised the tide of our happiness and lowered it."¹³ Second, the moon as boundary between disordered earth and the ordered heavens also became the boundary of Fortune's power. She could work her will on the chaotic physical existence of earth, but could not disturb the universal order beyond the moon.

This idea appears in Sallustius's fourth-century work entitled Concerning the Gods and the Universe. Farnham summarizes Sallustius's discussion: "Sallustius . . . says that Fortune has power beneath the moon--and he can even be interpreted as saying that Fortune's power rests in the moon--since above the moon nothing whatsoever could happen because of her."¹⁴ A similar belief

¹³Farnham, p. 107.

¹⁴Ibid.

appears in Boiardo's Orlando Innamorato (I, xvi, 1), where the author notes that Fortune gives rewards and rules only under the moon. The authors of Pricke of Conscience and of Floire et Blanchefleur also comment that Fortune is peculiar to earth.¹⁵ Farnham concludes that Fortune's influence was definitely seen as being "restricted . . . to the province of the mortal world."¹⁶

To Farnham's conclusion, Howard Rollin Patch adds that a number of writers depict Fortune as

¹⁵The pertinent passage from Pricke of Conscience is quoted on p. 108 of The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy. The significant section in Floire et Blanchefleur is ll. 2296-2321. See The Romance of Floire and Blanchefleur: A French Idyllic Poem of the Twelfth Century, trans. Merton Jerome Hubert, University of North Carolina Studies in Romance Languages and Literature, No. 63 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966), pp. 89-90. It should also be noted that Chaucer himself alludes to this idea in his poem "Fortune" (69-72), and that one of the glosses in Chaucer's Boece expresses the same concept: ". . . it byhoveth the to suffren wyth evene wil in pacience al that is doon inwith the floor of Fortune (that is to seyn in this world)" (II, pr. 1, 91-94).

¹⁶Farnham, p. 109.

having power only over men's physical being and not over their souls.¹⁷ Fortune can give temporal gifts, but never can she grant the lasting spiritual rewards that God offers.¹⁸ Furthermore, she controls only men's bodies; their spirits are free.¹⁹ Patch notes that this idea was quite common in classical literature. For example, Seneca, in his De Constantia Sapientis, says that a man who lives only to attain spiritual perfection puts himself outside of the power of Fortune:

¹⁷Patch, "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna," 150-51 and The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature, p. 69.

¹⁸Patch, "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna," 148 and The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature, pp. 62-63. See also Farnham, p. 109.

¹⁹Patch, "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna," 148-51.

Sapiens autem nihil perdere potest;
omnia in se reposuit, nihil fortunae
credit, bona sua in solido habet
contentus virtute, quae fortuitis
non indiget ideoque nec augeri nec
minui potest; nam et in summum preducta
incrementi non habent locum et nihil
eripit fortuna nisi quod detrahit;
libera est, inviolabilis, immota,
inconcussa, sic contra casus indurat,
ut ne inclinari quidem, nedum vinci
possit.

(V, 4)²⁰

Patch continues by observing that Christian writers later used this same remedy for the suffering caused by Fortune. He also remarks that the belief

²⁰But the wise man can lose nothing. He has everything invested in himself, he trusts nothing to fortune, his own goods are secure, since he is content with virtue, which needs no gift from chance, and which, therefore, can neither be increased nor diminished. For that which has come to the full has no room for further growth, and Fortune can snatch away only what she herself has given. But virtue she does not give; therefore she cannot take it away. Virtue is free, inviolable, unmoved, unshaken, so steeled against the blows of chance that she cannot be bent, much less broken.

Seneca: Moral Essays, trans. by John W. Basore, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. by T. E. Page, et al. (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1928), p. 61.

in the power of spiritual devotion to overcome Fortune's action implies another Ruler in the universe who has a sense of order and justice lacking in Fortune. Fortune does not rule everywhere.²¹ Patch adds that another common idea concerning Fortune was that after death a man was off of Fortune's wheel, which controlled only physical existence.²²

These concepts of Fortune help to show the unity of Boethius's cosmic view. First, if Fortune's power is restricted to earth, then portraying her as cruel and fickle does not necessarily suggest a disorder that extends throughout the universe. Instead, Fortune's actions need only represent the mutability and injustices of life in this world. Furthermore, since Fortune's realm does not include spiritual matters, her actions need not imply that the universe is utterly devoid of hope. In fact,

²¹Patch, "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna," 151.

²²Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature, p. 122. See also Farnham, p. 109.

her cruelty and fickleness can make her an effective foil for setting off the benevolence and justice of a better state of being that transcends physical existence.

Indeed, passages in the Consolation reflect some of the traditional attitudes toward Fortune. Boethius recognizes that Fortune's power is limited to the material world. Philosophy mentions that Fortune's concerns are only wealth, power, honor, and the like (II, pr. 2, 15-39). Philosophy also notes that Fortune has no control over spiritual matters. She tells Boethius that Fortune can never deprive a man of the happiness that depends on spiritual contentment: "Thanne, yif it so be that thow art myghty over thyself (that is to seyn, by tranquillite of thi soule), than hastow thyng in thi power that thow noldest nevere leesen, ne Fortune may nat bynymen it the" (II, pr. 4, 134-38). Philosophy adds that a man's death is the death of Fortune (II, pr. 3, 89-92).

Boethius is careful to show the dichotomy between physical and spiritual existence, and furthermore demonstrates that Fortune controls only

the former of these. Fortune's fickle and cruel influence, therefore, should not be seen as extending beyond the material existence of this world. Her appearance in the Consolation symbolizes only the harsh realities of corporeal life on earth.

The objection might yet be raised that using Fortune to represent the cruelties and injustices of physical existence implies a malicious creator. It must be remembered, however, that one of the central tenets of both Judaism and Christianity is that this world is a fallen place and therefore imperfect. The justice and lasting happiness of heaven need not always be manifested in the physical events here. In fact, a condition of the fallen world is that mutability, suffering, and death befall everyone regardless of the moral quality of his life.

The writer of Ecclesiastes recognized this condition: ". . . one fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the

evil, to the clean and the unclean" (9:2).²³ The writer of this passage does not mean to show that God is unfair; he merely shows that in this world physical well-being is sure to pass away. As other passages in Ecclesiastes imply, God is just but His justice may be expressed in lasting spiritual rewards and not in mutable material gifts.

This view of the world as a fallen place also appears in the Consolation. Philosophy tells Boethius that the world offers only an imperfect existence: "For the nature of thinges ne took nat hir begynnynge of thinges amenused and inparfit, but it procedith of thinges that ben alle hole and absolut, and descendith so doun into uttereste thinges and into thinges empty and withouten fruyt" (III, pr. 10, 25-30). This passage also reflects the common Boethian lesson that the material gifts of this world are worthless. Imperfect earth can

²³A similar view is expressed in Ecclesiastes 9:11: "Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the men of skill, but time and chance happen to them all."

never offer the "stable . . . quiete" (III, m. 10, 5-6) of perfect heaven. Existence in this fallen world, therefore, will always hold hardship for everyone, and this painful reality is all that Boethius intends to show through his depiction of Fortune as cruel and capricious.

The various concepts of Fortune current in Boethius's day, then, show that the treatment of this goddess in the Consolation contradicts neither Boethius's own thoughts in Book V nor the teachings of Christianity. Fortune is used merely as a literary device to show the mutability that affects the physical existence of all men who live in this fallen world. Her gifts are condemned as worthless, and God's gift of eternal bliss is honored as perfect. No doubt in God's goodness is intended.

Indeed, in the Consolation, Boethius makes Fortune a servant of God. Philosophy warns that good Fortune deceives men and causes them to trust in the world. She adds, however, that bad fortune can show men the false good of this world and lead them back to God:

For I deme that contrarious Fortune
profiteth more to men than Fortune
debonayre. For alwey, whan Fortune
semeth debonayre, thanne sche lieth,
falsly byhetyng the hope of welefulnesse;
but forsothe contraryous Fortune is
alwey sothfast, whan sche schewth hirsself
unstable thurw hir chaungynge. . . . At the
laste, amyable Fortune with hir flaterynges
draweth myswandrynge men fro the sovereyne
good; the contrarious Fortune ledeth ofte
folk ayen to sothfast goodes, and haleth
hem ayen as with an hook."

(II, pr. 8, 11-32)

This passage shows that by making Fortune a wicked and arbitrary goddess, Philosophy is not criticizing God's creation, but is attempting to develop an image of Fortune that would be effective in frightening men from their trust in material treasures. Philosophy unmasks good Fortune that "lieth, falsly byhetyng the hope of welefulnesse" (II, pr. 8, 14-15). She reveals Fortune's true nature--her caprice and cruelty--and thus takes advantage of the only good use that the goddess can have: her "schewynge of wrecchidness that is to comen" (II, pr. 1, 82-83), which will cause men to turn from love of the world to love of God.

Among the chief detractions of the Monk and his philosophy is the current criticism that he depicts Fortune as capricious and malicious.

According to the critics, this characterization shows that the Monk sees the universe as chaotic-- an inappropriate, even blasphemous, view for a cleric. But the critics who take a superior view of the Monk really show only that they have not paid attention to what the tale says or to Boethius, for passages in the Monk's tale show that he is merely imitating Philosophy's concept of Fortune in the Consolation.

In several of his tragedies, the Monk recalls Philosophy's depiction of Fortune as a deceitful goddess who befriends men before ruthlessly casting them into misery. After describing the assassination of Julius Caesar, the Monk says, "Fortune was first freend, and sitthe foo. / No man ne truste upon hire favour longe" (B² 3913-14). In the tragedy of Holofernes, the Monk reports that Fortune "kiste" Holofernes "likerously," but then "ladde hym up and doun, / Til that his heed was of" (B² 3746-48). Fortune also convinces Antiochus that he is as powerful as God:

Fortune hym hadde enhaunced so in pride
That verrailly he wende he myghte attayne
Unto the sterres upon every syde,
And in balance weyen ech montayne,
And alle the floodes of the see restrayne.
And Goddes peple hadde he moost in hate;
Hem wolde he sleen in torment and in payne,
Wenyng that God ne myghte his pride abate.

(B² 3773-80)

Fortune, however, has only deluded Antiochus, who dies a horrible death.

Fortune also deceives Alexander. She makes him "heir of hire honour" (B² 3833), but then causes him to be poisoned:

Allas! who shal me helpe to endite
False Fortune, and poyson to despise,
The whiche two of al this wo I wyte?

(B² 3858-60)

In the tale of Julius Caesar, Fortune gives Pompey the orient: "Thanke Fortune, that so wel thee spedde!" (B² 3876). Later, though, she leads Pompey to defeat and death: "Allas, Pompey, of th' orient conquerour, / That Fortune unto swich a fyn thee broghte" (B² 3883-84). The Monk notes that "Fortune hath in hire hony galle" (B² 3537), and after describing Hercules's demise, Daun Piers again warns of Fortune's deceit:

Lo, who may truste on Fortune any throwe?

.
Beth war, for whan that Fortune list to glose,
Thanne wayteth she her man to overthrowe
By swich a wey as he wolde leest suppose.

(B² 3326 and 3330-32)

Like Philosophy, the Monk is intent on revealing Fortune's true nature. Her generosity is only deceit; she finally casts men into misery. As Daun Piers warns in the tale of Hercules, men should "Beth war" (B² 3326) of her.

The Monk also characterizes Fortune as blind and cold-hearted. In the introduction to his tragedies, he recalls Philosophy's description of Fortune as a "blynde goddess" (II, pr. 1, 58). He admonishes his listeners, "Lat no man truste on blynd prosperitee" (B² 3187). His point, like Philosophy's, is that men should not hope to find lasting happiness in the accumulation of worldly goods, which pass away for all people regardless of their accomplishments or station in life.

Daun Piers also characterizes Fortune as malicious and heartless. In the tale of Ugolino, Fortune has the protagonist and his three small children imprisoned, and the Monk remarks, "Allas,

Fortune! it was greet crueltee / Swiche briddes
for to putte in swich a cage" (B² 3603-04). After
describing the death of Alexander, the Monk notes
that Fortune "ne weep she never a teere" (B² 3852).
When Nero commits suicide, moreover, Fortune actually
delights in his demise. Daun Piers characterizes her
reaction using the image of the heartless game-
player that Philosophy had used in the Consolation
(cf. II, m. 1, 10-15): "Hymself he slow, he koude
no better reed, / Of which Fortune lough, and hadde
a game" (B² 3739-40, italics mine). In these tales,
again, the Monk's depiction of Fortune is intended
not as an expression of belief in a chaotic universe,
but as a vivid warning that men who cherish worldly
gifts will suffer.

As mentioned earlier, Philosophy emphasizes
Fortune's ceaseless changing, and thus suggests
this broad concept to the Monk. Philosophy's dis-
cussion of Fortune's instability, however, contri-
butes two other elements to Daun Piers's narrative,
one of which has again been severely condemned by
the critics. First, Philosophy frequently refers
to Fortune's wheel, which became a familiar symbol

in medieval literature for the mutability of human existence. In the Consolation, Philosophy remarks that Fortune "torne[s_] the whirlyng wheel with the turnynge sercle" and thus causes men to "descende adown" when her "pley axeth it" (II, pr. 2, 51-56). Philosophy also adds that Fortune's decision to cause a person's fall "may nat been withholden at a mannys wille" (II, pr. 1, 78-79). Later, she remarks that men "mayst nat chaungen" Fortune's decrees (II, pr. 1, 100-101). Philosophy's point is that once Fortune has decided to bring a man to tragedy, he cannot successfully oppose her intent. Even royalty cannot control Fortune, for she "casteth adoun kynges that whilom weren ydradd" (II, m. 1, 7-8).

These concepts of Fortune's wheel and of her inflexible decrees are familiar motifs in the Monk's Tale. After telling about the murder of Peter of Cyprus, the Monk comments, "Thus kan Fortune hir wheel governe and gye, / And out of joye bringe men to sorwe" (B² 3587-88). Later, in the tragedy of Ugolino this once powerful man complains that his misfortunes have been caused

by the turning of Fortune's wheel: "Allas, Fortune,
and weylaway! / Thy false wheel my wo al may I
wyte" (B² 3635-36).

The Monk also echoes Philosophy's warning that men cannot prevent Fortune from working her will. In his introduction to his tale, the Monk states that "For certein, whan that Fortune list to flee, / Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde" (B² 3185-86). Later, after describing the death of Balthasar, the Monk again makes this same point: "For whan Fortune wole a man forsake, / She bereth away his regne and his richesse" (B² 3431-32). Daun Piers even recalls Philosophy's point that kings and queens also have no power over Fortune. He remarks in the tragedy of Nero, that although Nero "were strong, yet was she Fortune strenger" (B² 3711). A key passage in the tale of Zenobia also notes Fortune's power over this queen:

This myghty queene may no while endure.
Fortune out of hir regne made hire falle
To wrecchednesse and to mysaventure.

(B² 3538-40)

Concluding his tale of Ugolino, the Monk again points out that Fortune has greater strength than

a mighty man: "Thus ended is this myghty Erl of
Pize. / From heigh estaat Fortune away hym carf"
(B² 3646-47).

One of the Monk's passages reflecting this
theme has been cited as an example of his supposedly
inadequate philosophy. The Monk introduces his tale
with the following declaration:

I wol biwaille, in manere of tragedie,
The harm of hem that stooode in heigh degree,
And fillen so that ther nas no remedie
To brynge hem out of hire adversitee.
For certein, whan that Fortune list to flee,
Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde.

(B² 3181-88)

The phrase "nas no remedie" has been interpreted
as revealing the Monk's denial of the doctrine of
grace and salvation.²⁴ It must be noted, however,
that when the Monk speaks of men of "heigh degree"
who were brought into "adversitee" by "Fortune,"
he indicates that he is speaking in strictly
worldly terms. He recalls the Boethian passages
on the transience of earthly prosperity, and his
point is that when Fortune chooses to bring a man
to tragedy, that man cannot avoid physical suffering.

²⁴Delasanta, 120.

The Monk may also have in mind that in some situations, and certainly at the point of death, men fall from high position and never do regain their former wealth, power, or fame.

The mention of Fortune in this passage is especially significant in indicating the Monk's meaning. In his tale, Daun Piers shows an awareness of the theory that Fortune's power is restricted to the earth. Before he describes the fall of Lucifer, the Monk observes, "Fortune may noon angel dere" (B² 3191). Daun Piers's comment that Fortune has no power over Lucifer reflects the belief that Fortune rules only beneath the moon. Supernatural beings and spiritual matters are beyond her jurisdiction. The Monk's awareness of the restriction of Fortune's power to the material world shows that when he mentions falls without remedies, he is thinking only of earthly matters. He is not denying salvation, which is not part of Fortune's realm, but is reminding his listeners of the realities of material existence. His point is that all men must suffer physical tragedy, and that no matter what they do, they cannot prevent this inevitable end.

Throughout his tale, then, the Monk's characterization of Fortune is consistent with Philosophy's description of the fickle goddess in the Consolation.²⁵ In addition, Daun Piers repeatedly draws the correct moral that men should not trust Fortune and her gifts. The conclusion of his tale perhaps best reflects the purpose of this capricious creature in his tragedies:

Tragedies noon oother maner thyng
Ne kan in syngyng crie ne biwaille
But that Fortune alwey wole assaille
With unwar strook the regnes that been proude;
For whan men trusteth hire, thanne wol she
 faille,
And covere hire brighte face with a clowde.

(B² 3951-56)

²⁵E. M. Socola shows that Chaucer consciously made Fortune a central topic of the Monk's Tale. Socola points out that many of the references to Fortune in the Monk's stories do not appear in the sources for those stories. See his "Chaucer's Development of Fortune in the Monk's Tale," JEGP, 49 (1950), 159-71. Socola's conclusion raises an important question: If Chaucer was trying to characterize the Monk as a philosophical simpleton, why did he have the Monk imitate the portrayal of Fortune found in the Consolation, a highly respected work? A more reasonable conclusion would be that Chaucer added Fortune to the Monk's Tale merely to reinforce the lesson on true and false felicity that the Monk's narratives teach.

This key passage is one of the Monk's closest paraphrases of the Consolation: "What other thyng bywaylen the cryinges of tragedyes but oonly the dedes of Fortune, that with unwar strook overturneth the realmes of greet nobleye? (Glose. Tragedye is to seyn a dite of a prosperite for a tyme, that endeth in wrecchidnesse)" (II, pr. 2, 67-72).

Both the Monk and Philosophy realize that at least one function of tragedy is to warn men against seeking happiness in worldly prosperity. To achieve this end, they both make Fortune a frightening goddess. Neither of them intends to express despair over the nature of creation; they wish only to represent the painful realities of mutable physical existence and thus discourage the folly of seeking happiness in the accumulation of worldly goods.²⁶

²⁶Howard Rollin Patch shows that this use of Fortune was common in the Middle Ages. See his "The Tradition of Goddess Fortuna," 186-97, and his "Fortuna in Old French Literature," Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, 4 (1923), 2-23. Patch notes, for example, that Jean de Meun in the Roman de la Rose (5795-6900) employs Fortune to turn men from love of the world to love of God. Jean De Meun depicts Fortune as fickle, unjust, and malicious. She gives gifts but soon takes them

In the Consolation, however, Philosophy does more than expose earthly Fortune as the false good that is sure to lead a man to sorrow. She continues her discussion by defining the true good and by showing the perfect felicity that a man can achieve by attaining unity with this ideal good.

Philosophy comments first that men seek the true good in the wrong place: they "ploungen hem in erthe, and seken there thilke good that surmounteth the hevne that bereth the sterris" (III, m. 8, 22-24). She explains that the true good must be stable in its goodness and must, therefore, be beyond this unstable world. She also

(Footnote 26 continued.)
away, she raises and lowers men without regard to their moral worth, and she gives prosperity to men only so that their falls might be greater. In addition, she has power over mighty men; it was Fortune who overthrew such rulers as Nero, Croesus, and Priam. If people were wise, concludes Jean de Meun, they would disdain Fortune's gifts and seek heaven. For Patch's discussion of the Roman de la Rose, see "Fortuna in Old French Literature," 6-7. Similar treatments of Fortune appear in Boccaccio's De Casibus Virorum Illustrium, Petrarch's De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae, Machaut's Remede de Fortune, and Jean de Conde's Li Dis de Fortune. The resemblance between these respected works and the Monk's Tale again suggests that Chaucer did not intend the Monk's narratives to represent an uninformed philosophy.

states that the true good must always work for men's benefit and concludes that only God meets all of these requirements:

"And I have schewyd that God is the same good?"

"It remembreth me wel," quod I.

"Thanne ordeigneth he alle thinges by thilke good," quod sche, "syn he, which that we han accordid to ben good, governeth alle thinges by hymself; and he is as a keye and a styere, by which that the edifice of this world is kept stable withouten corrumpyng?"

"I accorde me greetly," quod I.

(III, pr. 12, 68-76)

Later, Philosophy adds that God "governeth alle thinges by the keye of his goodnesse" (III, pr. 12, 86-87) and remarks that in his compassion God seeks to return men's souls to him: "Thow [God] by evene-lyke causes enhauncest the soules and the lasse lyves. . . . And whan thei ben convertyd to the by thi benygne lawe, thow makest hem retourne ayen to the by ayen-ledyng fyer" (III, m. 9, 32-38). Philosophy also notes that nothing can stand against God: "Thanne is ther nothing," quod she, 'that either wole or mai withstonden to this sovereyn good.'" (III, pr. 12, 112-14). Philosophy portrays God as an omnipotent being, immutable in His goodness, and she says that

union with Him brings the sould great joy: "The soule . . . beynge in hevене rejoyseth" (II, pr. 7, 151-56).

Critics who maintain that the Monk's Tale is philosophically unsound say that Daun Piers pays little attention to God and his grace.²⁷ A close reading of the tale, however, shows that God is mentioned no less than twenty-four times and that the Monk consistently characterizes God as a benevolent and omnipotent deity, Who is the true good.

The central purpose of the Monk's tragedy of Nebuchadnezzar, for example, is to show God's strength and benevolence. The Monk relates that Nebuchadnezzar was an arrogant king who had no fear of God:

²⁷Delasanta maintains that the Monk's tragedies contain "only two references . . . to God and his governance" (123). Donaldson believes that in the Monk's Tale "God disappears entirely" (938). Paul Ruggiers, in his "Notes Towards a Theory of Tragedy in Chaucer," Chaucer Review, 8 (1973), 91, states: "It is possible to deduce from some of the segments of the Monk's Tale that Fortune is all-powerful, an ultimate law operating within a scope defined by nothing outside of itself."

He wende that God, that sit in magestee,
Ne myghte hym nat bireve of his estaat.
But sodeynly he loste his dignytee,
And lyk a beest hym semed for to bee,
Til God
relessed hym a certeyn yeres.
(B² 3358-67)

This passage shows that God is stronger than the mighty Nebuchadnezzar, but it also indicates that God is forgiving. The Monk notes that after God released this proud ruler, Nebuchadnezzar knew that God is "ful of myght and grace" (B² 3372). In fact, this tale reflects the Boethian and Christian belief that God seeks to redeem fallen men. In his pride, Nebuchadnezzar had turned from God and His will, but God showed him the insecurity of his position and thus converted him to a course of life that would offer him permanent happiness.

God's power and compassion are also the subject of the tale of Balthasar, the son of Nebuchadnezzar. Although Balthasar has his father's experience to guide him, "He by his fader koude nocht be war" (B² 3375). He becomes an "ydolastre" (B² 3377) and God's "foo" (B² 3415). At one of his banquets, though, strange writing appears on the wall, and Daniel is called to interpret it.

Daniel first discusses the events of Nebuchadnezzar's life and reminds Balthasar "That God of hevne hath domynacioun / Over every regne and every creature" (B² 3409-10). He also recalls God's "compassioun" (B² 3411) for Nebuchadnezzar, but warns that Balthasar need not expect such compassion because he has remained a "rebel to God" (B² 3415) even though he had the lesson of his father's life to guide him. Daniel tells Balthasar that the writing forecasts his destruction, which he has brought upon himself by his stubborn persistence in sin and worldliness: "Thou . . . / . . . heryst false goddes cursedly; / Therefore, to thee yshapen ful greet pyne ys" (B² 3416-20). That night Balthasar is conquered and killed.

This tale not only shows God's power over a mighty king, but also reflects the Christian doctrine that although God offers His grace, men must at least make an attempt to do His will and must desire His forgiveness. Here, again, the Monk also reflects the thoughts of Philosophy who observes that those who do not seek heaven do not deserve it (I, pr. 5, 34-36).

God's omnipotence and His desire to help men also appear in the tales of Antiochus and Samson. Antiochus is a cruel tyrant who torments "Goddes peple" (B² 3778) and who believes that "God ne myghte his pride abate" (B² 3780). However, "God for his manace hym . . . soore smoot / With invisible wounde" (B² 3789-90) and thus "daunted al his pride and his boost" (B² 3799). As Antiochus's body decays "horribly" (B² 3807), he comes to recognize God's strength and is sorry for his sinfulness: "In this meschief he wayled and eek wepte, / And knew God lord of every creature" (B² 3811-12). God thus effects Antiochus's repentance.

In the tale of Samson, God gives Samson the strength and hardiness by which he accomplishes his great feats. But God also cares for Samson's need. After killing the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, Samson is thirsty, and "he gan to preye / That God wolde on his peyne han some pitee" (B² 3230-31). God responds by causing water to flow from a tooth on the jawbone, and the Monk concludes, "Thus heelp hym God" (B² 3236). This

tale shows a loving God who hears men's prayers for pity and responds.

Despite what some critics say, God is a vital force in the Monk's Tale. The Monk's tragedies clearly demonstrate that God is the greatest power in the universe, and they also show that God uses his power for the good of men. These concepts of God are both Boethian and Christian, and their presence in the Monk's Tale reveals that the Monk's concept of the universe is highly informed as far as medieval philosophy is concerned.

Beyond showing that God is the true good, Philosophy tells Boethius that he himself can determine whether or not he shares in the perfect felicity God offers. Man's true "home" (I, pr. 5, 16-19; IV, m. 1, 36-38) is heaven, says Philosophy, and his true nature is to be virtuous: "Thanne comen alle mortel folk of noble seed. . . . yif thow loke youre bygynnyng, and God your auctour and yowr makere, thanne nis ther non forlyved wyght or ongentil, but if he noryssche his corage unto vices and forlete his proper byrthe" (III, m. 6, 8-14). Good fortune, however, encourages love of

earthly wealth, and creates in men "dyrkyd memorie" (III, pr. 2, 85) of their true home and nature. They betray their nobler inclination for wickedness: "And yif thow have enclyned thi studies to the wikkide thinges, ne seek no foreyn wrekere out of thiself; for thow thiself hast thrist thiself into wikke thinges" (IV, pr. 4, 197-201). By forgetting his true nature and by pursuing the goods of this world, a man loses his dignity and is "torned into a beeste" (IV, pr. 3, 127).²⁸

Philosophy tells Boethius that if a man wishes to attain lasting happiness, he must transcend the lust for the world that material prosperity encourages and must seek virtue instead. This transcendence can be achieved, Philosophy explains, if a man "despiseth . . . al erthly occupacioun" (II, pr. 7, 154-55) and loves "vertues" (V, pr. 6, 305). When a man looks into himself and recognizes his own potential for doing good and then lives only to fulfill that potential, he can attain an

²⁸See also II, pr. 5, 152-54 for this same idea.

inner peace, a satisfaction with his existence, that he will never lose: "O ye mortel folk, what seeke ye thanne blisfulnesse out of yourself which that is put in yowrself? Errour and folie confoundeth yow. . . . Thanne, yif it so be that thow art myghty over thyself (That is to seyn, by tranquillite of thi soule), than hastow thyng in thi power that thou noldest nevere lessen, ne Fortune may nat bynymen it the" (II, pr. 4, 128-38). Because Fortune controls only the physical world, she may take away a man's wealth or position, but she cannot deprive him of his spiritual achievement.

Living a virtuous life, adds Philosophy, can also make a man happy by uniting him with God, the true good. God "rejoisseth hym of the duellynge of his citezeens" (I, pr. 5, 21-22) in heaven, and "what wyght that hath levere founden therin his sete or his hous than elleswhere, he may nat ben exiled by no ryght fro that place" (I, pr. 5, 28-31). "The erthe overcomen yeveth the sterres," Philosophy concludes, and Chaucer glosses, "This to seyn, that whan that erthly lust is overcomyn,

a man is makid worthly to the hevене" (IV, m. 7, 69-72).

The Monk's Tale again reflects Philosophy's thoughts. First, in the tale of Nebuchadnezzar, the Monk describes a man who becomes a beast because he has forgotten his true nature and purpose. At the beginning of this tale, the Monk remarks that all of Nebuchadnezzar's "delit" (B² 3340) is in his earthly realm. In the midst of his good fortune, however, Nebuchadnezzar "sodeynly . . . loste his dignytee, / And lyk a beest hym seemed for to bee" (B² 3360-61). He eats hay, lies out in the rain, and walks with the wild beasts. Later, he recovers his "wit" (B² 3368) and puts his trust in God rather than in worldly goods. Only then does he become a man again. The Monk's account of Nebuchadnezzar's life is a clear demonstration of the Boethian belief that a man must transcend love of this world to live in true nobility.

In the tale of Hercules, furthermore, the Monk echoes Philosophy's exhortations to Boethius to despise the world and to look inside of himself

for the true good. After describing Hercules's death, the Monk explains that this world is unstable and that the wise man is the one who knows his true nature and purpose:

Lo, who may truste on Fortune any throwe?
For hym that folweth al this wrold of prees,
Er he be war, is ofte yleyd ful lowe.
Ful wys is he that kan hymselfen knowe!

(B² 3326-29)

The Monk's intimation that men should not follow "al this world of prees" recalls Philosophy's advice to forsake the world. Indeed, with its connotation of hoarding, hating, envy, failure, and general vain struggle for the position²⁹ prees echoes Philosophy's admonishment to Boethius to "fleen the perilous aventure (that is to seyn, of the world)" (II, m. 4, 11-12).

The Monk's point that the wise man is he who can know himself is also Boethian. Like Philosophy, the Monk believes that each man has within him the potential for doing good. Also like Philosophy, the Monk recognizes that the man who rises above materialism and lives only to develop his innate

²⁹Jefferson's definition (108).

ability to be virtuous both makes himself impervious to the physical threats of Fortune and approaches the eternal joy of union with God.

In its attempt to disparage materialism and to encourage the development of the human potential for acting virtuously, the Monk's Tale actually complements the Boethian implications of the Knight's Tale, at least as Kaske understands the Knight's performance. While the Knight emphasizes that men should not despair over bad fortune, the Monk warns that men must not be corrupted (made forgetful of spiritual life) by good fortune. Philosophy tells Boethius to beware "that the myrie fortune ne corruppe the nat" (IV, pr. 7, 95-96), and the Monk adopts this lesson as the theme of his tale.

Philosophy's discussion of true and false felicity contributes one last element to the Monk's Tale. Although she vividly depicts the folly of pursuing earthly rewards, Philosophy tells Boethius that the men who lust after the false good of this world should be pitied, not hated. She explains that such men have a sickness of the mind much as others have an illness of the body and should be

treated with sympathy rather than with contempt:
". . . and yit men scholden more ryghtfully han
pite of hem that doon the grevances and the wronges:
the whiche shewes [Robinson incorrectly has
"schrewes"⁷ it were a more covenable thing that
the accusours or advocattes, nat wroothe but pytous
and debonayre, ledden the schrewes that han don
wrong to the jugement ryght as men leden syke folk
to the leche, for that thei sholden seken out the
maladyes of synne by torment" (IV, pr. 4, 259-68).
Philosophy adds that hate has no place in the heart
of a wise man, who should see that a man corrupted
by the world is headed for misery and deserves pity.
She concludes, "Love ryghtfully goode folk, and
have pite on schrewes" (IV, m. 4, 17-18).

The Monk's sympathy for the characters in his
tragedies has been cited as evidence of his despair
over the apparent injustice of the universe.³⁰
The above passages from the Consolation, however,
show that the Monk's sympathy for fallen men reflects

³⁰Berndt, 44-59; Delasanta, 125; Donaldson,
939.

the proper Boethian spirit. His repeated use of "Allas!" (B² 3557, 3603, 3848, and 3858) and his frequent apostrophizing (B² 3194, 3265, 3565, 3581, 3848, 3869) reveal that rather than rejecting his characters as despicable fools, the Monk shows compassion for them as people who have doomed themselves to suffering by pursuing the false good of this world.

The Monk's sympathy, furthermore, need not conflict with Philosophy's proof that even bad fortune can ultimately be turned to good. Although she explains that all suffering has a purpose, she does not deny the suffering itself. In fact, she implies that bad fortune must cause anguish to be an effective teacher. The Monk, as a Christian and as a human being, cannot simply ignore this suffering. Not even Philosophy recommends that course of action. She, after all, condemns Fortune for casting men down without a tear for their misery III, m. 1, 10-15).

In light of these parallels between the Consolation and the Monk's Tale, it is evident that the Monk, rather than despairing over the apparent

meaninglessness of the creation, is actually using his tragedies to teach Philosophy's lessons on the nature of true and false felicity.³¹ Like the Consolation, the Monk's narratives repeatedly demonstrate that the goods of this world offer only

³¹It should be noted that in addition to being central to the Consolation the theme of true and false felicity also appears both in the Bible and in a number of works of medieval literature other than the Monk's Tale. Ecclesiastes, for example, contrasts the "vanities" of earthly existence with the perfect goodness of God and heaven. Matthew 6:19-20 also juxtaposes transient earthly goods with permanent heavenly rewards: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal."

The theme of true and false appears in such continental medieval works as the Roman de la Rose (5795-6900), Boccaccio's De Casibus Virorum Illustrium, and Innocent III's De Contemptu Mundi. Among medieval English works, the lyric poem "Love Song" warns a young woman not to seek happiness in the love of earthly men who are sure to die, but to love Christ, who can offer eternal bliss. The Pearl recommends that men should forsake their earthly possessions to gain the true bliss of heaven (see 727-32). Thomas a Kempis's Imitation of Christ also contrasts temporal and heavenly existence and shows that abiding rest and happiness is to be found in heaven and not on earth. This work encourages men to scorn the worthless gifts of this transitory world and to seek heavenly bliss, which is lasting (see ii.6 and iii.1, 4, 36, 47, 53). The appearance of the theme of true and false felicity in the Bible and in these other medieval works suggests that Chaucer intended to give the Monk a quite traditional and respectable topic.

false felicity because they are transient. Like the Consolation, Daun Piers's stories also portray Fortune as a capricious and cruel goddess in order to turn men from their trust in earthly prosperity. And like the Consolation, the Monk's tragedies show that God is the source of the true good, which can be attained only through virtuous living. In addition, the Monk, like Philosophy, never forgets the suffering of those who endure tragic falls, and responds to their misery with compassion. In both message and tone, therefore, the Monk's Tale is a sound Boethian narrative.

III. The Monk's Typically Chaucerian Theme

Comparison of the Monk's Tale with Boethius's Consolation has shown that the Monk's narratives embody a sound philosophical consideration of the nature of true and false felicity. In addition to being consistent with Boethian thought, however, the Monk's tragedies express some familiar themes in Chaucer's writings. Throughout Chaucer's works, written over what must have been a long period in his creative career, the same Boethian motifs recur: worldly prosperity and life itself are fleeting;¹ powerful men inevitably lose their position;² fickle Fortune causes earthly

¹See, for example, The Canterbury Tales (A 3428-30; B² 1198-99, 1427-28, 4394-96; D 474-77; E 36-37, 2055-56, 2069-71; G 438-41, 947-48), The Parlement of Foules (53-54), and The Book of the Duchess (209-11).

²A number of Chaucer's works depict the sorrow and misfortune of great people. The Black Knight and Queen Alcione, in the Book of the Duchess, suffer the loss of their spouses. Queen Dido, in The House of Fame, commits suicide when Aeneas leaves her, and the noble women in The Legend of Good Women suffer afflictions at the hands of cruel men. In The Canterbury Tales,

tragedy;³ God offers permanent

(Footnote 2 continued.)

Virginius is forced to kill his own daughter; January, a knight, loses his eyesight; and Arcite and Valerian are killed.

³See, for example, The Book of the Duchess (610-682), The House of Fame (1542-48), the Knight's Tale (A 924-26), the Merchant's Tale (E 1312-15, 2057-60), and the Tale of Melibee (B2 2639-44). Chaucer's short poem "Fortune" also discusses this goddess's caprice and cruelty. In addition, this poem makes some observations that reflect and help to explain the Monk's attitudes towards Fortune in his tale. The complainant notes that Fortune operates without apparent concern for justice. She is a "blind goddess" (50), who causes physical mutability without a sensible plan:

This wrecched worldes transmutacioun,
As wele or wo, now povre and now honour,
Withouten order or wys discrecioun
Governed is by Fortunes errour.

(1-4)

This poem also indicates that Fortune's rule is restricted to earth. The goddess tells the "pleintif," "Thy laste day is ende of myn intresse" (71). When men die, they escape to the "sikerness" (69) of heaven, where Fortune cannot harm them. Finally, several passages in the poem show that Fortune rules only material existence and that men can successfully resist her by ignoring her gifts. The complainant observes that men are brought to sorrow by Fortune only when they desire her gifts: "Wikke appetyt comth ay before syknesse" (55). He comments that Fortune has "no force . . . / To him that over himself hath the maystrye" (13-14) and advises men to be more like Socrates, who "Ne in hir chere founde . . . no savour" (20). These remarks echo the Monk's warning to forsake Fortune and to look inward to discover the true self and

goodness;⁴ and lasting joy is found in spiritual perfection.⁵ These motifs, of course, are

(Footnote 3 continued.)
the true good (See B² 3326-32).

⁴The contrast of transient earthly happiness and permanent heavenly bliss appears in several of Chaucer's works. Prudence tells Melibus that although the world is a place of "tribulaciouns," a good man escapes at death to "'The joye of God,'" which is "'perdurable,' that is to seyn, evere-lastynge" (B² 2695-2700). She later adds that God works to "bryngen us to the blisse that nevere hath ende" (B² 3077-78). In The Parlement of Foules, Africanus comments that earth is a "lyte" place "ful of torment and of harde grace" (64-65), but that at death honorable men will go to heaven, a ". . . place deere / That ful of blysse is and of soules cleere" (76-77). Earthly bliss may pass away, but in heaven is "joye . . . that last withouten ende" (49). The short poem "Fortune" also contrasts heaven and earth: "The hevене hath propretee of sikernesse, / This world hath ever resteles travayle" (69-70).

⁵The advice to forsake the world and to seek happiness in virtuous living recurs in many of Chaucer's works. See, for example, the Second Nun's Tale (G 276), "Fortune" (9-24), and The Parlement of Foules (64-71). Prudence, in the Tale of Melibee, expresses this view when she notes that virtuous living can provide contentment both now and after death: "And th'apostle seith that 'ther nys thyng in this world of which we sholden have so greet joye as whan oure conscience bereth us good witnesse. . . . it /a reputation for virtuousness/ shal lenger abide with thee than any tresour, be it never so precious" (B² 2823-29).

represented extensively elsewhere in medieval literature; considering the medieval world view, it could hardly have been otherwise. But the point here is that they constitute a significant and consistently recurring element in Chaucer's works outside of the Monk's Tale and thus are another suggestion that Chaucer would have deemed the Monk's observations on true and false happiness as philosophically and theologically respectable. In fact, in four of Chaucer's other works--"Truth," the Man of Law's Tale, the Parson's Tale, and Troilus and Criseyde--a discussion of the nature of true and false felicity, expressed in terms similar to those of the Monk's performance, is a major topic.

Chaucer's lyric, "Truth," uses all of the motifs of the Boethian lesson on true and false felicity to show that "trouthe" can deliver a man from misery. Chaucer opens the poem by noting that happiness founded on the attainment of material goods is unstable. He comments that "hord hath hate, and climbing tikelnesse" (3), and he adds later that "The wrastling for this world axeth a

fal" (16). These lines sound very much like the Monk's comments on the lack of "sikernesse" (B² 3430) in this world and on the fact that many great men have "yfallen" into misery (B² 3166). Chaucer also alludes to the instability of Fortune, and warns that men should not "trust of hir that turneth as a bal" (9).

Because the material prosperity of this world is mutable, Chaucer continues, men should never seek happiness in the accumulation of earthly possessions. He advises first that people make a few goods suffice: "Suffyce unto thy good, though it be smal" (2) and "Savour no more than thee bihove shal" (5). He adds that men should detach themselves from the grubbing and greed of earthly existence. Again sounding much like the Monk, he admonishes his readers to "Flee fro the prees" (1, cf. B² 3327) and remarks that "Gret reste stant in litel besinesse" (10). Men should be careful never to become slaves to the world: "Unto the world leve now to be thral" (23).

In addition to cautioning men against seeking happiness in earthly delights, Chaucer observes

that permanent joy can be found in heaven. Men must realize that this imperfect world is not their true home and must seek a better existence: "Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernesse; / Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth beste, out of thy stal!" (17-18). The word beste in this passage recalls the fate of Nebuchadnezzar in the Monk's Tale (B² 3360-70) and shows that people who are content with worldly pleasures are no better than mere brutes. Man's true home, Chaucer observes, is heaven, for which men should be thankful: "Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al" (18). God in His benevolence has created "hevenlich mede" (27) for men, and it is in the attainment of that spiritual reward that men can find lasting peace.

The only way to achieve this heavenly bliss, Chaucer cautions, is to follow the dictates of the soul, which is opposed to man's bestial nature: "Hold the heye wey, and lat thy gost thee lede" (20). Their spirits will show men that they should lead virtuous lives apart from earthly lusts. Men should "Reule" (6) and "Daunte" (13) themselves and suppress their physical desires.

They should cry unto God for "mercy" (24), draw unto him (26), and pray that others reach their heavenly home (27). Above all, however, they should always live in "trouthe," a word that may be interpreted as meaning truthfulness or fidelity. The implication is that a man who is honorable in his relations with others will be virtuous enough to attain heaven.⁶

The point of the poem, then, is aptly stated in the first line: "Flee fro the prees, and dwelle with sothfastnesse" (1). If men are to be truly happy, they must live to seek God and not to fulfill their physical desires. In both its message and some of its phrasing, therefore, "Truth" is remarkably similar to the Monk's Tale. Furthermore, since Chaucer wrote "Truth" as a representation of his own convictions,⁷ he evidently would have approved of the Monk's tragedies.

⁶For a more complete discussion of the meaning of trouthe, see Jefferson, pp. 116-19.

⁷Ibid., p. 119.

Another Chaucerian work that expresses views similar to those of the Monk is the Man of Law's Tale. The theme of true and false felicity is not as central to this narrative as is a consideration of Christian faith and the power of God. In showing God's goodness, however, the Man of Law frequently makes the distinction between the impermanence of earthly happiness and the everlasting joy of union with God.

A recurring theme of the Man of Law's Tale is the certain passing of earthly bliss. On the level of plot, the events of the poem form a pattern: repeatedly, characters attain great earthly happiness but then suffer a misfortune that brings them to woe. When he welcomes Constance to his land, the Sultan of Syria has "joye and blis" (B¹ 409). Soon afterward, however, the Sultan's mother, who despises Constance's Christianity, has the Sultan murdered and sets Constance adrift at sea. Constance's ship is driven to England where this virtuous woman eventually marries King Alla, has a child, and lives in "joye and blisse" (B¹ 735). Again, though, earthly happiness is

interrupted. Alla's Mother, another pagan who detests Constance's Christianity, arranges for Constance to be exiled and set adrift on the ocean. Alla and Constance, consequently, are both brought to "woe" (B¹ 757 and 847). In England, also, the happiness of the Constable and his wife is dissolved when the wife is murdered.

Her second voyage on the sea brings Constance back to Italy, her native land. Eventually, she is reunited with her father and with Alla, and the narrator remarks that they were all filled with joy:

Who kan the pitous joye tellen al
Bitwixe hem thre, syn they been thus ymette?
In joye and blisse at mete I lete hem dwelle
A thousand foold wel moore than I kan telle.
(B¹ 1114-20)

But this happiness, too, proves unstable. First, Alla dies, then Constance's father, and finally Constance herself.

The events of the Man of Law's Tale, therefore, are an effective demonstration of the instability of worldly happiness. The Man of Law shows that during the course of a man's life on

earth, his felicity can be rudely interrupted by tragedy. Furthermore, the Man of Law's performance is quite reminiscent of the Monk's Tale. Both storytellers organize the events of their narratives to show earthly prosperity followed by sudden misfortune.

In addition to depicting the sudden falls of prosperous people, the Man of Law frequently introduces into his narrative lectures on the impermanence of earthly felicity. After describing the Sultan's joy over the arrival of Constance, the Man of Law warns that earthly happiness is always followed by woe:

O sodeyn wo, that evere art successour
To worldly blisse, spreynnd with bitternesse!
The ende of the joye of oure worldly labour!
Wo occupieth the fyn of oure gladnesse.
Herke this conseil for thy sikernesse:
Upon thy glade day have in thy mynde
The unwar wo or harm that comth bihynde.

(B¹ 421-27)

The truth of this warning is demonstrated when the Sultan is killed. Near the conclusion of his tale, the Man of Law again discusses the mutability of worldly bliss. He describes the happiness of Constance's reunion with her father and with Alla, but warns that earthly felicity will last only a

short while:

But litel while it lasteth, I yow heete,
Joy of this world, for tyme wol nat abyde;
Fro day to nyght it changeth as the tyde.

(B¹ 1132-34)

He then reports the death of Alla, and he is careful to emphasize that the characters' delight is turned to sorrow:

I ne seye but for this ende this sentence
That litel while in joye or in plesance
Lasteth the blisse of Alla with Custance.

For deeth, that taketh of heigh and logh his
rente,
Whan passed was a yeer, evene as I gesse,
Out of this world this kyng Alla he hente,
For whom Custance hath ful greet hevynesse.

(B¹ 1139-45)

These passages on the woe that can suddenly follow joy again echo the Monk's observation that the man of prosperity and high position always "endeth wrecchedly" (B² 3167).

Although the Man of Law depicts the world as a place of inevitable physical suffering, he never doubts the ultimate goodness of God or the possibility of finding permanent happiness. God's power and benevolence and the eternal bliss of heaven are central themes of his tale, and in its

expression of these beliefs the Man of Law's performance is again similar to the Monk's.

Constance is repeatedly tormented by malicious people, but God is always with her and helps her. When, for example, Constance is set adrift in a rudderless boat, God sustains her physically as well as spiritually. The Man of Law remarks that such an event is not unusual. After all, God saved Jonah from the whale and the Hebrews from drowning in the Red Sea. Later, when a man boards Constance's ship and intends to rape her, God gives her the strength to defend herself. In this tale, God does not erase all suffering nor finally does He protect Constance from death, but He does help alleviate some physical pain. This element of the tale recalls God's aid to Samson and to Nebuchadnezzar in the Monk's Tale. Also, God's power over the man who would rape Constance is reminiscent of the punishment that God metes out to His foes in the Monk's tragedies.

Greater than God's physical aid, however, is His promise that men will be saved to the eternal bliss of heaven. The Man of Law observes that

heaven offers "joye that lasteth everemo"
(B¹ 1076), and he notes that God acts to save
mankind to this eternal bliss (B¹ 907). In
addition, his tale is filled with references to
Christ's redemption of sinful man. When Constance
is adrift in the rudderless ship, she prays for
aid, and her prayer reflects the doctrine that
Christ died to save men from their sinfulness:

"O cleere, of welful auter, hooly croys,
Reed of the Lambes blood ful of pitee,
That wessh the world fro the olde iniquitee,
Me fro the feend and fro his clawes kepe."

(B¹ 451-54)

The Man of Law, himself, closes his tale with a
prayer, and in it he asks that Christ save men's
souls and grant them "Joye after wo" (B¹ 1161).
The Man of Law's Tale is more specifically
Christian than is the Monk's Tale, but finally
Christ's grace is only a manifestation of God's
benevolence. Both works, therefore, portray God
as the true good that offers lasting felicity.

A final element common to both the Monk's
and Man of Law's performances is the belief that
permanent happiness can be attained only through
virtuous living. Such sinners as the young knight

who murders Hermyngild and the man who tries to rape Constance are punished severely for their crimes. More virtuous characters, however, die with the hope of attaining eternal life. Alla, for example, vows to do Christ's will: "Lord, welcome be thy lust and thy plesaunce; / My lust I putte al in thyn ordinaunce" (B¹ 762-63). And when Alla dies, the Man of Law believes that God will "blesse" (B¹ 1146) the soul of this worthy man. Both the Man of Law and the Monk believe that virtue is the path to true happiness.

One of the most admirable characters on the pilgrimage is the Parson, and his tale, too, reflects attitudes similar to those of the Monk. The Parson sees that the gifts of this world can be a source of misery. He even makes an allusion to Fortune:

Certes also, whoso prideth hym in the
goodes of fortune, he is a ful greet
fool; for somtyme is a man a greet lord
by the morwe, that is a caytyf and a wrecche
er it be nyght;/and somtyme the richesse
of a man is cause of his deth; somtyme
the delices of a man ben cause of the
grevous maladye thurgh which he dyeth. /
Certes, the commendacioun of the peple
is somtyme ful fals and ful brotel for

to triste; this day they preyse, tomorwe
they blame. / God woot, desir to have
commendacioun eek of the peple hath
caused deeth to many a bisy man.
(I 470-73)

Later, the Parson makes a similar observation:

". . . oure lif is in no sikernesse, and eek
. . . alle therichesses in this world ben in
aventure, and passen as a shadwe on the wal"
(I 1067). Quoting David, he warns further that
all men are eventually separated from their
treasures by death: "'The riche folk, that
embraceden and oneden al hire herte to tresor of
this world, shul slepe in the slepyng of deeth;
and nothyng ne shal they fynden in hir handes of
al hir tresor'" (I 192).

These passages show that men who seek riches,
fine clothes, power, and fame pursue the "ydel
solas of worldly thynges" (I 740). It is interest-
ing to note that all of the earthly goods that the
Parson condemns as offering false happiness are
the very material benefits possessed by the
characters of the Monk's Tale. The Parson merely
states in his sermon what the Monk demonstrates
in his tragedies.

To the world where adversity and death are certain, the Parson contrasts the perfect bliss of heaven. The conclusion of his tale, in fact, is devoted to contrasting the miseries of earthly existence with the everlasting joys of God's kingdom:

Thanne shal men understonde what is the fruyt of penaunce; and, after the word of Jhesu Crist, it is the endlees blisse of hevne, / ther joye hath no contrariouste of wo ne grevaunce; ther alle harmes been passed of this present lyf; ther as is the sikernesse fro the peyne of helle; ther as is the blisful compaignye that rejoysen hem everemo, everich of otheres joye;/ther as the body of man, that whilom was foul and derk, is moore cleer than the sonne; ther as the body, that whilom was syk, freele, and fieble, and mortal, is inmortal, and so strong and so hool that ther may no thing apeyren it;/ther as ne is neither hunger, thurst, ne coold, but every soule replenyssed with the sighte of the parfit knowynge of God.

(I 1075-79)

As this conclusion shows, the true good is not to be found on earth, but in the heavenly bliss that God offers.

Since he is a devoutly religious man, the Parson naturally characterizes God as omnipotent

and benevolent.⁸ Especially, however, he emphasizes the forgiveness that God offers to those people who repent of their sins. He recalls the story of the prodigal son and Jesus's promise on the cross that the thief would be with him in paradise as signs of God's mercy (I 700-703). The Parson also states, "Certes, ther is noon so horrible synne of man that it ne may in his lyf be destroyed by penitence" (I 704). The image of God as merciful recalls the forgiveness that God shows penitent Nebuchadnezzar in the Monk's Tale.

The Parson's statement, though, indicates that although God is forgiving, men themselves must be repentant if they hope to attain the lasting joys of heaven. The Parson warns that the people who exhibit the "perpetueel wil to do synne shul . . . han perpetueel peyne" (I 1067-69). Repentance, of course, implies not only contrition and penitence but also the attempt to cease from committing sins, and it is in his definition of

⁸See I 305-10, 550-55, 690-95, 705-70, and 805-10.

sin and his advice for avoiding it that the Parson reflects some ideas that are again similar to the Monk's thoughts.

For the Parson, sin is primarily a matter of lust for worldly pleasures: "Certes, synful mannes soule is bitraysed of the devel by coveitise of temporeel prosperitee, and scorned by deceite whan he cheseth fleshly delices" (I 275).⁹ Since sin is caused by the desire to possess earthly goods, the remedy for it is to use material benefits only with restraint and to abstain from loving them altogether. The Parson cautions men to avoid "likerousnesse in herte to have erthely thinges" (I 741). He points out that the pursuit of "riche metes" (I 833) and other material prosperity is ultimately worthless. At death a man will have to forego all of his possessions, and furthermore the accumulation of earthly wealth will count nothing toward the salvation of a man's soul (I 812-33). The Parson's advice is that

⁹For other passages defining sin as love of the world, see I 276 ff., 364-65, and 445-46.

men should "chese the loweste place over al" (I 481) and seek only "suffisance" (I 833) in worldly goods. His comments recall the Monk's suggestion that men should not "folweth al this world of prees" (B² 3327).

The Parson's Tale exhibits one last parallel to the Monk's tragedies. The Parson believes that each man has in him "the Hooly Goost . . . the liknesse of God, that is to seyn, the vertu that is in mannes soule" (I 543). He recognizes that everyone has in him something of the spirit of the Creator and also, therefore, the potential for doing good. He observes further that a man who allows this goodness to be diminished in his thoughts and deeds will suffer the unhappiness of an existence apart from God, but that the man who cultivates his potential for acting virtuously can hope to have the bliss of heaven (I 543-46 and 832). His remarks echo, and actually help to explain, the Monk's comment that "Ful wys is he that kan hymselfen knowe" (B² 3329). Both men see that true happiness lies in living to be virtuous rather than in the accumulation of

material goods.

One other Chaucerian work that expresses attitudes similar to those of the Monk is Troilus and Criseyde. Although much of this poem is a sympathetic depiction of the love of the two titular characters, a number of passages discuss the instability of worldly joy and the permanence of heavenly bliss. In fact, one point of the poem seems to be that not even the happiness of an earthly love as beautiful as Troilus's and Criseyde's can last forever.

The mutability of worldly felicity is reflected both in the events of the narrative and in the speeches of several characters. At the beginning of the poem, the narrator states that he will tell of Troilus, whose ". . . adventures fellen/ Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie" (I, 4). He thus indicates that although Troilus will be happy for a while, his life will end in sorrow, as indeed it does.

Troilus's joy is his love of Criseyde. At first, he suffers from lovesickness, but Pandarus works to bring him "to joye out of distresse"

(III, 245) and finally the two lovers are united. Their relationship, furthermore, brings both of them to great bliss:

Nought nedeth it to yow, syn they ben met,
To axe at me if that they blithe were;
For if it erst was wel, tho was it bet
A thousand fold; this nedeth nought enquere.
Agon was every sorwe and every feere;
And bothe, ywys, they hadde, and so they wende,
As mucche joie as herte may comprende.
(III, 1681-86)

The narrator had warned, however, that this joy would not last, and when Criseyde is given to the Greeks in exchange for Antenor, the lovers are plunged into sorrow. Troilus lives "out cast from alle joie" (V, 615) and laments in ubi sunt fashion the loss of Criseyde:

"Wher is myn owene lady, lief and deere?
Wher is hire white brest? wher is it, where?
Wher ben hire armes and hire eyen cleere,
That yesternyght this tyme with me were?
Now may I wepe allone many a teere."
(V, 218-22)

Criseyde, also, is filled with "destresse" (IV, 800) and "hevynesse" (IV, 802), and makes a long complaint about how her "joies" have become "cruel wo" (IV, 828-30).

Later, of course, Criseyde proves unfaithful, and although she finds security, Troilus is crushed

when he learns that she will not return. He becomes "malencolie" (V, 1646), and vows, "Myn owen deth in armes wol I seche" (V, 1718). Eventually, he is killed, and the tale ends with the sorrow that had been predicted. Troilus's joy in his love of Criseyde is turned to woe.

In addition to the events of the narrative, speeches by several of the characters show that happiness based on the possession of earthly benefits will surely fade. Criseyde recognizes how quickly worldly joy can pass, and she delivers two long speeches on this subject. The first appears in Book III when Criseyde learns that Troilus thinks her unfaithful, and she fears that she will lose his love and protection:

"O God!" quod she, "so worldly selynesse,
Which clerkes callen fals felicitee,
Imedled is with many a bitternesse!
Ful angwissous than is, God woot," quod she,
"Condicoun of veyn prosperitee;
For either joies comen nought yfeere,
Or elles no wight hath hem alwey here.

"O brotel wele of mannes joie unstable!
With what wight so thow be, or how thow pleye,
Either he woot that thow, joie, art muable
Or woot it nought; it mot ben oon of tweye.
Now if he woot it nought, how may he seye
That he hath verray joie and selynesse,
That is of ignoraunce ay in derknesse?

"Now if he woot that joie is transitorie,
As every joie of worldly thyng mot flee,
Than every tyme he that hath in memorie,
The drede of lesyng maketh hym that he
May in no perfit selynesse be;

"Wherfore I wol diffyne in this matere,
That trewely, for aught I kan espie,
Ther is no verray weele in this world heere."
(III, 813-36, italics mine)

Criseyde's conclusion that the world offers no perfect happiness is correct, and her speech properly embodies the lesson of false felicity.

Criseyde's second speech on the mutability of earthly joy is part of her lamentation when she learns that she is to be sent to the Greek camp:

"Endeth thanne love in wo? Ye, or men lieth!
And alle worldly blisse, as thynketh me.
The ende of blisse ay sorwe it occupieth;
And whoso troweth nat that it so be,
Lat hym upon me, woful wrecche, ysee,
That myself hate, and ay my burthe acorse,
Felyng alwey, fro wikke I go to worse."
(IV, 834-40, italics mine)

This speech echoes the Nun's Priest's "For evere the latter ende of joy is wo" (B² 4395); the Man of Law's "O sodeyn wo, that evere art successour/
To worldly blisse" (B¹ 421-22); and the Monk's reminder that tragedy is the story of a man
". . . that stood in greet prosperitee, / And is

yfallen . . . / Into myserie, and endeth
wrecchedly" (B² 3165-67). The transience of earthly
happiness is obviously an important theme in
Chaucer's works.

In Troilus and Criseyde, Pandarus also gives
a speech on the false felicity of this world.
Cautioning Troilus to take the greatest care to
preserve his relation with Criseyde, Pandarus
remarks that even when men are most cautious to
guard their happiness, earthly joy soon fades:

"Thow art at ese, and hold the wel therinne;
For also seur as reed is every fir,
As gret a craft is kepe wel as wyne.
Bridle alwey wel thi speche and thi desir,
For worldly joie halt nought but by a wir.
That preveth wel it brest alday so ofte;
Forthi nede is to weken with it softe."
(III, 1632-38)

Troilus, of course, does act with great caution,
but his earthly felicity fails anyway.

In addition to showing the mutability of
worldly contentment, Troilus and Criseyde contains
another of the motifs of the Monk's Tale. It
emphasizes the instability of physical prosperity
by depicting fickle and malicious Fortune as an
active force in men's lives. Troilus frequently
complains of Fortune's cruelty. Believing that

he will not be able to win Criseyde's love, Troilus laments that he cannot succeed with Criseyde because Fortune is his "fo" (I, 837). He adds that no man can withstand this goddess's maliciousness and whimsicality:

Ne al the men that riden konne or go
May of hire cruel whiel the harm withstonde;
For, as hire list, she pleyeth with free and
bonde.

(I, 838-40)

This passage also characterizes Fortune as a heartless game-player.

Later, when Criseyde must go to the Greek camp, Troilus asks what he has done to make Fortune punish him (IV, 260-62). He says that he has "honoured" (IV, 267) Fortune all of his life and "above the goddes alle" (IV, 268). Now, however, she is "cruwel and unkynde" (IV, 266) and will "deprive" him of his "joie" (IV, 269). Troilus learns that he has made a mistake in trusting Fortune.

Another character who recognizes Fortune's ceaseless changing is Cassandra. In fact, in explaining Troilus's dream (V, 1457-1512), she delivers a miniature Monk's Tale. Troilus comes

to Cassandra to learn the significance of a dream in which he saw Criseyde sleeping with a boar. Cassandra says that to understand the meaning of this vision, Troilus will have to listen to ". . . a few of olde stories . . . / To purpos, how that Fortune overthrowe/ Hath lordes olde . . ." (V, 1459-61). Cassandra then shows how adversity daunted the Greeks and especially the line of Meleager. She tells of the boar that Diana sent to punish the Greeks for their failure to worship the goddess and of the deaths of Meleager, Tydeus, Eteocles, Polynices, Archimorus, Amphiaraus, Hippomedon, Parthenopeus, and Capaneus. Her narrative, like the Monk's Tale, shows a world where the most powerful men are subject to Fortune and are not secure in their strength and position.

Pandarus also shows an awareness of Fortune's power and cruelty. Lamenting Troilus's possible loss of Criseyde, Pandarus asks, "Who wolde have wend that in so litel a throwe / Fortune oure joie wold han overthrowe?" (IV, 384-85). The "ruyne" (IV, 387) of Troilus has shown him that no man can hope to find "propretee" (IV, 392) in

Fortune.

Admittedly, Troilus and Pandarus's portrayal of Fortune may reflect the disappointments that they suffer. However, even the narrator of the poem depicts Fortune as a cruel goddess who leads Troilus and Criseyde to happiness only to cast them into misery later. On the night when Troilus and Criseyde consummate their love, the narrator reports that Fortune caused the rain that kept Criseyde at Pandarus's house and thus made the meeting with Troilus possible (III, 617-20). The narrator later remarks that the lovers enjoy a period of bliss ". . . for that Fortune it wolde" (III, 1667).

A warning, though, is soon sounded. After describing the happy meeting between Troilus and Criseyde at Pandarus's house, the narrator comments, ". . . thus Fortune a tyme ledde in joie / Criseyde, and ek this kynges sone of Troie" (III, 1714-15, italics mine). The phrase "a tyme" indicates that the joy of the lovers has only limited duration in Fortune's ever-changing realm.

At the beginning of Book IV, the narrator

reveals fully Fortune's cruel intentions for the lovers. Now that she has made Troilus jubilant, Fortune will forsake him without the least concern for his suffering. The narrator laments the passing of Troilus's joy and notes the goddess's deception and cruelty:

But al to litel, weylaway the whyle,
Lasteth swich joie, ythonked be Fortune,
That semeth trewest whan she wol bygyle,
And kan to fooles so hire song entune,
That she hem hent and blent, traitour comune!
And whan a wight is from hire whiel ythrowe,
Than laugheth she, and maketh hym the mowe.
(IV, 1-7)

This passage portrays Fortune as the beguiling and heartless goddess found in the Monk's Tale. The narrator's comments recall particularly both the tale of Holofernes, where Fortune kisses the protagonist "likerously" (B² 3747) but then has him beheaded, and the tale of Nero, where Fortune laughs at this emperor's wretched end.

Fortune's deceptiveness and cruelty also form the subjects of other narrative intrusions in Troilus and Criseyde. As he awaits Criseyde's return from the Greek camp, Troilus never doubts that she will come back, and he even imagines their

reunion. The narrator comments, though, that Fortune was merely mocking Troilus with a delusion: "Fortune his howve entended bet to glaze!" (V, 469). Again, when Troilus and Pandarus watch for Criseyde from the walls of Troy, the narrator remarks that Fortune was making fools of them by leading them to expect Criseyde's return: "Fortune hem bothe thenketh for to jape" (V, 1134). Later, when Troilus learns that Criseyde has betrayed him for Diomede, the narrator emphasizes Fortune's indifference to Troilus's sorrow. Although "Gret was the sorwe and pleynte of Troilus," Fortune took no pity on him, but merely ". . . hire cours . . . ay gan to holde" (V, 1744-45). The narrator, like the Monk, concludes that Fortune makes the world a place where "In ech estat is litel hertes reste" (V, 1749; cf. B² 3330-32 and 3430-32).

In addition to showing Fortune's deceit and maliciousness, Troilus and Criseyde embodies other concepts of the goddess that help to explain some features of the Monk's Tale. Criseyde indicates in several passages that Fortune's power is limited to physical existence. Criseyde tells

Troilus that she loves him for his "moral vertu," "trouthe," "gentil herte," and "resoun" (IV, 1672-78). She admires these qualities because they offer a permanent foundation for a happy relation and are not subject to Fortune's whims: "And this may lengthe of yeres naught fordo, / Ne remuable Fortune deface" (IV, 1681-82). Criseyde also mentions that men can make themselves invulnerable to Fortune's wiles simply by ignoring her gifts: ". . . lord is he / Of Fortune ay, that naught wole of hire recche" (IV, 1587-88). Criseyde's remarks show the wisdom of the Monk's advice to flee from the "prees" and to seek happiness inwardly where Fortune has no control.

Another concept of Fortune that appears in Troilus and Criseyde is the belief that Fortune can be used to frighten men from trust in this world. Just before he describes the death of Hector, the narrator reports that Fortune turned her favor from Troy:

Fortune, which that permutacioun
Of thynges hath, as it is hire comitted
Thorough purveyaunce and disposicioun
Of heighe Jove, as regnes shal be flitted

Fro folk in folk, or when they shal be
smytted,
Gan pulle away the fetheres brighte of Troie
Fro day to day, til they ben bare of joie.
(V, 1541-47)

This passage shows that Fortune is under the direction of a higher deity, but it also indicates that Fortune's purpose is to cause change and suffering in this world. By her very fickleness, which makes earthly prosperity unstable, Fortune serves God. This concept of Fortune's role suggests the Monk's literary use of the goddess in his tale. Daun Piers sees that by using fickle Fortune to represent earthly mutability he can more effectively show the false felicity of this world than if he simply said that physical existence is transient.

A final element that Troilus and Criseyde shares with the Monk's Tale is a discussion of true felicity. After Troilus has been killed, his soul ascends to the eighth sphere, from which he looks down on earth. What he sees is that the joy of this world is worthless when compared to the felicity of heaven:

And down from thennes faste he gan avyse
This litel spot of erthe, that with the se
Embraced is, and fully gan despise
This wrecched world, and held al vanite
To respect of the pleyne felicitye
That is in hevne above. . . .
(V, 1814-19)

Troilus laughs at men's lust for transient worldly
joys and sees that people should set their hearts
on heaven:

And in hymself he lough right at the wo
Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste;
And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so
The blynde luste, the which that may nat laste,
And sholden al oure herte on hevne caste.
(V, 1821-25)

Troilus's perceptions are supported by the
conclusion of the poem. The narrator points out
that Troilus's love and earthly gains have ended
in sorrow as do all worldly joys:

Swich fyn hath, lo, this Troilus for love!
Swich fyn hath al his grete worthynesse!
Swich fyn hath his estat real above,
Swich fyn his lust, swich fyn hath his noblesse!
Swich fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse!
(V, 1828-32)

The narrator continues by warning that men should
seek true happiness in God and not in the
possession of material goods:

Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte,
And of youre herte up casteth the visage
To thilke God that after his ymage
Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire
This world, that passeth soone as floures
faire.

(V, 1837-41)

Forsake ". . . this wrecched worldes appetites"
(V, 1851), the narrator commands, and love Christ
who died on the cross that men might enjoy eternal
bliss. Christ deceives no man, and whoever seeks
happiness in Him will have no need for the false
delights of this world:

For he nyl falsen no wight, dar I seye,
That wol his herte al holly on hym leye.
And syn he best to love is, and most meke,
What nedeth feynede loves for to seke?

(V, 1845-48)

These concluding remarks show that lasting
happiness is to be found not in the possession of
material goods but in the perfection of spiritual
existence that will unite a man with God in
heaven.

The theme of true and false felicity, then,
appears quite frequently in Chaucer's works other
than the Monk's Tale. The similarities, further-
more, between these works and the Monk's tragedies
suggest that Daun Piers's philosophy is not so

flawed as some critics maintain. His demonstration of the false felicity of this world where Fortune rules and his depiction of God as the true good show that the Monk shares the attitudes both of Chaucer's most respected characters and of Chaucer himself. The Monk's Tale, therefore, is no philosophical anomaly among Chaucer's works but is yet another artistic representation of a typically Chaucerian theme.

IV. The Artistic Achievement of the Monk's Tragedies

While some critics condemn the Monk's Tale as philosophically inadequate, others castigate Daun Piers's tragedies as artistically unrefined.¹ These scholars find the Monk's tragedies a dull performance that shows a failure of the imagination. Specifically, they maintain that the Monk's narratives suffer from lack of character development,

¹Helen Storm Corsa, for example, finds the Monk's Tale "A series of dreary tragedies, unimaginatively and prosaically narrated." See her Chaucer: Poet of Mirth and Morality (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), p. 208. George Williams, in his A New View of Chaucer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965), p. 6, calls the Monk's performance "acknowledged wearisomeness." R.K. Root remarks that, with the exception of the tale of Ugolino, the Monk's narratives have "no literary merit." See his The Poetry of Chaucer: A Guide to Its Study and Appreciation (Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1922), p. 207. Similar views are expressed by Joella Owens Brown, "Chaucer's Daun Piers: One Monk or Two?" Criticism, 6 (1964), 44-50; Donald K. Fry, "The Ending of the Monk's Tale," JEGP, 71 (1972), 355; Henry Savage, "Chaucer and the 'Pitous Deeth' of 'Petro, Glorie of Spayne,'" Speculum, 24 (1949), 357-58; John Speirs, Chaucer the Maker (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 184.

monotonous repetition, scant use of literary devices, formlessness, dreariness, and an unsophisticated representation of the causes of human tragedy. These critics also believe, though, that just like his bad philosophy, the Monk's unimaginative artistry ultimately serves Chaucer's purposes and thus reveals Chaucer's own narrative skill.

Among those feeling that the Monk fails to develop his characters and the situations in which they are involved is Henry Savage, who maintains that the Monk's tragedies are no more than "bare statements" of theme and event. The Monk "strips the tales of flesh, skin, and sinew, leaving only the skeleton of brutal fact."² Willard Farnham also criticizes the "bald style" of the Monk's narratives. The tale is "encyclopedic," and like a reference work, it is without development of character or emotion.³

²Savage, 358.

³Farnham, p. 130.

A second criticism of the Monk's Tale is that its repetition of plot sequence and message makes it monotonous. Farnham complains of the tale's "tiresome iteration," noting that each story follows the same pattern. Tragedy after tragedy shows the fall of some mighty person from prosperity into adversity.⁴ John Speirs and Joella Owens Brown also find the tale a "monotonous succession" of narratives with the same events and the same theme.⁵ Brown adds that the infrequent use of literary devices contributes further to the overall wearisomeness of the Monk's performance.⁶ R. K. Root maintains that the "dry epitomizing character of the individual narrations" and "the inevitably recurring moral" create "unspeakable monotony."⁷

⁴Ibid., p. 135.

⁵Brown, 44 and Speirs, p. 184. (Quoted phrase is from Speirs, but Brown makes the same point.)

⁶Brown, 49-50.

⁷Root, p. 207.

Other critics condemn the tale's apparent lack of organization, its dreary mood, and its inadequate representation of the relation between a man's character and his tragic end. Donald Fry believes that the Monk's Tale is an "artistic failure" because it is "formless." He explains that the tale has no order, not even a chronological one.⁸ George Williams, moreover, disapproves of the tale's dreariness. He finds the Monk's narratives a "melancholy catalogue" that is depressing to read.⁹ Paul Ruggiers and P. M. Kean criticize the Monk's Tale as an inadequate representation of human tragedy. They maintain that the work lacks sophistication because it does not consistently show that a man's character is the cause of his suffering.¹⁰

⁸Fry, 355.

⁹Williams, p. 6.

¹⁰P. M. Kean, Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry, Vol. I (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 136; Paul G. Ruggiers, "Notes Towards a Theory of Tragedy in Chaucer," The Chaucer Review, 8 (1973), 91.

As this brief survey shows, the belief that the Monk's Tale is artistically unrefined has gained wide acceptance among the critics. A number of these scholars, however, contend that although the Monk's boring performance may be valueless as a piece of literature apart from the Canterbury Tales, it does serve some worthy literary purposes when read in the context of the Knight's and Host's responses to it. Specifically, Chaucer was using the Monk's Tale either to show his distaste for the genre of medieval tragedy or to help develop the dramatic interplay of characters on the pilgrimage.

T. R. Lounsbury and R. K. Root maintain that Chaucer was using the Monk's narratives to criticize the genre of medieval tragedy.¹¹ Lounsbury believes that the Monk's Tale was "introduced as a specimen of these collections of stories [tragedies] and largely and perhaps

¹¹Root, p. 33. Lounsbury's views are summarized by J. S. P. Tatlock in his The Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works (London: Chaucer Society, 1907), p. 166.

entirely for the sake of satirizing or at least of censuring the taste that created and enjoyed them."¹² Root agrees that Chaucer included the Monk's tragedies among the Canterbury Tales simply to have an opportunity to condemn the Monk's performance. According to Root, the Knight's and the Host's comments when they interrupt the Monk reveal Chaucer's own recognition of the "essential literary badness" of the Monk's narratives.¹³

The idea that Chaucer gave the Monk a dull tale to help develop the dramatic interplay of the characters on the pilgrimage is expressed by R. M. Lumiansky and Joella Owens Brown.¹⁴ Both

¹²Quoted from Tatlock, p. 166.

¹³Root, p. 33.

¹⁴Brown, 48-51; R. M. Lumiansky, Of Sundry Folk: The Dramatic Principle in the Canterbury Tales (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1955), pp. 99-104. This idea is, of course, a development of Tatlock's view of Daun Piers's motivation for telling his tale. See Tatlock's "Chaucer's Monk," MLN, 55 (1940), 352-53.

of these critics note that during his invitation to the Monk to tell a tale, the Host does not show Daun Piers proper respect and even insults him. The Monk, therefore, seeks to punish the Host for his impudence and hits upon the idea of telling a boring tale.

Lumiansky believes that the Monk chooses to tell the dullest kind of story that he can think of. Daun Piers cares not about teaching some lesson in morality, but wants only to relate a tale so tedious that it will bore the Host. Moreover, remarks Lumiansky, the Monk succeeds, for the Host nearly falls asleep during Daun Piers's performance and later complains bitterly about the wearisomeness of the Monk's tragedies.

Joella Owens Brown agrees that Daun Piers consciously selects a ponderous type of narrative. She also contends, though, that the Monk actually tries to construct his tale in a manner that will increase its dullness. According to Brown, the Monk carefully avoids using any literary techniques, such as characterization and figurative language, that will make his narrative interesting and lively.

Instead, he concentrates on making his stories tiringly repetitive. Brown notes that the plot structure and the theme is the same in nearly all of the seventeen tragedies. She also observes that the Monk uses a limited vocabulary, repeating such words as Fortune, God, and pride up to as many as thirty-one times in his narrative. The Monk never uses variation in his tale, nor does he want to, for if his tragedies had any merit they would not be so likely to bore the Host.

The critics who find the Monk's Tale a vengeance piece demonstrate a kind of consistency in the Canterbury Tales. Insulted by the Host, the worldly Monk tells a ponderous tale that will weary Harry and thus requite him for his impudence. This view, like that which finds the Monk's Tale a satire of medieval tragedy, suggests that Chaucer, by having the Monk deliver an inept narrative, was actually demonstrating his own artistic ability.

The arguments that the Monk's Tale is representative of bad storytelling and that it thus serves Chaucer's purposes in the Canterbury Tales may seem to provide an adequate and plausible

understanding of the artistic merit of this narrative. Comparison, however, of the Monk's stories with the tradition of medieval tragedy indicates that the critics have not been fair to the Monk in condemning his tale as artistically inept and ultimately have missed Chaucer's intentions in *Daun Piers's* performance. Studies of medieval tragedies reveal that these works nearly always contain three elements--they show a man's fall from prosperity to adversity, they depict Fortune as the cause of earthly tragedy, and they attempt to elicit pathos for human suffering. These three elements all appear in the Monk's Tale, and suggest that the Monk was attempting to present a respectable example of this type of narrative. Furthermore, a number of the Monk's tragedies seem especially designed to evoke pathos, an emotional response to suffering that Chaucer honors in his other tales.

Medieval tragedy has been the subject of a number of studies, which demonstrate the genre's popularity and respectability in the Middle Ages

and which isolate some of the characteristics of medieval tragic works.¹⁵ R. W. Babcock notes that before the Monk begins his tale proper, he gives a formal definition of tragedy (See B² 3163-71) and refers to "olde bookes" (B² 3164) that apparently contained tragic stories. The Monk's comments indicate to Babcock that medieval men would have been aware of a tradition of tragedy, and he sets out to recreate that tradition. Babcock believes that medieval tragedies had two distinguishing traits. They showed the falls of mighty men from prosperity to adversity, and they depicted Fortune as the agent of those falls.¹⁶ Using these criteria, Babcock discovers numerous works in the Middle Ages that might be called tragedies. Included in his list are such works

¹⁵See, for example, R. W. Babcock, "The Medieval Setting of Chaucer's Monk's Tale," PMLA, 46 (1931), 205-13; Farnham, chapters 3 and 4; John Lawlor, Chaucer (London: Hutchinson, 1968), pp. 70-72; D. W. Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," Chaucer Criticism II, 86-121 (see Chapter 2, footnote 5). It should also be noted that in medieval literature the term tragedy did not denote drama but narratives in prose or poetry that depicted the falls of great men.

¹⁶Babcock, 206.

as John of Bromyard's Summa Praedicatorum, Aeneas Sylvius's De Viris Illustribus, Petrarch's De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae, Simund de Freine's Le Roman de Philosophie, the Roman du Renart, and Jean de Conde's Le Dis de Fortune. Also in Babcock's list are Boccaccio's De Casibus Virorum Illustrium and the Fortune section of the Roman de la Rose (5795-6900)--two works that probably influenced Chaucer's Monk's Tale. Babcock concludes from his study that Chaucer composed the Monk's narratives in "an atmosphere heavy with 'tragedie.'"¹⁷

Another scholar who demonstrates that the Monk's Tale is representative of a popular medieval tradition is Willard Farnham. Beginning with the Latin authors such as Lucan, Lactantius, and Seneca, Farnham shows that the Monk's Tale is the product of a tradition that had been growing for centuries. He notes that such themes of medieval tragedy as the puny will of man and the hopeless evil of the world could be traced to Greek thought,

¹⁷Ibid.

but he observes that the medieval emphasis on Fortune as the cause of human suffering implies that the Roman writers were the immediate progenitors of tragedy in the Middle Ages.¹⁸

Turning to the medieval period itself, Farnham observes that tragedies were quite popular. A sign of this popularity was the medieval response to Boccaccio's De Casibus Virorum Illustrium. Although modern readers may regard the Decameron as Boccaccio's greatest work, men in the Middle Ages honored the Italian writer for his De Casibus. This work, remarks Farnham, "took hold of men's imaginations" in the medieval world.¹⁹ Originally written in Latin, the De Casibus was soon translated into Italian, French, Spanish, German, and English. Moreover, even though it was written after the Decameron, the De Casibus was translated

¹⁸Farnham, chapter 1 and pp. 75-80. Farnham shows especially that Lactantius and Seneca were immediate and significant influences on medieval tragedy.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 70.

first in France, Spain, and England.²⁰

Farnham continues his discussion of the popularity of tragedy in the Middle Ages by noting that writers frequently discussed tragic theory and wrote works that conformed to this theory. Dante, for example, attempted to define the form. He thought of tragedies as works that in their beginning were admirable and quiet but in their ending were full of catastrophe and misery.²¹ Vincent of Beauvais also defines tragedy as a story about people who initially have great prosperity but who lose everything they have and end wretchedly.²² Farnham notes that a number of tragedies were written in the Middle Ages, and he lists many of the same works that Babcock mentions.

The studies of Babcock and Farnham show that

²⁰Ibid., pp. 71-72.

²¹Ibid., p. 71.

²²Babcock, 206, quotes Vincent of Beauvais's definition.

by the time Chaucer wrote the Monk's Tale, many writers in the Middle Ages, including some that Chaucer himself knew and respected, had written tragedies. It is quite likely, therefore, that Chaucer intended the Monk's performance not as bad art but as an example of an esteemed narrative form.

In addition to discussing the popularity and respectability of tragedy in the Middle Ages, scholars have also attempted to determine some of the genre's chief characteristics.²³ Examining such works as Boccaccio's De Casibus and Jean de Meun's Fortune section of the Roman de la Rose, these critics find three consistently recurring elements in medieval tragedy: descriptions of the falls of powerful men, the depiction of fickle Fortune as the cause of material adversity, and an attempt to elicit pathos.²⁴

²³See Babcock, 205-13; Farnham, chapters 1-4; Lawlor, pp. 70-72; Robertson, 86-121.

²⁴See especially Farnham, p. 77 and Lawlor, pp. 70-72.

In both the De Casibus and the Roman de la Rose, for example, the tragic characters are kings, queens, emperors, and other great leaders. Boccaccio describes the falls of such mighty people as Cadmus, Hercules, Priam, Hecuba, Agamemnon, Dido, Zenobia, Samson, Pompey, and Julius Caesar. Jean de Meun's tragic protagonists include Nero, Croesus, Manfred, Conradin, and Henry of Spain--all powerful men.

Both Boccaccio and Jean de Meun also depict Fortune as the cause of physical adversity. The role of Fortune in the Roman de la Rose has already been discussed (above, p. 82, n. 26), but the fickle goddess also appears in the De Casibus. Boccaccio describes Fortune as putting bounds on men's merrymaking. She may offer wealth, beauty, fame, strength, and power, but she always turns her wheel and brings men to ruin. In fact, she only raises men to prosperity because she wants to have the enjoyment of causing their falls. Unjust Fortune has been responsible for the tragedies of many great and worthy people, including Priam, Dido, Zenobia, Agamemnon, Alexander, Cicero,

Hannibal, and Pompey. Men should beware of Fortune, concludes Boccaccio, for her ceaseless changing and cruelty can overthrow anyone's prosperity despite his position or moral character.²⁵

The frequent appearance of Fortune in medieval tragedies creates a unique perception of the causes of human suffering, and a brief consideration of this feature of the genre will help to explain Chaucer's artistic intentions in the Monk's Tale. Unlike other tragedians before and after them, medieval writers were not intent on showing that a man's physical adversity was a

²⁵This discussion of Boccaccio is based on Louis Brewer Hall's translation of the De Casibus Virorum Illustrium, Milestones of Thought Series, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1965). See especially Book VI, the section entitled "A Conversation Between Fortune and the Author." See also references to Fortune both in the tales of the characters listed in the text of this paper and in the concluding line of the De Casibus, which notes that human adversity is caused by "the iniquity of changing Fortune" (p. 243 of Hall's translation). The original Latin for this last line reads: "Set proteruia potius Fortunae cuncta vertentis." See Louis Brewer Hall's facsimile reproduction of the 1520 edition of the De Casibus (Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1962), p. 241. All other references to Boccaccio will be based on Hall's translation.

result of his character or of some misjudgment that he had made. John Lawlor observes, "Medieval tragedye is not essentially concerned with the connection between what a man is and what may befall him."²⁶ Instead, tragedy in the Middle Ages was absorbed with the adversity that can befall a man whether he is good or evil. In Farnham's words, medieval writers of tragedy "were actually aware that the world of the flesh . . . is a welter of unexplainable evil."²⁷

Medieval authors, however, did not merely accept the mystery of human suffering; they addressed the problem with the insistent question "Why?" Eventually, they answered this question with the Greco-Roman image of Fortune's wheel. They imagined fickle Fortune as the governor of worldly routine, elevating men and casting them down again at her whim. A man's earthly fall,

²⁶Lawlor, p. 17.

²⁷Farnham, p. 14. (The following discussion is from Farnham.)

therefore, was not necessarily the result of his misjudgments or sins, but was caused by the circumstances of life that were often beyond his control.

Farnham finds this feature of medieval tragedy a weakness; he believes that sophisticated tragedy will always investigate the finer truth that a man can unwittingly contribute to his own material downfall.²⁸ D. W. Robertson, however, points out that medieval tragedy does present a refined perception of reality.²⁹ According to Robertson, medieval writers of tragedy saw that because the world is a place where any man can be harmed or even destroyed physically, the most serious mistake that a person can make is to devote himself to the world. If a man is wise, medieval tragedies taught, he will forsake his love of worldly delights and seek God. The implication of

²⁸Ibid., pp. 171-72.

²⁹Robertson, 89. (The following discussion is from Robertson, 89-90.)

Robertson's analysis is that writers of medieval tragedies did, in a sense, make men responsible for their suffering. If a man wrongly chose to love the transient world and its pleasures, he would inevitably be plunged into misery over his losses. If, however, he chose to love God and His will, he would find a happiness without end. This is the Boethian lesson again, but it is also the central message of medieval tragedies. As Robertson shows, the genre does have an important perception to offer.

In light of Robertson's study, it is evident that those critics who complain of the Monk's inadequate understanding of the causes of suffering have missed the intended significance of the Monk's tragedies. By depicting the falls of people who honor wealth and power, the Monk demonstrates that men bring themselves to inevitable torment through their love of worldly delights. He may not show consistently how a man's decisions and actions can lead to material adversity, but he does show how misplaced values can cause sorrow and despair.

Despite their strong moralizing tendencies, medieval tragedies were also marked by their expression of sympathy for those who suffer. This concern eventually led to the third element of the genre--its attempt to elicit pathos. Willard Farnham observes that the tragic artists in the Middle Ages were "not content to realize heaven without realizing earth."³⁰ Although ecclesiastics often focused primarily on contempt of the world, medieval poets became interested in the reality of suffering and death. Their works began to have a dual concern: "beside contempt grew an emotional absorption in the world."³¹ In the tragedies of the Middle Ages, therefore, showing "sympathy and understanding" became as important as teaching the nature of true and false felicity. The poets simply could not tell about

³⁰Farnham, p. 64.

³¹Ibid., p. 67.

a man's suffering without showing pity.³²

Farnham believes that Boccaccio's De Casibus is responsible for making the attempt to elicit pathos an integral part of medieval tragedy. Before discussing Boccaccio, however, Farnham observes that the potential for encouraging a sympathetic response to suffering existed in the Roman works that preceded the tragedies of the Middle Ages. Farnham cites, for example,

³²Farnham notes that pity for men who suffer and die is not encouraged by contempt of the world. If the earth is bad and heaven good, why pity a man who loses the former and gains the latter? Farnham adds, however, that medieval writers of tragedy would have realized that compassion is essential to Christianity and would have seen their sympathy for their fallen characters as a manifestation of the true Christian spirit. They would not have thought of the expression of pity as a contradiction of contempt of the world. See pp. 61-68, and specifically for a discussion of these apparently conflicting attitudes in Chaucer's works see pp. 43-45. It should also be noted that Philosophy recommends pity for suffering men (see above, pp. 94-97). A person who suffers because of his foolishness and mistakes still can be pitiable--King Lear comes to mind immediately.

Lactantius's fourth century De Mortibus Persecutorum, a work known to Boccaccio.³³ Although Lactantius generally shows a pageant of wicked rulers punished by God, he occasionally depicts the suffering of less villainous characters and seeks to arouse pity for them. Such is the case in the tale of Valeria and her mother Prisca, two chaste women who suffer innocently. Lactantius notes that when these women were about to be unjustly beheaded, the beholders were moved to sorrow.

Whether Boccaccio was influenced by the Latin

³³Farnham, pp. 75-78. The following discussion of Lactantius is from Farnham, but see also The Works of Lactantius, V. 2, trans., William Fletcher, The Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871), pp. 199-201. Other classical works that might have contributed to the development of pathos in medieval tragedy are Lucan's Pharsalia (VIII, 503 ff.), which arouses pity for the murdered Pompey, and such tragedies by Seneca as the Agamemnon (994-98) and Hercules Oetaeus (1863 ff.), which contain formal laments for the fallen protagonists. References to Lucan are to A. E. Housman's edition of M. Annaei Lucani Belli Civilis, libri decem (Oxonii, Blackwell, 1958), and references to Seneca are to Rudolf Peiper's and Gustav Richter's edition of Tragoediae (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1902).

authors or whether he was merely recording a normal response to suffering, he does develop the potential for pathos in a number of his tragedies. In his tale of Priam, for example, Boccaccio constructs his story to show a loving family destroyed by cruel circumstances.³⁴ Boccaccio begins by describing the marriage of Priam and Hecuba. He idealizes the couple and then reports that they had nineteen children, whom they loved dearly. The Trojan War, however, interrupts their happiness, and the parents can only look on as two of their favorite sons--Hector and Troilus--are killed. Eventually, Priam himself is killed, Troy is destroyed, and Hecuba is carried off in captivity. The account ends with a lamentation about the hardships that this family had to endure.

The attempt to produce sympathy also appears in the tales of Dido and Pompey.³⁵ Dido

³⁴Book I, "About Priam and Hecuba," Hall, pp. 28-32.

³⁵For Dido, see Book II, "About Dido, Queen of Carthage," Hall, pp. 51-57. For Pompey, see Book VI, "About Pompey the Great," Hall, pp. 149-56.

is described as a virtuous woman and a good leader who is loved by her people. She falls in love with Aeneas, and when he leaves her, she commits suicide. Boccaccio describes at this point the great mourning of the Carthaginians, and later he adds his own lament in an apostrophe praising Dido's character and accomplishments. The tale of Pompey also closes with a lament honoring this ruler's great feats, and Boccaccio openly admonishes the reader to have sympathy for fallen Pompey.

Farnham concludes that Boccaccio cannot be "coolly and unsympathetically exultant over the insecurity of mortal effort."³⁶ The De Casibus shows a "sympathetic espousal of life . . . which makes a good tragedy profound art instead of shallow case history."³⁷ This sympathy, furthermore, was to become a major element in all medieval tragedies following the De Casibus tradition.

³⁶Farnham, p. 93.

³⁷Ibid.

Scholars have shown, then, that the Monk's Tale has been preceded by a tradition of medieval tragedy, and that furthermore medieval writers had their own ideas about what a tragedy should be and do. The question remains, though, "How did Chaucer respond to this tradition?" As mentioned above, some critics see the Knight's and Host's interruption of the Monk's Tale as an indication of Chaucer's disapproval of the genre of medieval tragedy. The works of other critics, however, suggest that Chaucer respected this form and incorporated its elements into his writings.

It has been noted that Chaucer frequently describes the falls of great men and that he depicts Fortune as the agent of these falls (see chapter III). His tales thus contain at least two of the elements associated with the tradition of tragedy. The findings of several critics, furthermore, show that Chaucer also admired the third element of tragedy--the attempt to elicit pathos.

Paul Ruggiers points out that a number of Chaucer's works other than the Monk's Tale might

be considered tragic. These include The Book of the Duchess, the Prioress's Tale, the Physician's Tale, the Knight's Tale, the Man of Law's Tale, and Troilus and Criseyde, which Chaucer himself calls a "tragedye" (V, 1786). Surveying these poems, Ruggiers observes that the attempt to evoke pathos is fundamental to Chaucer's tragic art:

"The canon of his work demonstrates that his special forte in the realm of the serious, the talent which accounts for the major part of the tragic tone in Chaucer, is his proclivity for pathos. Chaucer is most at home in what Frye calls low mimetic tragedy, in which the emotional responses are those of pity induced by incidents arousing tears, sobbing lamentation, without the deeper coloration of terror."³⁸

Ruggiers finds the handling of Arcite's death indicative of Chaucer's intentions. Not only does Chaucer report Arcite's fall from his horse, but also he mentions that Arcite's wound is incurable, he gives Arcite a dying speech of reconciliation with Palamon, he vividly depicts the sorrow caused by Arcite's death, and he describes the sadness of the funeral ceremonies. Chaucer, Ruggiers concludes,

³⁸Ruggiers, 92.

takes advantage of every opportunity in this incident to arouse the reader's sympathy for the dying knight and for the grieving friends.

In addition to Ruggiers, other critics show that Chaucer attempted to elicit pathos in his works. Thomas Bestul and Edward Block, for example, demonstrate that Chaucer used numerous rhetorical devices in the Man of Law's Tale to heighten the reader's sympathy for Constance.³⁹ Both of these critics note that in Chaucer's day poets accepted the classical theory that pity could be evoked through the use of rhetorical devices. They then show that the Man of Law's Tale contains numerous rhetorical devices, most of which appear in passages with a high potential for causing sadness.

According to Bestul and Block, some of the

³⁹Thomas H. Bestul, "The Man of Law's Tale and the Rhetorical Foundations of Chaucerian Pathos," Chaucer Review, 9 (1975), 216-26; Edward A. Block, "Originality, Controlling Purpose, and Craftsmanship in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale," PMLA, 68 (1953), 572-616. (The following discussion is from these two articles.)

rhetorical figures most commonly employed in this narrative include apostrophe, descriptio, conquestio, and simile. The first time that Constance is set adrift on the sea, the narrator arouses pity for her in an apostrophe that emphasizes her innocence and youth and her need for God's protection:

O my Custance, ful of benignytee,
O Emperoures yonge doghter deere,
He that is lord of Fortune be thy steere!
(B¹ 446-48)

Later, when Constance is about to be set adrift from England, the Man of Law again attempts to evoke sympathy for her, this time using descriptio to show her tender concern for her defenseless child:

Hir litel child lay wepyng in hir arm,
And knelynge, pitously to hym she seyde,
"Pees, litel sone, I wol do thee noon harm."
With that hir coverchief of hir heed she breyde,
And over his litel eyen she it leyde,
And in hir arm she lulleth it ful faste,
And into hevne hire eyen up she caste.
(B¹ 834-40)

In an earlier passage, descriptio and simile are both employed to elicit pathos. As she is brought into court to be tried for a murder that she has not committed, Constance is compared to a man being led to his execution:

Have ye nat seyn somtyme a pale face,
Among a prees, of hym that hath be lad
Toward his deeth, wher as hym gat no grace,
And swich a colour in his face hath had.
Men myghte knowe his face that was bistad,
Amonges alle the faces in that route?
So stant Custance, and looketh hire aboute.

(B¹ 645-51)

In the lines immediately following this passage, furthermore, the Man of Law uses conquestio, a direct appeal to pity, to emphasize that Constance must face her trial without a friend to help or comfort her:

O queenes, lyvyng in prosperitee,
Duchesses, and ye ladyes everichone,
Haveth som routhe on hire adversitee!
An Emperoures doghter stant allone;
She hath no wight to whom to make hir mone.

(B¹ 652-57)

In the Man of Law's Tale, then, Block concludes, Chaucer successfully employs rhetorical devices to create a "profound sympathy" for Constance.⁴⁰

While Bestul and Block show that Chaucer used rhetorical devices to evoke pathos, J. Burke Severs demonstrates that Chaucer sometimes altered his sources to make his characters more

⁴⁰Block, 592.

pitiabile.⁴¹ Comparing the Clerk's Tale with its sources, Severs finds that Chaucer made changes in the tone and spirit of the tale that are intended to heighten the reader's sympathy for Griselda. Severs notes first that Griselda's antagonists, Walter and the sergeant, are made more cruel than they were in the sources. The Clerk explicitly refers to Walter's "wikke usage" (E 785) of his faithful wife and to his "cruel purpos" (E 740) in testing Griselda. Such references do not appear in the sources for the tale. Furthermore, the polite and almost compassionate sergeant of the sources becomes harsh, crude, cruel, and unfeeling in the Clerk's version of the story. The Clerk even reports that the sergeant ". . . wel kan / Doon execucioun in thynges badde" (E 521-22), another remark that does not appear in the sources.

In addition to blackening Walter and the

⁴¹J. Burke Severs, The Literary Relations of Chaucer's "Clerkes Tale" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942). See especially pp. 215-51 for the following discussion.

sergeant, Chaucer heightens Griselda's admirable qualities and emphasizes her tenderness. Griselda is described as "meke" (E 538) and "humble" (E 949), and she possesses "vertu" (E 216), "reverence" (E 231), and "diligence" (E 230). She is also filled with a tenderness that contrasts sharply with the apparent cruelty and coldness of the sergeant and Walter. When her children are taken from her, she weeps for them and mourns their apparent demise (E 547-67 and 673-84). Later, when they return, she swoons and clasps them so tightly that they must be torn from her (E 1093-1103). All of the people who witness this scene are moved to tears by Griselda's love and devotion (E 1104-06). Again, all of these details are added to sources of the tale.

The final effect of these changes is that they arouse sympathy for Griselda, a humble and tender-hearted woman who suffers. Severs believes, furthermore, that the evocation of pathos is the central strategy of the tale. Chaucer intended the story to awaken in his readers their own capacity for compassion. This purpose, Severs adds,

is typically Chaucerian: " . . . the poet
[Chaucer] . . . seldom fails to fully develop
the pathos latent in any situation."⁴²

The works of Ruggiers, Block, Bestul, and Severs indicate that Chaucer considered the evocation of pathos an admirable artistic achievement. It is evident, therefore, that in his works in general, other than the Monk's Tale, Chaucer accepted all three of the fundamental elements of medieval tragedy--the falls of powerful men, fickle Fortune as the agent of tragedy, and pity for human suffering--and thus showed his respect for this genre.

In light of this conclusion, it is unlikely that Chaucer was using the Monk's Tale to parody medieval tragedies. Furthermore, comparison of the Monk's stories with other medieval tragic works suggest that the Monk is not the unimaginative storyteller that some critics claim and that he certainly is not making a conscious effort, as Lumiansky and Brown maintain, to bore the Host. In fact, both the numerous parallels between the

⁴²Ibid., p. 242.

Monk's performance and the tradition of medieval tragedy and Daun Piers's obvious attempts to refine the narrative quality of his stories show that he tells a respectable tale.

As shown in chapter two, the Monk consistently depicts the falls of great men at the hands of fickle and malicious Fortune. His tale, therefore, contains the first two elements of medieval tragic narratives. Before going on, however, to a consideration of the third element, pathos (see p. 173 below--"third element"), it must be noted that in addition to borrowing the plot lines of traditional tragedies, the Monk also observes some rules of respectable storytelling and employs some literary devices that make his tales good works of narrative art as well as good tragedies. The Monk's achievements as a storyteller are quite significant, and a brief discussion of them will show that Daun Piers was concerned not only with imitating but also with refining the plots of other tragedies.

The Monk, first of all, is careful to lend unity to his diversified stories. In no less than three long passages (B² 3170-78, 3181-88, and

3949-56), Daun Piers gives a formal definition of tragedy. Each of these definitions is quite similar to the others, and they all serve the same three functions: they indicate the organizational pattern of the individual narratives, they define Fortune's relation to the Monk's protagonists, and they state the theme--"Lat no man truste on blynd prosperitee" (B² 3187). This repeated defining of tragedy, therefore, keeps before the reader the structure and the purpose of the Monk's performance, and thus helps to unify the tale.⁴³

Another admirable feature of the Monk's narrative art is his effective use of tragedies within tragedies. In at least four of his tales, the Monk shows both the fall of his protagonist and the fall of a supporting character or characters in the narrative. The tragedy of Caesar, for example, depicts this emperor's unfortunate end, but it also shows the rise and fall of Pompey.

⁴³For a similar discussion of the unity of the Monk's Tale see Estelle Taylor's "Chaucer's Monk's Tale: An Apology," College Language Association Journal, 13 (1969), 178-79.

By his prowess, Pompey becomes a "noble governour" (B² 3878) and conqueror "of th'orient" (B² 3883). His life, however, ends wretchedly when he suffers defeat at Pharsalia and is later beheaded by a "false traitour" (B² 3880). In this tragedy within the larger narrative of Caesar, therefore, the Monk is able to demonstrate once again his theme that great men will inevitably fall from their prosperity and high position.

A similar use of tragedies within tragedies appears in three other tales. In the story of Samson, the Philistines are happy when they have captured and blinded the Israelite hero. They celebrate their victory with a "feeste" (B² 3270) and "greet array" (B² 3272). Their fortune is good, but Samson soon turns their celebration to tragedy when he pulls down the temple on them. The tale of Zenobia, furthermore, depicts both this mighty woman's fall and the tragedy of Odenake, her husband. Although Odenake is a powerful ruler who puts "manye regnes" (B² 3503) in subjection, he finally cannot maintain his position. His glory ends in death, and his power

passes to his successors. The tragedy of Seneca, in the larger story of Nero, also shows a man who is influential and prosperous for awhile, but who is eventually forced to commit suicide.

As these examples show, the Monk takes full advantage of the stories he tells. He recognizes in the subplots of his narratives the potential for further demonstration of his theme, and he develops that potential by creating miniature tragedies within the larger narratives of his work.

A third artistic achievement of the Monk's Tale is the Monk's effective use of irony. Earle Birney notes that Daun Piers uses both verbal irony and what Birney calls "the irony of fate."⁴⁴ An instance of verbal irony appears in the tale of Hercules. Hoping to regain the hero's love, Deianira sends Hercules a charmed shirt which the Monk describes as "fressh" and "gay" (B² 3312). In reality, however, the shirt is poisoned and dissolves Hercules's flesh. Such verbal ironies,

⁴⁴Earle Birney, "The Beginning of Chaucer's Irony," PMLA, 54 (1939), 650.

Birney notes, add to the artistic merit of the Monk's tragedies. Birney adds, however, that the Monk's tragedies demonstrate a more prevalent kind of irony--"the irony of fate."

According to Birney, the characters of the Monk's narratives act in a manner that they would shun if they knew the real fortune awaiting them. They pursue wealth, power, and fame, and they believe, furthermore, that the possession of these earthly benefits will give them true happiness. None of them, however, hears "the mocking laughter of Fortune" that the Monk so persistently incorporates into his narratives.⁴⁵ In their materialistic blindness, they fail to see that earthly mutability will deprive them of the treasures on which their happiness depends and thus leave them miserable in their losses. The tale, then, shows an ironic distance between the characters' belief that they have found the source of true happiness and the reality that they are putting themselves

⁴⁵Ibid., 652.

in a position to be made wretched. In its development of irony, Birney concludes, lies one of the significant achievements of the Monk's Tale.

Two final elements that add to the artistic merit of the Monk's narratives are his use of contrast and his vivid descriptions. As noted in chapter two, each of Daun Piers's tragedies is organized to contrast a character's former prosperity with the misfortune and woe that inevitably befall him. To make his contrasts more effective, furthermore, the Monk frequently uses vivid description. He gives an abundance of details that graphically depicts his characters' earthly good fortune and their agony in their falls.

In the tale of Zenobia, for example, the Monk uses a hundred lines (B² 3437-3537) to tell of Zenobia's noble birth, beauty, strength, rich garments, happy marriage, children, and military successes. And later, when Zenobia falls, Daun Piers describes her humiliation in Rome: she must wear "gilte cheynes" (B² 3554), the people "gaureth" (B² 3559) at her, and she is crowned with a "vitremyte" (B² 3562), or "fool's cap."

In the tale of Nero, as well, the Monk gives detailed accounts of this emperor's prosperity and death. The Monk's graphic description of Nero's wealth and power is typical of his narrative:

Moore delicaat, moore pompous of array,
Moore proud was nevere emperour than he;
That like clooth that he hadde wered o day,
After that tyme he nolde it nevere see.
Nettes of gold threed hadde he greet plentee
To fische in Tybre, whan hym liste pleye.
His lustes were al lawe in his decree.

(B² 3661-67)

The treatment of Nero's fall is equally thorough. Fleeing an angry mob that intends to kill him, Nero goes to the homes of his former friends, but the faster he knocks, "The fastere shette they the dores alle" (B² 3722). He then prays "pitously" (B² 3729) to his gods, but they offer no help. Finally, in desperation, he ends his own life in a garden with only two churls as witnesses.

Such accounts as these from the tales of Zenobia and Nero show that the Monk paid close attention to detail. Some critics may find his tale "bald," but they simply have failed to notice the richness of description that characterizes most of the Monk's narratives.

In light of these artistic accomplishments in his tale, it is evident that the Monk was interested in making his narratives respectable works of literature. Not only did he imitate the plots of other medieval tragedies, but also he observed some conventions of good storytelling and employed literary devices to refine his performance. He does not seem to have been concerned with deliberately telling a boring tale as some critics have suggested.

This conclusion is supported further by the Monk's effort to incorporate into his narratives the third element of medieval tragedy--the eliciting of pathos. In fact, the Monk's evocation of pity is one of the greatest achievements of his work. By encouraging sympathy for his protagonists, Daun Piers not only lends an emotional quality to his tales but also he tempers his moralizing on true and false felicity with a compassion that is meant to be as admirable as his philosophy.

The Monk attempts to elicit pathos in two ways: by using rhetorical devices and by altering his sources. The two rhetorical devices that the

Monk employs most frequently to create sympathy for his tragic protagonists are apostrophe and exclamatio.⁴⁶ As he describes Alexander's death, the Monk uses apostrophe to lament this great king's wretched end: "O worthy, gentil Alisandre, allas, / That evere sholde fallen swich a cas!" (B² 3848-49). The Monk's account of Samson's capture also contains an apostrophe aimed at accentuating the misery that the worthy Samson must endure:

O noble Sampson, strongest of mankynde,
O whilom juge, in glorie and in richesse!
Now maystow wepen with thyne eyen blynde,
Sith thou fro wele art falle in wrecchednesse.
(B² 3265-68)

The tale of Pompey, too, closes with an apostrophized

⁴⁶The terms apostrophe and exclamatio overlap somewhat. An exclamatio is an emotional outburst and an apostrophe is a passage addressed to a person or thing present or absent. Many apostrophes, however, are emotionally charged and thus become a type of exclamatio. Because the use of apostrophes to arouse pity appears quite frequently in the Monk's Tale, I have chosen to discuss examples of this rhetorical device as a separate topic. For a discussion showing that apostrophes are commonly used as exclamations, see Bestul, 221 and Block, 584-85.

lament: "Allas, Pompeye, of th'orient
conquerour, / That Fortune unto swich a fyn thee
broghte!" (B² 3883-84). Other examples of
apostrophes used to evoke pity appear in the tales
of Peter of Spain (B² 3565-67) and Peter of Cyprus
(B² 3581-86).

Exclamatio is also used heavily in the Monk's
Tale to heighten the pathetic response to human
suffering. In the tale of Alexander, the Monk
uses exclamatio to emphasize the woe that Fortune
and poison have caused for this conqueror:

Allas! who shal me helpe to endite
False Fortune, and poyson to despise,
The whiche two of al this wo I wyte?
(B² 3858-60)

In the tale of Ugolino, when Ugolino realizes
that he and his children must starve, he bewails
his misery with an exclamatio: "'Allas!' quod
he, 'allas, that I was wroght!'" (B² 3619).

And when Hercules's flesh is being dissolved by
the poisoned shirt that Deianira gave him, the
Monk cries out, "Allas! this sherte, allas and
weylaway!" (B² 3313).

In addition to apostrophe and exclamatio,

the Monk uses other rhetorical devices to generate pity. In his tale of Peter of Spain, Daun Piers uses conquestio to elicit sympathy for the murdered protagonist: "Wel oghten men thy pitous deeth complayne!" (B² 3567). In his account of Caesar's assassination, the Monk employs descriptio to show the dignity of this great man even at the moment of death:

So manly was this Julius of herte,
And so wel lovede estaatly honestee,
That though his deedly woundes soore smerte,
His mantel over his hypes caste he,
For no man sholde seen his privetee;
And as he lay of diyng in a traunce
And wiste verrailly that deed was hee,
Of honestee yet hadde he remembrance.

(B² 3901-08)

The effect of this passage is to make Caesar admirable and therefore worthy of pity as he dies. Descriptio is also used in the tale of Ugolino, where the starvation of the youngest son is depicted in a heart-rending manner:

Thus day by day this child bigan to crye,
Til in his fadres barm adoun it lay,
And seyde, "Farewel, fader, I moot dye!"
And kiste his fader, and dyde the same day.
And whan the woful fader deed it say,
For wo his armes two he gan to byte.

(B² 3629-34)

The pathos of this tale is also enhanced by the metaphor describing Ugolino's children as birds locked in a cage: "Allas, Fortune! it was greet crueltee / Swiche briddes for to putte in swich a cage" (B² 3603-04).

In addition to using formal rhetorical devices, the Monk also employs other artistic techniques to create sympathy. He often capitalizes on dialogue to evoke pity. Ugolino's youngest son, unaware that he and the rest of his family have been condemned to starve, complains innocently of his hunger and asks his father when the jailer will bring food. The boy's speech is piteous:

. . . "Fader, why do ye wepe?
Whanne wol the gayler bryngen oure potage?
Is ther no morsel breed that ye do kepe?
I am so hungry that I may nat slepe.
Now wolde God that I myghte slepen evere!
Thanne sholde nat hunger in my wombe crepe;
Ther is no thyng, save breed, that me were
levere."

(B² 3622-28)

Later, at the point of death, the same son says, "Farewel, fader, I moot dye" (B² 3631). The child's simple statement of this painful reality is again quite moving.

The Monk also creates pity by using frequent

references to the sorrow of his characters. Images of weeping and lamentation appear in a number of narratives. When Samson is captured and blinded by the Philistines, the Monk comments, "Now maystow wepen with thyne eyen blynde" (B² 3267). Earlier in this tale, the Monk had warned that Samson would ". . . wepe many a teere" (B² 3251). As he reports Antiochus's torment and slow death, the Monk remarks that this powerful general ". . . wayled and eek wepte" (B² 3811) in his misery. In the tale of Ugolino, the young son begins "to crye" (B² 3629) because of his hunger, and the father weeps for his family's suffering: ". . . teeris fillen from his yen" (B² 3620). The Monk himself remarks, in the tale of Croesus, that tragedies are meant to "crie" and "biwaille" (B² 3952) the cruelties of Fortune.

One last device that the Monk uses to elicit pathos is foreshadowing. In several of his narratives, Daun Piers predicts the falls of his characters. As he describes Zenobia's victories, for example, the Monk pauses to warn that her success ". . . may no while endure" (B² 3538).

Zenobia will suffer "meschief" and "wo" (B² 3513). Croesus's death on the gallows is also foretold, and in the tale of Samson, the Monk warns that despite this hero's strength, "soone shal he wepe many a teere" (B² 3251). Knowing that characters are going to meet tragic ends generates sympathy for them. The reader, watching these people live out their lives without an awareness of the disaster that is imminent, pities them for their lack of perception and for the sorrow that they must consequently endure.

The Monk's use of these rhetorical and artistic devices contributes significantly to the pathetic effect of his tale. But it is not simply this use that shows us the Monk's concern to evoke our sympathy for his characters. We can see this concern also in the way the Monk (Chaucer) alters his sources.

F. P. Lock has noted a number of discrepancies between the Monk's narratives and the classical

and Biblical sources for these narratives.⁴⁷

Lock believes that Chaucer consciously incorporated these "mistakes" into the Monk's Tale to reveal Daun Piers's lack of study and general ignorance. A close examination, however, of the differences between the Monk's stories and their sources indicates another purpose for the alterations of the traditional accounts.⁴⁸

⁴⁷F. P. Lock, "Chaucer's Monk's Use of Lucan, Suetonius, and 'Valerie,'" ELN, 12 (June, 1975), 251-55.

⁴⁸A source study of the Monk's narratives, it should be noted, presents some problems. First of all, in a number of instances scholars have proposed several possible sources for a single tragedy, and one cannot be certain which source was in fact used. In addition, some of the Monk's tragedies seem to have been based on oral reports of historical events, and consequently no source exists. To discover any significance in the Monk's use of received information, therefore, one must focus on details unique to the Monk's Tale; that is, on features of the Monk's accounts that do not appear in any of his possible sources or in the historical backgrounds of the characters who were not drawn from literature. This procedure will be followed in this dissertation.

Also, the text of this chapter attributes the manipulation of the sources to the Monk. The source changes, of course, are Chaucer's and were probably made in his composition of the tale before the Canterbury period. Critical convention, however,

In each tragedy where the Monk departs from the facts of his sources, his changes nearly always reflect an attempt to heighten the sympathy for his characters. Sometimes he adds details to emphasize his characters' defenselessness and suffering, and sometimes he uses pathetic dialogue, not found in the sources, to increase the sadness of a tragic event. Most often, however, he makes his characters more sympathetic by minimizing their wickedness. He seems to have understood that the fall of a basically good man is more likely to evoke pity than the fall of a bad man.⁴⁹

The tragedy that best demonstrates the Monk's

(Footnote 48 continued.)
frequently makes the pilgrims responsible for the form and content of their narratives, and that convention will be followed here.

⁴⁹It must be noted that although the Monk minimizes the wickedness of many of his characters, he is still careful to show that each of the people in his tale makes the mistake of seeking happiness through the accumulation of worldly goods. Many of the Monk's characters have virtues, but none has achieved the spiritual perfection to transcend a lust for material prosperity.

purpose for changing his sources is the tale of Ugolino. This is one narrative for which a definite source has been located. Scholars have shown that the Monk's account of this "Comite de Pize" is drawn from Dante's Inferno (xxxiii, 1-90).⁵⁰ The Monk, though, tells a story that is quite different from its Italian counterpart.

Theodore Spencer comments that Dante's story of Ugolino creates "stony horror."⁵¹ In the Inferno, Ugolino is not an isolated individual as he is in the Monk's Tale. Instead, he is a citizen of a moral universe that is punishing him because he has committed the sin of treachery. The manner of his death, furthermore, has increased his bitterness, and every thought of his demise only intensifies his desire for revenge. As he tells his story of his suffering in prison, the reader may feel pity

⁵⁰R. K. Root, "The Monk's Tale" in Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, ed. by W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 638.

⁵¹Theodore Spencer, "The Story of Ugolino in Dante and Chaucer," Speculum, 9 (1934), 295-96. (The following discussion is from Spencer.)

for him, but this emotion soon passes when, after finishing his speech, Ugolino turns and seizes again with his teeth on the skull of Ruggieri, his persecutor.

The Monk's tragedy of Ugolino is nothing like Dante's account. Whereas Dante is concerned with showing the terror of Ugolino's hatred and desire for revenge, the Monk wants only to elicit pathos. One of the most significant changes that the Monk makes is to keep Ugolino innocent. In Dante's narrative, Ugolino was imprisoned because he had committed treason, but in the Monk's Tale he is locked in a tower because of "a fals suggestioun" (B² 3607). Ugolino has committed no crime; he suffers simply because of someone else's treachery. By keeping Ugolino innocent, the Monk makes him more sympathetic and thus heightens the potential for pity when this important man falls.

Another modification that the Monk makes is to shift much of the emphasis of the story from Ugolino to the children. When Ugolino is imprisoned, he is accompanied by ". . . his litel children thre" (B² 3601). Adding a realistic touch not found in

the Inferno, the Monk gives the ages of the children. The reader, learning that the eldest child is only five years old, can readily envision young and totally innocent boys who cannot see how much they will have to suffer. Another detail added by the Monk is that the food served to Ugolino and his children is ". . . ful povre and badde" (B² 3612). And in the passage indicating that this father and his children must starve, the Monk adds the touching speech (B² 3641-46, quoted above) in which the youngest son asks when the jailer will bring more food. The addition of these details to Dante's account shows that the Monk was most interested in arousing sympathy for his characters.

Indeed, the Monk devotes a large part of his story to a vivid description of the deaths of Ugolino and his children--another feature lacking in the Inferno. The heart-rending description of the death of the youngest son has already been noted, but the accounts of the deaths of Ugolino and his other two boys are equally moving. Having witnessed the passing of his youngest child, Ugolino laments Fortune's cruelty and bites his own arms in

grief. The Monk then calls attention to the other two children. Seeing their father biting his arms, they fear that he is tearing at his own flesh from hunger. They try to comfort him and express their devotion by offering themselves so that their father may live: "Fader, do not so, allas! / But rather ete the flessh upon us two" (B² 3639-40).⁵² The father, of course, does not harm them, and ". . . withinne a day or two, / They leyde hem in his lappe adoun and deyde" (B² 3643-44). Ugolino himself soon follows them in death.

Rather than showing the terror of a hate-ridden man who seeks vengeance even beyond the tomb, the Monk depicts the innocent suffering of a father and his young children. Daun Piers states the purpose of his narrative in its opening lines: "Off the Erl Hugelyn of Pyze the langour / Ther may no tonge telle for pitee" (B² 3597-98). He then changes the details found in Dante's work to emphasize the suffering of a blameless family. His tale is

⁵²This detail does appear in the Inferno (xxxiii, 61-63), but Dante does not provide the extended description of the childrens' deaths that the Monk gives.

expertly designed to elicit pity.

In no other tragedy does the Monk alter his sources quite as extensively as he does in this one. The attempt, however, to evoke sympathy by making the tragic protagonists more admirable than they were in the sources appears quite frequently in other stories that the Monk tells.

The Monk's tale of Zenobia, for example, is mostly a synopsis of Boccaccio's "De Zenobia Palmirenorum Regina" in De Claris Mulieribus (cap. xcviiii).⁵³ Daun Piers, however, makes two significant changes. First, Boccaccio reports the belief of ancient historians that Zenobia, hopeful that her own sons might someday rule the kingdom, had consented to the murder of her stepson Herodes, who was Odenake's first son and the true heir to the throne.⁵⁴ The Monk completely ignores

⁵³Root, "The Monk's Tale," 632.

⁵⁴Discussion of Boccaccio's account of Zenobia is based on Guido a Guarino's translation of the De Claris Mulieribus (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963), pp. 226-30.

this accusation. Instead, he depicts Odenake, Zenobia, and her two sons as a strongly united family that leads Palmyra to victory over other nations. He merely notes Zenobia's "noblesse" (B² 3438), "hardynesse" (B² 3440), and "gentilless" (B² 3441), and never mentions her wickedness. The Monk keeps Zenobia essentially innocent and thus more pitiable when she falls.

The Monk's second change also is intended to arouse sympathy for his protagonist. After describing Zenobia's defeat and humiliation in Rome, Boccaccio reports that Zenobia was granted a private estate near Tivoli, where she had matrons to wait in attendance upon her. The Monk, however, closes his tale with a harsher image. He says that Zenobia must remain a prisoner and ". . . bere a distaf, hire cost for to quyte" (B² 3564). In the Monk's Tale, Zenobia's defeat does not result in a comfortable life in Tivoli but in a demeaning existence, where Zenobia must work to earn her keep. The Monk's account of Zenobia's end has much more potential for arousing pity than Boccaccio's conclusion has.

The Monk's alteration of his sources to heighten the pathos of his tale is also exemplified by the tale of Samson. Judges 13-16 is the Monk's primary source for this tragedy,⁵⁵ and again Daun Piers makes his protagonist more sympathetic than the source does.

The Monk's first change occurs in his account of Samson's marriage to a Timnahite woman. Judges reports that at his wedding feast Samson made a young man's arrogant bet with thirty Timnahite men that they could not solve a riddle that he knew. The Timnahites accept his challenge, and indeed cannot solve his riddle. To discover the answer, they secretly approach Samson's bride-to-be and threaten to burn her and her father if she does not secure the solution for them. They also complain that it is an insult to them to be invited to a wedding feast and then to be stripped of their cloaks (The bet was for thirty new cloaks.) The

⁵⁵Root, "The Monk's Tale," p. 625. The discussion of the Biblical account of Samson is based on the Douay-Rheims edition and translation of the Vulgate.

girl, in fear, soothes Samson, learns the answer, and tells it to the Timnahites. They win the bet, and the angered Samson, to pay off his wager, kills thirty innocent Ashkelonites and takes their cloaks.

The Monk's version of this part of the Samson story is quite different. First, he elevates the events from game to seriousness. No mention is made of a riddle or a bet between Samson and guests at his wedding. Instead, the Monk reports that Samson's ". . . false wyf . . . / Unto his foos his conseil gan biwreye" (B² 3217-19, italics mine). Conseil can mean secret, but the Monk never indicates that the secret is merely an answer to a riddle. Furthermore, the wedding guests become "foos," and the bride-to-be becomes a "false wife," who betrays Samson on her own initiative. She is not threatened into disloyalty as she is in the Bible. In the Monk's account, then, Samson is not an impetuous young groom who loses a bet. Instead, he is a good husband betrayed into the power of his enemies by his perfidious wife.

An even more important change in this incident

is the Monk's deletion of the detail that Samson killed thirty innocent men to pay off his wager. Whether intended or not, the Biblical account makes Samson seem despicably rash and cruel. By omitting reference to this horrid act, the Monk keeps Samson admirable. Both of the changes in this incident, therefore, make Samson more sympathetic than he is in the Bible and thus more deserving of pity when he falls.

The Monk alters two other sections of the Biblical narrative. Judges reports that at Gaza Samson slept with a harlot. The Monk, though, omits this detail and keeps Samson more virtuous. Later, after describing Delilah's betrayal of Samson, the Biblical narrator merely continues his story. The Monk, however, ends his account of Delilah's deception with an apostrophe lamenting the fall of his protagonist (B² 3265-68, quoted above). The Monk shapes his version of this narrative to make Samson an object of pity.

The concern for eliciting pathos also influences the Monk's tale of Hercules. This tragedy has several possible sources. The account

of Hercules's feats has apparently been derived from Boethius's Consolation (IV, m. 7, 13-31). The source for the Monk's account of Hercules's death, however, is not certain. Ovid's Metamorphoses (IX, 125-240) and Heroides (IX, 67-70) and Boccaccio's tale of Deianira from De Claris Mulieribus (cap. xxii) have been suggested as possible influences.⁵⁶ The Monk made no apparent changes in Boethius's description of Hercules's exploits, but he did delete a significant detail from the traditional accounts of this hero's death.

All three sources for the Monk's description of Hercules's tragic end either allude to the possible unfaithfulness of Hercules to Deianira or state outright that Hercules had cheated on his wife.⁵⁷ In the Metamorphoses, Ovid reports that Deianira gave Hercules the shirt of Nessus because

⁵⁶Root, "The Monk's Tale," pp. 629-30.

⁵⁷For a discussion of the Hercules tradition in classical and medieval literature, see Richard Hoffman's Ovid and the Canterbury Tales (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), pp. 43-44 and 190-92.

she had heard that Hercules was in love with Iole and believed that the shirt would restore the hero's love for her. The intimation of Hercules's infidelity is even stronger in the Heroides. Deianira, watching Hercules's victory procession, notes that Iole is not led through the streets in the manner of a prisoner, but is kept by Hercules in the finery of a wife.

What Ovid implied, the medieval writers turned into fact. Gower reports that Hercules betrayed Deianira and "His love . . . set on Iole" (Confessio Amantis, II, 2263). Jean de Meun comments that Iole replaced Deianira as Hercules's true love (Roman de la Rose, 9159 ff.), and Boccaccio, in his De Claris Mulieribus (xxii), castigates Hercules for abandoning Deianira to pursue Iole's favors. Chaucer himself states in The House of Fame that Hercules deserted Deianira for Iole:

And Ercules to Dyanira,
For he left hir for Yole,
That made hym cache his deth, parde.
(402-04)

Richard Hoffman remarks that in the Middle Ages the story of Hercules was told to demonstrate a

hero's "moral self-poisoning" through illicit love.⁵⁸

When the Monk tells his tale, however, he omits this quite significant element of the Hercules story. Daun Piers never alludes even in the smallest way to the infidelity of Hercules. Instead, he describes Hercules as "worthy" and "myghty" (B² 3325), and reports merely that Deianira sent the hero a shirt "fressh and gay" (B² 3312). The motive for Deianira's action is her love for her husband, and the Monk blames neither Hercules nor Deianira for the subsequent tragedy. He does mention that Nessus made the shirt, but most of all he focuses on describing Hercules's torment and death.

In the Monk's version of this tale, then, Hercules is a good husband, who suffers because of another man's treachery. The Monk does not intend to show a great hero's moral decay. He wants only to arouse sympathy for a mighty man who must endure a horrible death.

This omission of references to a character's

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 190.

misdeeds and objectionable traits appears in other narratives that the Monk tells. All of the suggested sources for the Monk's tale of Alexander, for example, criticize this conqueror's hot temper, love of wine, and extreme cruelty.⁵⁹ The Monk does make a comment about Alexander's passions for women and wine (B² 3834), but he omits altogether references to Alexander's cruelty. In fact, the Monk characterizes Alexander as "gentil" (B² 3848), and closes his account of Alexander's life with two exclamatios (B² 3847-48 and 3858-60) that lament the death of this great man.

In the tragedy of Caesar, also, the Monk

⁵⁹No specific source has been located for the Monk's tale of Alexander, but R. K. Root, in Sources and Analogues (p. 641) suggests several possible influences. These include the De rubus gestis Alexandri Magni by Quintus Curtius, the Speculum Historiale by Vincent de Beauvais, and medieval romances about Alexander. George Cary, furthermore, in his The Medieval Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), shows that both Quintus Curtius and Vincent de Beauvais are highly critical of Alexander (see pp. 14-20 and 114). Cary also notes that a familiar theme in medieval works about Alexander was the conqueror's decline in virtue (102). That this unfavorable tradition is ignored almost completely in the Monk's Tale again suggests that Daun Piers was trying to make Alexander more sympathetic.

chooses to ignore criticisms of his protagonist that exist in the possible sources. The Monk's characterization of Caesar was most likely influenced by either Lucan's Pharsalia, Suetonius's Life of Julius Caesar, or Jehan de Tuim's Li Hystore de Julius Cesar.⁶⁰ Lucan detests Caesar and generally characterizes him as mad and wicked.⁶¹ Furthermore, since de Tuim's Li Hystore is a translation of Lucan, it also condemns this Roman emperor.⁶² Suetonius in his gossiping fashion also finds Caesar a man driven by an ambition to rule Rome. Suetonius reports that Caesar stole gold from the capitol, plotted to have his enemies in the senate assassinated, disregarded laws, used

⁶⁰Root, "The Monk's Tale," pp. 642-44.

⁶¹Passages in the Pharsalia that depict Caesar as wicked include: Book II, 439-43; VII, 168-71, 799-817; VIII, 831-40. See M. Annaei Lucani Belli Civilis libri decem, ed. by A. E. Housman (Oxonii, Blackwell, 1958).

⁶²Root, "The Monk's Tale" (p. 642), points out that de Tuim's work is a paraphrase of Lucan's Pharsalia.

bribery to secure his political position, and fought a civil war to advance his own interests.⁶³

Despite these criticisms of Caesar in the sources, the Monk chooses to portray his protagonist merely as a mighty "conqueror" (B² 3863) whose reign ends in an unfortunate death. Daun Piers makes no critical remarks about Caesar, and in fact depicts him as a victim of treachery. Suetonius had noted that Caesar's murder was motivated by a fear of Caesar's tyranny and his desire to be king (see LXXIX.3-LXXX.2). Daun Piers, however, indicates that Caesar was assassinated for no other reason than the jealousy of his political associates. The Monk states that Brutus had "envye" of Caesar's "hye estaat" (B² 3888) and therefore ". . . prively hath maad conspiracye / Agayns this Julius in subtil wise" (B² 3888-90). Brutus and the other conspirators are described as "false" (B² 3896), and their treachery is contrasted with Caesar's dignity. The effect of this change is to make

⁶³See Suetonius's De Vita Caesarum, ed. by Maximilian Ihm (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1908). The appropriate sections include: IX, XII, XXX, L, LIII, LIV, LXXVI, and LXXIX.

Caesar an innocent victim of other men's wickedness. The Monk thus heightens once again the potential of his tale for eliciting sympathy.

In the tragedy of Adam, the Monk employs two methods of producing pathos. First, he reduces the seriousness of Adam's sin. Because the Monk's account of Adam's creation and fall is quite short and filled with a number of commonplaces from a well-known story, no definite source has been located. Two likely influences, however, are the Bible and Boccaccio's De Casibus (I, 1), a few lines of which are echoed in the Monk's Tale.⁶⁴ A comparison of the Monk's version of the Adam story with these possible sources reveals an effort to make Adam less wicked.

In both the Bible and the De Casibus, Adam and Eve disobey God because they desire to make themselves equal with their Creator.⁶⁵ Their

⁶⁴Root, "The Monk's Tale," p. 625.

⁶⁵See the De Casibus (I, i), Hall, p. 4 and Genesis 3:1-22.

sin is an objectionable pride. The Monk's description of Adam's wrong, however, is much less severe. Daun Piers says only that Adam lived in happiness "til he for mysgovernaunce" (B² 3202) was driven out of paradise. Adam's pride and his wilful disobedience of God are not mentioned. Adam becomes merely a bad caretaker of Eden.

The Monk also increases the pathos in this tale by making Adam's punishment more harsh than it is in the sources. The Bible and the De Casibus report that Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden to another part of the world.⁶⁶ Daun Piers, however, states that Adam was driven out of Paradise "To labour, and to helle, and to meschaunce" (B² 2014). The Monk notes not only Adam's suffering on earth but also his damnation in hell.

Daun Piers's intentions are more clearly revealed by George Pace, who points out that two basic concepts of Adam's existence in hell were

⁶⁶See the De Casibus (I, i), Hall, p. 5 and Genesis 3:23-24.

common in the Middle Ages.⁶⁷ The one view was rather mild, and its supporters maintained that after death Adam was sent to hell but resided in a special region--the Limbus Patrum--and underwent no physical torment. In fact, the Limbus Patrum was supposed to be a piece of rest and happiness, where the soul waited before going to heaven. The second view was harsher, and its proponents held that after death Adam was sent to hell, where he was bound in chains and was tortured by fiends.

Citing works by Chaucer other than the Monk's Tale, Pace demonstrates that Chaucer was familiar with both views.⁶⁸ He notes further that in the Monk's Tale Adam is put "in the hell of the severe tradition."⁶⁹ Pace believes that the Monk uses the harsher concept to make his work more tragic. Placing Adam in the Limbus Patrum "would constitute

⁶⁷George Pace, "Adam's Hell," PMLA, 78 (1963), 25-35.

⁶⁸Ibid., 32.

⁶⁹Ibid.

an upturn in his fortunes and would not be tragic. . . . Adam would not suffer."⁷⁰ If, however, Adam is put in hell proper, then he endures the torment that makes him a true tragic protagonist. It might be added that by placing Adam in hell proper, the Monk makes him a more pitiable character.

In the tales examined so far, the Monk changed literary sources to heighten the pathos of his tragedies. In three other narratives, Daun Piers alters historical facts to make his characters less wicked and therefore more worthy of pity when they fall. The tales of Peter of Spain, Peter of Cyprus, and Barnabo probably were created from information that came to Chaucer "by word of mouth" or from "common knowledge."⁷¹ These three men were contemporaries of Chaucer, and in their tales he was recording current history. He did not, however, feel bound to authenticity and had the Monk recreate the lives and falls of these rulers to serve an artistic purpose.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Root, "The Monk's Tale," pp. 636-37.

Haldeen Braddy notes that both Peter of Spain and Peter of Cyprus were wicked monarchs.⁷² Of all the writers who discuss the life of Peter of Spain, remarks Braddy, Chaucer is the only one who does not "anathematize" this king.⁷³ Don Pedro conducted a reign of terror, and he was given an appropriate nickname--Peter the Cruel. Braddy also reports that the rule of Peter of Cyprus was marked by atrocious injustices that aroused public indignation.⁷⁴ This monarch extorted money to pay for his extravagances, and he frequently dispossessed his subjects of their inheritance and lands. In fact, it was Peter of Cyprus's unjust and cruel treatment of a venerable noblewoman that led to his assassination.

Despite the fact that both of these men were commonly known to be villainous, the Monk characterizes them as respectable leaders. Peter of Spain

⁷²Haldeen Braddy, "The Two Petros in the Monk's Tale," PMLA, 50 (1935), 72 and 78.

⁷³Ibid., 72.

⁷⁴Ibid., 78-79.

is described as "noble" and "worthy," and Daun Piers calls him the "glorie of Spayne" (B² 3565). Peter of Cyprus is also described as "worthy" (B² 3581), and is depicted as a good Christian knight who has wrought "Ful many an hethen . . . ful wo" (B² 3583).

Both of these men, furthermore, are made victims of treachery. Peter of Spain is "bitrayesed" (B² 3570) into the hands of his covetous brother, who kills him and takes his throne and wealth. The Monk describes Peter's enemies as "wikked" (B² 3576) and "corrupt" (B² 3579). Peter of Cyprus is also betrayed. His "owene liges" turn on him and kill him because of their "envie" of his "chivalrie" (B² 3584-85). In both stories, then, the Monk changes despicable kings into honorable ones and shows their deaths at the hands of deceitful and cruel subjects. He alters fact to sustain the pathetic tone of his narrative.

This same manipulation of history appears in the tale of Barnabo. Historians show that Barnabo was a vicious man, who cared only about gratifying his desires. Cecil Headlam calls Barnabo a "monster

of cruelty and oppression" and remarks that Barnabo kept order with "a prolonged series of tortures."⁷⁵ Jacob Burckhardt states that Barnabo "exhibited a likeness to the worst of the Roman emperors."⁷⁶ Barnabo enjoyed boar hunting, and set his dogs on anyone who interfered with the hunt or who merely got in his way. He also extorted money from the citizens of Milan to pay for his sumptuous living. In addition, he usurped the throne from Gian Galeazzo, who finally captured and murdered Barnabo to regain the kingdom.⁷⁷

Daun Piers does call Barnabo "God of delit" and "scourge of Lumbardye" (B² 3590), but otherwise he portrays Barnabo as a "grete" (B² 3589) ruler who suffers "infortune" (B² 3591). The Monk also does not mention that Barnabo's murder was justified.

⁷⁵Cecil Headlam, Venetia and Northern Italy (London: J. M. Dent and Company, 1908), p. 60.

⁷⁶Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (Viena: The Phaidon Press, 1938), p. 7.

⁷⁷Headlam, p. 60.

In fact, he indicates that Barnabo was a victim of treachery. Barnabo is imprisoned and killed by a man described as his "double allye" (B² 3593.⁷⁸ Barnabo thus becomes another protagonist who suffers unjustly, and he is worthy of our sympathy.

The remaining six characters of the Monk's Tale are quite evil and proud, and the tragedies in which they appear elicit only a little pathos. Daun Piers includes these characters to make his tale an accurate representation of reality. He shows that neither virtue nor vice will protect a man from physical adversity. It should be noted, however, that even in these tragedies the Monk alters his sources somewhat to maintain his sympathetic tone.

The tale of Antiochus is an example. This narrative comes from II Maccabees 9:1-28, and both the Monk and the Biblical writer depict Antiochus

⁷⁸Gian Galeazzo was Barnabo's nephew and son-in-law. See B² 3594. This detail also shows Chaucer's familiarity with the life of Barnabo, and indicates that Chaucer was quite possibly aware of Barnabo's tyranny.

as an enemy of God.⁷⁹ The Monk, though, makes an important change in his source. II Maccabees mentions that God destroyed Antiochus with a horrible disease and briefly describes his torment. The main purpose of the narrative, however, is to show that men should not disobey God's will.

Daun Piers also uses his tale to teach that men can never hope to successfully oppose God. Much of the Monk's narrative, though, is devoted to showing the physical suffering of Antiochus. Elevating a minor point of the Biblical story to his central concern, Daun Piers uses four of the seven stanzas of his account to give a detailed description of this general's decay and death. The reader learns, for example, that Antiochus had to endure "peynes . . . importable" (B² 3792), that ". . . thurgh his body wikked wormes crepte" (B² 3806), and that he ". . . stank so horribly / That noon of al his meynee that hym kepte, / . . . myghte noght the stynk of hym endure"

⁷⁹Root, "The Monk's Tale," p. 641. On Antiochus as an enemy of God, see especially II Maccabees 9:1-7.

(B² 3807-10). The Monk also adds the detail that in this misery, Antiochus "wayled and eek wepte" (B² 3811). Although the point is made that Antiochus invited his fall, Daun Piers never forgets the reality of Antiochus's torment. This tragedy, therefore, shows that Antiochus was a sinner, but it also keeps before the reader Antiochus's humanity and pain. The Monk thus creates some pity even for this rebel against God.

In the tales of other wicked characters, as well, Daun Piers slightly alters his sources to maintain a sympathetic tone. Holofernes, Balthasar, and Nero are depicted as essentially evil men. The Monk, however, also makes each of them a victim of Fortune--a view not found in any of the sources for these narratives.⁸⁰ In the tale of Holofernes, for example, Fortune kisses this general "likerously" (B² 3748), but then causes his death. Balthasar is also overthrown by this same goddess (see B² 3429-33), and Nero falls when Fortune

⁸⁰Socola, 165-68.

decides to turn the public against him. This last tragedy closes with the image of Fortune laughing over the agony that she has caused.⁸¹ None of these tales evokes the pathos elicited by such narratives as the Ugolino tragedy. They do, however, invite some sympathy for men who suffer at the hands of a cruel goddess.⁸²

⁸¹The Monk, to be sure, generally depicts Nero as utterly evil and despicable. Given Nero's reputation, he could hardly have done otherwise. Daun Piers, nevertheless, does attempt to arouse some pity for even this wicked emperor. He devotes the last three stanzas of his tale to describing both Nero's fear of the angry mob that intends to murder him and his despair when his friends and his gods forsake him. The Monk depicts Nero as a man "allone" (B² 3270), who prays "pitously" (B²3770) for help but receives none. The shift to Nero's point of view also seems intended to elicit sympathy. (See also the discussion of the tragedy of Nero on pp. 171-72 above.)

⁸²It should be noted that in his account of Holofernes's death, the Monk also omits some important details found in the Bible. Daun Piers does not mention that God had sanctioned Judith's actions and had indeed given her the strength to behead Holofernes. The Monk also fails to mention that Holofernes had Judith brought to his tent for the purpose of raping her. In the Monk's Tale Judith is simply "a womman" (B² 3761) who steals up on Holofernes, beheads him, and then slips away "Ful pryvely" (B² 3763), almost as if she were a sly murderess and not an agent of God. The effect of

Although his method is different, the Monk also tries to evoke sympathy for Nebuchadnezzar and Croesus. The source for the Monk's tragedy of Nebuchadnezzar is Daniel, chapters 1-5.⁸³ Both the Biblical author and the Monk depict Nebuchadnezzar as a proud king, who believes himself more powerful than God, and both report that God is able to effect Nebuchadnezzar's repentance. The Monk, however, adds a detail not found in Daniel. As he gives thanks for God's forgiveness and guidance, Nebuchadnezzar weeps: " . . . and thanne with many a teere / He thanked God . . . " (B² 3368-69). The reference to Nebuchadnezzar's weeping is an addition by the Monk, and it reflects not only Nebuchadnezzar's new-found humility but also his gratitude. Nebuchadnezzar is thus humanized, and the reader both sympathizes with him when he repents and sorrows over his passing when he is

(Footnote 82 continued.)
these changes is to reduce Holofernes's guilt and thus make him more pitiable when he dies. In the Monk's Tale, Holofernes is merely a great conqueror killed by a woman from the enemy camp.

⁸³Root, "The Monk's Tale," p. 632.

"leyd . . . on his beere" (B² 3371).

The tale of Croesus is the final tragedy of the Monk's collection. This narrative was most likely taken from the Roman de la Rose (6489-6622),⁸⁴ but again the Monk makes a significant change. In the Roman de la Rose, Croesus reports a dream that he has had to his daughter Phanie, who interprets the dream as a warning that Croesus will be hanged. Croesus, however, scoffs at her interpretation. His greater wisdom, he says, has shown him that the dream betokens the willingness of the gods to serve him and to protect him from his enemies. Shortly thereafter, though, Croesus is hanged, and Jean de Meun remarks that this man was surely a great fool.

In his account, the Monk reports Croesus's dream and Phanie's interpretation. Daun Piers, however, eliminates entirely both Croesus's rejection of Phanie's interpretation and Croesus's arrogant belief that the gods will serve him. After relating Phanie's warning, the Monk continues merely by reporting that Croesus was hanged. The

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 644.

stupid pride of Croesus drops out of the tale. In addition, the Monk blames Fortune for the fall of Croesus and comments that this goddess frequently brings men to misery. The final effect of this conclusion, then, is to draw attention away from the folly of Croesus and to make him a man destroyed by the larger tragic movement of earthly existence. Croesus is, therefore, far more pitiable than he is in Jean de Meun's narrative.

In light of the rhetorical devices and source changes employed in the Monk's Tale, then, it is evident that Daun Piers was concerned with eliciting the pathetic response in his listeners. His performance, therefore, is wholly consistent with the tradition of medieval tragedy. Not only does he show the falls of great men at the hands of malicious Fortune, but also he attempts to evoke pity for his tragic protagonists. Far from trying to tell a deliberately boring tale, the Monk consciously makes his work representative of a respected medieval genre.

The Monk's artistic achievement, furthermore, contributes significantly to the message of his tale.

On the philosophical level, Daun Piers demonstrates the imprudence of seeking true happiness in the accumulation of worldly goods, but finally he does not scorn those people who indulge in this folly nor does he ignore the reality of their suffering. Instead, like Lady Philosophy, he shows sympathy for those men whose foolishness brings them to misery. The Monk's attitude is actually quite similar to that of the narrator of Troilus and Criseyde. Although he recognizes the limitations of Troilus's and Criseyde's love, the narrator never condemns the lovers and in fact pities them when they fall. Both the Monk's Tale and Troilus and Criseyde teach the lesson of true and false felicity, but both works also show that sympathy and compassion are better than condemnation.

As mentioned in chapter one, critics who believe that the Monk's Tale is philosophically unsound cite the Monk's sorrow as a sign of his despair over an apparently chaotic universe. The critics never mention how they would have Daun Piers react to the suffering of his protagonists, but his pity is surely a more noble response than cold

indifference.

Paul Ruggiers notes that Chaucer thought of tragedy in terms of the pathetic.⁸⁵ If the Monk thinks of tragedy in the same way, it is likely that Chaucer is not criticizing the Monk's sorrow but is showing Daun Piers's sensitivity to human misery. This response, moreover, would be wholly appropriate to a man concerned with earthly matters. The Monk's worldliness may have caused him to depart from a strict observation of his vows, but his love for worldly goods and position has also made him aware of the sorrow that others feel when they suffer material loss and thus has kept him in touch with his human sentiments.

The Monk's sympathetic response to human misery, therefore, is intended to be an admirable part of his tale. Daun Piers's compassion for those who fall both tempers his sermonizing and suggests a noble reaction to the shortsightedness and anguish of others. He may effectively teach his lesson on

⁸⁵Ruggiers, 92.

true and false felicity with its implication that material prosperity is worthless. He also shows, though, that men should not be indifferent to human pain but should pity those who suffer adversity. This adept combination of ascetic moralizing (with its truth about the nature of perfect felicity) and of sympathetic concern for the welfare of others is the Monk's greatest artistic achievement in his tragedies. This fine balance between thought and emotion, furthermore, indicates that Chaucer intended the Monk's Tale to be seen not as bad narrative art but as a commendable work of literature.

V. Chaucerian Consistency in the
Monk's Tale and Its Links

The conclusion that the Monk's Tale is philosophically and artistically refined raises some questions. If the Monk's narratives are philosophically sound, why does the apparently wise Knight stop the Monk's performance and offer a correction to Daun Piers's point of view? If the tale has artistic merit, why does the Host condemn the Monk's tragedies as boring and inept? And if the tale is philosophically and theologically proper, how is it appropriate to a Monk who is described in the General Prologue as a worldly man more interested in hunting and eating than in studying his books? These questions may seem to suggest that Chaucer has not been careful to eliminate certain incongruities from the Canterbury Tales. A close examination, however, of the Knight's philosophy, of the Host's abilities as a literary critic, and of the portrait of the Monk in the General Prologue shows that Chaucer has been wholly consistent in constructing the links of the Monk's Tale and in

assigning the seventeen serious tragedies to the Monk.

As mentioned in chapter one, a number of critics believe that the Knight interrupts the Monk's Tale because he has recognized some philosophical inadequacies in the Monk's tragedies. Being a wise Boethian and a good Christian, the Knight sees that Daun Piers has lapsed into despair. He also realizes that the Monk's tragedies both deny the benevolent order of the universe and ignore Christ's promise of salvation, which can redeem physical suffering. The Knight's comments are meant to show the Monk that the creation is good and that the bliss of heaven can follow worldly woe. The Knight offers the joy of faith to offset the Monk's gloomy despondency.¹

Indeed, the view that the Knight has faith in an ordered and benevolent creation reveals one of the most fundamental aspects of his character. In

¹Kaske, 265-67; Mahoney, 87; Robert Pratt, "'Joye after Wo' in the Knight's Tale," JEGP, 57 (1958), 416-23.

his tale, for example, the Knight seems most intent on demonstrating that bad fortune should not diminish a man's confidence in the goodness of the universe. Although for much of his narrative the Knight details the adversities that befall his characters, he follows the last and greatest misfortune--Arcite's death--with Theseus's First-Mover speech, explaining that all of the events of this world, even the seemingly evil ones, are part of a benevolent cosmic order and thus are actually good in their ultimate effects. The Knight shows that in this world men must endure adversity, but he includes this feature in his tale only to have the occasion to reaffirm his belief that God is loving and always works for men's good, even when He allows them to suffer.

The terminology of Theseus's speech and the design of the tale--woe followed by consolation and by the joy of Palamon and Emily's wedding--show that the Knight has learned Philosophy's lesson on the goodness of creation and is representing that concept in his narrative. To see the Knight's Tale, however, as a flawless representation of Boethian

philosophy may be to ignore some significant details in this story. In at least two instances when the Knight might have used some fundamental concepts from the Consolation to support his belief in an ordered and benevolent cosmos, he either misrepresents or ignores Boethian thought and thus to a certain extent undermines his central thesis.

One example of the Knight's failure to use an important Boethian concept to strengthen his argument for a benevolent creation is his comment on the fate of Arcite's soul. Boethius, and Christ as well, teach that at death a man's soul leaves his body and is reunited, in eternal bliss, with God. In the Consolation, Philosophy expresses this idea when she prays to God to help her show Boethius the true good:

Thow [God] by even-lyke causes enhauncest the
soules and the lasse lyves; and, ablynge hem
heye by lyghte waynes or cartes, thow sowest
hem into hevne and into erthe. And whan thei
ben convertyd to the by thi benygne lawe,
thow makest hem retourne ayen to the . . . thow
art pesible reste to debonayre folk.
(III, m. 9, 32-47)

The recognition that the soul can be eternally

reunited with God² nullifies earthly tragedy and helps to enhance the argument that the universe is benign. Although a man suffers, he can live with the confidence that his physical torment will be redeemed by an everlasting spiritual bliss offered by a loving creator.

After reporting Arcite's death, however, the Knight offers no assurance that this man's physical tragedy is redeemed by heavenly salvation.³ In fact, the Knight makes the rather flippant comment that he does not know where the soul goes when the body dies (A 2809-14). His remark thus deemphasizes both the Boethian and Christian perspectives that offer hope to suffering men and that clearly define one way in which God is benevolent. The Knight may intend to show once again that men must have

²The belief that a man's soul ultimately returns to God and heaven is also expressed in III, m. 10 and m. 11; IV, pr. 1 and m. 1.

³The Knight's failure to offer the traditional Boethian and Christian belief in the soul's ultimate reunion with God has been noted. See, for example, Joseph Westlund's "The Knight's Tale as an Impetus for Pilgrimage," Philological Quarterly, 43 (1964), 535-36.

faith in the unknown, but if that is his point, he greatly limits, according to Boethian and Christian belief, what is known--namely, that God offers spiritual redemption of physical tragedy. The suggestion is that although the Knight has accepted the Boethian confidence in the goodness of creation, he has not fully appreciated Boethius's understanding of how that goodness is manifested in men's lives.⁴

Another instance of the Knight's failure to adequately represent a Boethian lesson appears in Theseus's First-Mover speech, the very section of the Knight's Tale that most critics believe presents the heart of the Knight's philosophy. Faced with the task of consoling Palamon and Emily over the death of Arcite, Theseus offers a speech apparently designed to neutralize the horrors of the chaos and suffering of the world. His comments echo

⁴The Knight's failure to discuss the fate of Arcite's soul seems especially significant when one recognizes that the Teseida, Chaucer's source for the account of Arcite's death, describes the flight of Arcite's soul to the eighth sphere. The fact that this detail was omitted in the Knight's Tale to be replaced by the Knight's frivolous remarks suggests that Chaucer intended to give the Knight a somewhat limited discussion of Boethian and Christian philosophy.

sections of the Consolation (II, m. 8; III, pr. 10; IV, pr. 6 and m. 6)⁵ in which Philosophy explains that God's love can be found even in the change that typifies physical existence. Theseus, however, ultimately misrepresents Philosophy's discussion.

In the Consolation, Philosophy notes that this imperfect world is subject to change, but she adds that change need not deny the chain of love that governs the Universe. In fact, change itself represents a kind of stability and indicates a cosmic design. The movements of the planets, the flow of the tides, and the passage of the seasons show that God has given the creation order and that He maintains that order. Furthermore, remarks Philosophy, the order of the physical universe is a sign of God's love for men, and they can always trust that He is working for their good even when they suffer physical adversity.

⁵For a discussion of the influence of the Consolation on Theseus's First-Mover speech, see Westlund, 533-35. Westlund points out, as will be argued in the following paragraphs, that in his speech Theseus does not adequately represent Boethian thought (see 533-36).

Although Theseus bases his speech on Philosophy's discussion, he alters some important details and thus produces a different attitude toward the world of change than is found in the Consolation. When Theseus attempts to demonstrate stability in change, he completely ignores Philosophy's references to ongoing processes that show both the enduring order of the universe and God's lasting concern for men. Instead, Theseus cites several examples of things that seem stable and eternal but which prove to be subject to decay and destruction: the oak, rocks, rivers, and great towns. The result is that rather than showing the perpetuation of God's control in the cosmos, Theseus merely presents a moving account of earthly mutability. He indicates only that material existence passes away, and does not recognize Philosophy's larger conclusion that the benevolent order of the universe is a sign of God's love for men.

Theseus, therefore, is not prepared to offer Philosophy's consolation to those people who endure misfortune. Whereas Philosophy can console men by pointing out that a loving God is always working

for their good, even when they suffer, Theseus has missed the opportunity to show God's abiding love. He thus can suggest only that men look for a way "To maken vertu of necessitee," (A 3042) a phrase which for Theseus means finding some good worldly effect to a man's fall just as he does by commenting that although Arcite's death is saddening, at least the young man died at the height of his career. As compared to Philosophy's counsel, Theseus's consolation in this instance remains somewhat earth-bound. He does not point to the harmony of the spheres as a sign of God's love, but instead encourages men to seek a rational worldly justification for suffering. His consolation seems far less complete than does Philosophy's.

These two features of the Knight's Tale--the flippant response to the fate of Arcite's soul and Theseus's failure to adequately demonstrate the cosmic signs of God's love--show that although the Knight has adopted Boethius's confidence in the goodness of the creation, he fails to provide two of the strongest arguments to support his belief. It appears that while the Knight has faith in God's

love, he has not seen precisely how that love is manifested--namely, in the spiritual redemption of human suffering and in the divine ordering of the processes of the creation. The Knight's views, at least as they are expressed in his tale, remain somewhat limited. He is so intent on demonstrating God's goodness in worldly human affairs that he fails to emphasize the other indications of God's love that recur in the teachings of Christianity and in Boethius's Consolation.⁶

In light of this conclusion, the Knight is not the flawlessly perceptive Boethian that Kaske and others claim. The possibility exists, therefore, that in his interruption of the Monk's performance,

⁶The belief that the Knight's Tale is not a wholly adequate representation of Boethian thought has also been expressed by Dale Underwood, who maintains that the Knight fails to offer the proper Boethian concept of man's role in the universe, and by Katharine Blake, who thinks that although the tale shows an artificial human order imposed on the chaotic world, it fails finally to demonstrate the ultimate order of the universe. See Underwood's "The First of the Canterbury Tales," ELH, 26 (1959) 463-67 and Blake's "Aspects of Order in the Knight's Tale," MLQ, 34 (1973), 3-19.

the Knight locates no actual flaw in the Monk's philosophy, but reveals yet another instance of his incomplete understanding of the Consolation.⁷

⁷The view that the Knight's interruption of the Monk's Tale was intended more as a satire of the Knight than of the Monk's performance has been advanced by a number of critics. Several scholars believe that Chaucer was mocking the Knight's literary tastes. Kemp Malone, for example, maintains that by expressing a preference for stories with happy endings the Knight shows that he has "the taste of a child, or at any rate of a thoroughly unsophisticated person." See Malone's Chapters on Chaucer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1951), p. 170. Paul Baum, in his Chaucer: A Critical Appreciation (Durham: Duke University Press, 1958), p. 220, finds the Knight's comments at the end of the Monk's Tale representative of the "bourgeois" belief that "there is tragedy enough in real life, without reading about it." Bertrand Bronson, in his In Search of Chaucer (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1960), p. 76, remarks too that the Knight shows himself to be "something of a sentimentalist" who "likes a happy ending."

Other critics believe that the Knight's interruption of the Monk's Tale was meant to show the Knight's fears. Donald Fry notes that the Knight's "own situation is potentially closest to that of the Monk's modern tragic figures." Fry contends that the Knight is "upset" by the reminder that tragedy will surely befall him and thus stops the Monk's performance. See Fry's "The Ending of the Monk's Tale," JEGP, 71 (1972), 366. Earle Birney also argues that the Knight, "a representative of the men of power, the feudal lords, the people who have," finds the Monk's warnings about the insecurity of earthly prosperity "sufficiently unwelcome" to

Indeed, a close examination of the Knight's comments when he interrupts the Monk reveals one view that is uninformed in light of Boethian thought.

Philosophy teaches in the Consolation that worldly prosperity is transient and that all men who have risen on Fortune's wheel can only expect to fall. The Knight, however, when he interrupts the Monk, shows that he has failed to comprehend, or at least to accept, this Boethian lesson. After expressing his distaste for tales that show a "sodeyn fal" (B² 3963), the Knight describes the kind of situation that he likes to hear about:

And the contrarie is joye and greet solas,
As whan a man hath been in povre estaat
And clymbeth up and wexeth fortunat,
And there abideth in prosperitee.

(B² 3964-67, italics mine)

The Knight's point that men can rise from poverty to prosperity is an accurate observation. He does, however, make a philosophical blunder when he suggests that a man can abide in prosperity. This

(Footnote 7 continued.)
interrupt the Monk's narrative. See Birney's "The Beginning of Chaucer's Irony," PMLA, 54 (1939), 654.

belief that people can perpetually maintain their affluence contradicts Philosophy's conclusion that earthly good fortune is sure to pass away. The Knight seems to be expressing a personal desire for everlasting material happiness, but his wish, of course, will never be fulfilled. The point of the passage, then, is not the Monk's misrepresentation of Boethius, but the Knight's own uninformed views.

One critic, William Mahoney, suggests that in this passage the Knight is speaking in spiritual terms.⁸ The phrase "abideth in prosperitee," says Mahoney, is meant to signify the lasting joy of heaven that can be attained through salvation. It should be noted, however, that both the context of the Knight's comments and his vocabulary indicate that he is thinking only of earthly circumstances.

After remarking that he is saddened by stories about men who fall from "welthe and ese" (B² 3962) into adversity, the Knight tells the Monk that the "contrarie" (B² 3964) situation exists. He makes his remark that men do rise from poverty to

⁸Mahoney, 88-89.

prosperity. By referring to the material falls of the characters in the Monk's Tale and then by saying that he likes better to hear about the opposite condition, the Knight shows that what he is thinking about is the possibility of a man's attaining worldly riches and power. Instead of contemplating salvation, the Knight is merely saying that he would rather hear about men winning temporal rewards than about human falls from "welthe and ese" into misery.

A second indication that the Knight is thinking only in earthly terms in this passage is his vocabulary. When he reminds the Monk that people in "povre estaat" can "wexeth fortunat" and attain "prosperitee," (B² 3965-66), the Knight echoes phrases from those sections of the Consolation that discuss the possibility of men rising from low estate to high on Fortune's wheel.⁹ The ascension on Fortune's wheel, of course, is a very mundane affair and suggests that the Knight's comments were never intended to express more than

⁹See for example, II, pr. 2, 1-22 and 50-57.

a belief that men can achieve material affluence. In fact, the glosses that Chaucer added to Boethius's passages on Fortune equate "prosperitee" specifically with riches and make no attempt to lend this word any spiritual significance.¹⁰

The one phrase, however, that most clearly shows the limited scope of the Knight's thoughts is his comment that men can "clymbeth up" (B² 3966) from poverty to prosperity. This expression "clymbeth up" again recalls the image of men ascending on Fortune's wheel. In the Consolation, for example, Fortune invites those who cherish her gifts to "Worth up" (II, pr. 2, 54) on her turning wheel. "Clymbeth up," though, also recalls Chaucer's poem "Truth," where the poet warns that "climbing" has "tikelnesse" (3). As mentioned earlier, "climbing" in this poem means the pursuit of wealth and power, the attempt to move from a poorer to a more prosperous worldly estate. The use of "climbing" in "Truth," therefore, suggests

¹⁰See II, pr. 2, 71 and 79.

that when the Knight speaks of men who "clymbeth up," he is referring not to salvation but to the attainment of material prosperity.

In the light of the misconception that he expresses in this passage, then, it is evident that the Knight's criticisms of the Monk's Tale are a reflection of his own shortcomings and not a serious condemnation of the Monk's tragedies. The Knight's interruption of Daun Piers's performance, therefore, neither invalidates the conclusion that the Monk's Tale is philosophically sound nor creates an inconsistency in the Canterbury Tales. Chaucer merely capitalizes on the opportunity afforded by the Monk's Boethian consideration of the fate of powerful men to further reveal the character of his own important man, the Knight.

The second question raised by the conclusion that the Monk's Tale is philosophically and artistically refined is "Why does the Host condemn the Monk's performance as boring and inept?" As this question implies, the Host objects more to the tale's artistry than to its philosophy.

As soon as the Knight finishes his remarks

about the Monk's views, the Host joins in with his own bitter criticism of Daun Piers's tragedies:

Sire Monk, namoore of this, so God yow blesse!
Youre tale anoyeth al this compaignye.
Swich talkyng is nat worth a boterflye,
For therinne is ther no desport ne game.

(B² 3978-81)

Later, Harry adds that only the bridle bells on the Monk's horse kept him from falling asleep and thus from missing the message of the Monk's narratives. Some critics see in the Host's remarks Chaucer's personal criticism of the genre of medieval tragedy. It should be noted, however, that Harry is not a wholly reliable literary critic. He occasionally misses altogether the point of a narrative, and he frequently exhibits some prejudices about what constitutes good literature. Most of his responses seem to be used for comic effect and certainly do not always represent Chaucer's final judgment about the worth or meaning of a narrative.

One of Harry's biggest blunders as judge of the storytelling on the Canterbury pilgrimage is his evaluation of Sir Thopas. This tale is a brilliant parody of the tail-rime romances, but the Host condemns it as worthless. He tells Chaucer,

"Thy drasty rymyng is nat worth a toord" (B² 2120). Of course, the Host to some extent serves Chaucer's purposes here. First, Harry's interruption is a humorous way to end a tale that has accomplished its purpose and that would become tedious if it were allowed to continue. In addition, when the Host does not see the parody and offers his condemnation of Sir Thopas, we are left with a reinforcement of Chaucer's criticism of the genre under attack. The humor, however, does cut two ways because the Host indeed misses the fact that Chaucer himself is satirizing the tail-rime romances and that thus his narrative does have artistic merit. Harry's opacity in this instance, therefore, shows that his evaluations of the pilgrims' stories are not always completely accurate and need not represent entirely Chaucer's opinions.

In addition to misjudging the merit of Sir Thopas, the Host also exhibits some literary prejudices that Chaucer again turns to comic

effect.¹¹ Harry demands literature with a moral that can readily be applied to himself or to another pilgrim, and he is quick to make such an application, often producing amusement. At the end of the Tale of Melibee, for example, the Host shows that he has been impressed with the contrast between the patient Prudence and his own wrathful wife "Goodelief" (B² 3084). Harry reports that his wife is always badgering him, for one reason or another, to beat up a servant or a neighbor. He would like to oppose her, but she is "byg in armes" (B² 3111), a reality that he respects. He wishes that she could have heard this tale of Prudence so that his life could be easier. Harry's remarks obviously are not meant as an explication of Melibee; Chaucer has him make this application of the tale to his own circumstances only to produce humor.

Another literary prejudice that the Host exhibits is his strong preference for tales of "myrthe" (B² 1896), a term which for Harry denotes

¹¹For a discussion of the Host's literary shortcomings, see Alan T. Gaylord's "'Sentence' and 'Solaas' in Fragment VII of The Canterbury Tales: Harry Bailly as Horseback Editor," PMLA, 82 (1967) 226-35.

bawdiness, slander, and trickery.¹² Harry can appreciate a serious tale, a fact demonstrated by his responses to the Man of Law's Tale and to the Tale of Melibee. He does not, however, seem willing to listen to consecutive sober narratives,¹³ and he frequently tries to influence the pilgrims to tell humorous or bawdy stories. When, for example, the Host calls on the Nun's Priest for a tale, he commands this pilgrim to tell "swich thyng as may oure hertes glade" (B² 4001) and to be "murie everemo" (B² 4005). Indeed, after the Nun's Priest finishes his story, Harry is grateful for the "murie tale of Chauntecleer" (B² 4639). Similar bids for amusing or amorous narratives also appear in the prologues to Sir Thopas (B² 1881-96), the

¹²For a detailed discussion of the Host's concept of what constitutes a mirthful tale, see Gaylord, 231-35.

¹³Gaylord notes that in a number of instances when one pilgrim tells a sober narrative, the Host encourages the next pilgrim to tell a mirthful tale. For example, after listening to the Prioress's Tale, the Host calls on Chaucer for "a tale of myrthe" (B² 1896). Similar bids for humorous performances appear after the Tale of Melibee and after the Monk's Tale. See "'Sentence' and 'Solaas' in Fragment VII," 227-28.

Canon's Yeoman's Tale (G 597-98 and 653-56), and the Parson's Tale (I 22-29) and in the introduction to the Pardoner's Tale (C 311-17). The Host's desire to hear humorous, lewd, or slanderous tales probably is not meant to be seen as a serious fault in his literary taste; after all, many sensitive readers have enjoyed the Miller's and Reeve's tales. Chaucer, however, was quite willing to use Harry's desires for such tales to create humor, both in the Host's attempts to elicit stories of sex or trickery and in his frustrations when the pilgrims do not gratify his wishes. The Host's comments on many of the narratives, therefore, are not meant to reflect astute literary criticism but are intended only to be funny.

In light of the Host's failure to see the merit of Sir Thopas and in light of the comic functions of his literary taste, Harry's criticisms of the Monk's tragedies could be one more instance of his misjudgment and of Chaucer's attempt to use him to create humor. Indeed, a consideration of the Host's invitation to the Monk to tell a tale and of the substance of his condemnation of the Monk's

performance suggests that Harry only succeeds in further revealing his prejudices and is consequently used to produce a comic effect.

Thus, instead of merely asking Daun Piers for a story, Harry first jests about the Monk's sexual capabilities and laments that religion has deprived the human race of such a fine breeder:

I pray to God, yeve hym confusioun
That first thee broghte unto religioun!
Thou woldest han ben a tredefowel aright.
Haddestow as greet a leeve, as thou hast myght,
To parfourne al thy lust in engendrure,
Thou haddest bigeten ful many a creature.

(B² 3133-38)

He also suggests, though, that clergymen really do not observe their vows of celibacy and that furthermore the wives of laymen prefer to make love with clerics, who can ". . . bettre paye / Of Venus paiementz . . ." (B² 3150-51) than secular men can. The Host is in a merry mood, and he hopes that his coarse remarks will suggest a theme to the worldly Monk and thus prompt him to tell a bawdy tale.

The Monk, however, frustrates Harry's wishes by telling a serious tale that depicts the falls of great men and that moralizes about the folly of trusting the world. Daun Piers's narratives contain

no slander, no spicy incidents, and no japery. Forced to listen to such a moral tale when he had hoped for a mirthful narrative, the Host complains bitterly, and the essence of his criticism is that the Monk has offered ". . . no desport ne game" (B² 3981). Harry makes a final plea for his type of story when he asks for a tale "somewhat of huntyng" (B² 3995). The Monk, though, refuses to tell such a tale and the chagrined Host must turn to another teller for a humorous story.

The purpose of the Host's interruption, then, is the comic effect of his complaint when his expectations for a bawdy tale have been frustrated.¹⁴

¹⁴The belief that the Host's interruption of the Monk was meant as a satire of the Host and not of Daun Piers's narrative has been advanced by several critics. Kemp Malone, for example, thinks that Harry's condemnations of the Monk's Tale are "meant to be funny" and "need to be taken no more seriously than his criticism of Sir Thopas." See Chapters on Chaucer, p. 171. Paul Baum believes that the Host's comments were included to capitalize on the humor of Harry's hope for a bawdy tale and his subsequent frustrations. See Baum's Chaucer: A Critical Appreciation, p. 82. For other critics who think that in this passage the Host is the butt of Chaucer's satire, see John Lawlor's Chaucer, p. 125; Gaylord's "'Sentence' and 'Solaas' in Fragment VII," 228; and Bernard Huppe's A Reading of the Canterbury Tales (Albany: State University of New York, 1964), p. 226.

Harry's vulgar literary taste, not the Monk's performance, is the butt of Chaucer's satire here.¹⁵ The Host's critical comments on the Monk's Tale, therefore, need not be taken as Chaucer's final judgment on Daun Piers's performance nor do they deny the conclusion that this narrative is artistically

¹⁵Alan Gaylord points out a passage in the Host's interruption which clearly indicates that Harry is meant to be the butt of Chaucer's humor. After complaining that the Monk's narratives contain no sport or game, the Host continues by warning Daun Piers that even though a tale has a worthwhile message, the listeners will not learn its lesson if it is dull:

For certainly, as that these clerkes seyn,
Whereas a man may have noon audience,
Noght helpeth it to tellen his sentence.

(B² 3990-92)

These lines are a paraphrase of Ecclesiasticus 32:6, but the point of the Biblical passage is that the wise man should not cast his pearls before swine. There are no admonishments against boring one's listeners. Harry's uninformed use of this proverb, therefore, actually reflects his own shortcomings; he is the "swine" who cannot understand the wisdom of the Monk's tragedies. See Gaylord's "'Sentence' and 'Solaas' in Fragment VII," 233.

refined. Indeed, the Host's outburst is merely part of the continuing attempt to show his literary misjudgments and to use him to create humor.

The third question raised by the opinion that the Monk's Tale is philosophically and artistically sound is "How is such a tale appropriate to the Monk, who is described in the General Prologue as a seeker of worldly pleasures and a scorner of books?" As noted in the first chapter, the question of the appropriateness of the Monk's Tale to its teller has been the subject of numerous scholarly studies, and has given rise to the belief that the Monk's tragedies are part of an ongoing satire of Daun Piers begun in the General Prologue. The assumption is that a bad Monk is given a bad tale.

A close examination, however, of the Monk's portrait in the General Prologue and of his probable educational background suggests that Chaucer had different intentions when he assigned the Monk's Tale to Daun Piers. Although many critics assume that the Monk's portrait in the General Prologue is wholly satiric, Chaucer's depiction of the Monk is in fact ambivalent. In addition to criticizing

the Monk, Chaucer also compliments him. The Monk's portrait thus transcends mere caricature to become a lifelike characterization of a man with a complex nature.

Even though the Monk may well be a "recchelees" (A 179) roamer, he is also fit to be "an abbot able" (A 167) (a comment which possibly is not ironic) and is in fact a "kepere of the celle" (A 172). He is thus an important administrator, responsible for both a relatively large amount of wealth and property, and for the spiritual welfare of a number of people under him.¹⁶ Keepers of the cell, moreover, often did become abbots. When we add to these facts the terms Chaucer uses to refer to the Monk--"lord" (A 172), and "prelaat" (A 204)--we must conclude

¹⁶A number of studies have shown that in the General Prologue Chaucer compliments as well as criticizes the Monk. One of the most thorough discussions of this point is Huling E. Ussery's "The Status of Chaucer's Monk: Clerical, Official, Social, and Moral," Tulane Studies in English, 17 (1969), 1-30. Other works which suggest that Chaucer saw the Monk as a worthy cleric include: G. C. Coulton's Medieval Panorama (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 281; Kemp Malone's, Chapters on Chaucer, p. 174; and J. S. P. Tatlock's, "Chaucer's Monk," MLN, 55 (1940), 350-54.

that we are supposed to be impressed by this pilgrim and not to consider him solely an object of satire. The Monk is thus not a caricature but a real man and cleric, neither totally good nor totally evil.¹⁷

In addition to giving the Monk the ambivalent nature that characterizes real people, Chaucer also develops Daun Piers psychologically. Chaucer's fiction in the General Prologue is that he is reporting the salient points of an apologia spoken by the Monk.¹⁸ Daun Piers suggests that his position requires a certain amount of worldliness; he must hunt, wear fine clothes, and dine sumptuously to encourage good relations with the wealthy patrons who give money to his abbey. To serve his monastery

¹⁷That Daun Piers was intended to be seen as a realistic character is supported by the fact that hunting monks actually existed in Chaucer's day. See Ramona Bressie's "'A Governour Wily and Wys,'" MLN, 54 (1939), 477-90 and H. S. Bennett's "Medieval Literature and the Modern Reader," Essays and Studies, 31 (1945), 10.

¹⁸For the following discussion of Chaucer's psychological development of the Monk, see Paul E. Beichner's "Daun Piers, Monk and Business Administrator," Speculum, 34 (1959), 611-19.

well, he has had to be a good businessman as well as a good monk. The reader might infer, furthermore, that Daun Piers's position shows that he has indeed been a worthy servant to his order. Whether or not, however, the Monk successfully defends his mode of living, the important point is that he is self-conscious. He cares enough about the other pilgrims' opinions of him to attempt to justify his way of life.

The conclusion that Daun Piers is a realistic and successful cleric who seeks the approbation of his fellow pilgrims helps to show how the serious tragedies of the Monk's Tale are appropriate to their teller. First, if Chaucer compliments the Monk's achievements, as well as criticizing his worldliness, then Daun Piers's narratives could represent Chaucer's attempt to develop the dignified aspects of the Monk's character. Chaucer does not give the Monk a tale that reflects a lack of ascetic discipline, but one that shows the training and respectability which have earned Daun Piers his position as keeper of the cell.

Furthermore, a serious tale could be meant to

assist in the presentation of a psychologically consistent character. Chaucer may have seen that a Monk who has achieved prominence in his monastery and who seeks the approbation of his fellow men would be likely to tell a solemn tale. A serious narrative not only would be in keeping with his self-image but also would show the other pilgrims that he is a proper ecclesiast. That Daun Piers, therefore, should deliver seventeen sober narratives is not surprising. They are precisely the kind of stories that we might expect from a distinguished clergyman who is anxious to defend his reputation.

In fact, Chaucer actually provides the self-conscious Monk with a specific motivation for telling his solemn stories. Daun Piers may see the Host's vulgar and too familiar invitation to tell a tale as a sign that he has lost the esteem of his fellow pilgrims, for the Host is extremely disrespectful, daring to talk about an important clergyman's sexual capabilities and suggesting that clerics commonly violate their vows of celibacy (See above, p. 225). The Monk's vocation is impugned and Daun Piers himself is made the butt

of vulgar jesting. He cannot let this broadside go unmet. As a dignitary of the church, he must reassert the worthiness of this institution and must recapture the respect due to its members, including himself. Bertrand Bronson remarks that the Monk must "substitute a dignified likeness for the base image that has been foisted on him so gratuitously."¹⁹

Daun Piers, consequently, reasserts his dignity in two ways. First, he evinces self-control. Although he is probably outraged by the Host's impertinence, the Monk takes all "in pacience" (B² 3155). He refuses to be drawn into an argument with the Host, but demonstrates instead a self-mastery that shows genuine individual character and that represents the ideal response of a man of the Church.

In addition to avoiding a confrontation with the Host, Daun Piers also establishes his dignity by refusing to tell a tale of hunting or of sexual dalliance. He proposes, rather, to give a proper

¹⁹Bronson, p. 74.

religious performance:

. . . "I wol doon al my diligence,
As fer as sowneth into honestee,
To telle yow a tale, or two, or three.
And if yow list to herkne hyderward,
I wol yow seyn the lyf of Seint Edward;
Or ellis, first, tragedies wol I telle,
Of whiche I have an hundred in my celle."

(B² 3156-62)

He then reaches back in his memory to his former studies, gives his formal definition of tragedy, and proceeds to tell his solemn tale. He may thus punish the Host by frustrating his expectations for a bawdy narrative, but also Daun Piers shows that he is a dignified and learned man who should be respected.²⁰

The Monk's serious tale, therefore, is quite appropriate. It highlights his dignity, alluded to in the General Prologue, and it is his method of reasserting that dignity among the apparently disrespectful pilgrims. Bertrand Bronson notes further that Chaucer also is thus able to incorporate an irony into his treatment of Daun Piers. The

²⁰For a similar discussion, see Joella Owens Brown's "Chaucer's Daun Piers: One Monk or Two?" Criticism, 6 (1964), 47-48.

lover of worldly goods is given a tale designed to teach contempt of the world. Bronson adds, however, that Daun Piers is no hypocrite: "This sobriety is an essential element in the Monk's idea of himself and constitutes, all in all, a truer picture than the indecent travesty of the popular conception."²¹ The learned tragedies, therefore, are not only appropriate to the Monk but also show a complexity of character development that far exceeds mere caricature.

Two last matters of appropriateness need to be discussed. First, some critics who find the Monk's Tale philosophically unsound admit that Chaucer has provided motivation for Daun Piers to tell a serious narrative. They maintain, though, that because the Monk has been lax in his studies, he does not have the learning to present a sound theological performance and thus makes some serious theological mistakes when he attempts to tell a proper tale. Examination, however, of a medieval

²¹Bronson, p. 75.

monk's educational background and training suggests that even though Daun Piers's duties as administrator have taken him away from his books, he would still have had the preparation to teach successfully the lesson of true and false felicity. In fact, as a novitiate preparing to join an ascetic order, the Monk would have been taught repeatedly that this false world can never offer the perfect bliss of heaven.

It is true that Daun Piers's duties as keeper of the cell kept him from his books, but during his days as a novitiate, when he had not yet become an administrator, he would have been required to study vigorously. Dom David Knowles observes that each monastic novice received instruction at least for a year, and sometimes as many as seven years, before he could become a monk.²² A special part of the monastery was set aside where the potential monks met daily with a master who had them memorize psalmodies, lessons, and chants and who taught them

²²Dom David Knowles, The Religious Orders in England, v. II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), pp. 232-33 and 417.

theology and philosophy. Jean Canu adds that the curriculum for the novices frequently included the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy),²³ and Jean Leclercq notes that among the books listed as scholastica (class books) were a number of works by classical poets and philosophers.²⁴ If Daun Piers had the traditional training for novices, his educational background would have been quite broad and may even have provided the classical allusions in his narrative.

In addition, Leclercq makes two other comments about monastic education that seem especially appropriate to understanding Chaucer's Monk. Leclercq notes, as does Canu, that all novices had to learn the art of "grammatica," which we call

²³Jean Canu, Religious Orders of Men (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1960), p. 463.

²⁴Jean Leclercq, The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture, translated by Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), pp. 141-43. See also Knowles, p. 337. According to Leclercq and Knowles, classical authors frequently read by medieval monks included Terence, Sallust, Cicero, Vergil, Horace, Ovid, Lucan, Statius, Juvenal, and Seneca.

literature.²⁵ Each prospective monk had to know the science of things said by poets, historians, and orators. By observing techniques in other works, monks were to achieve a mastery of writing, reading, understanding, and proving. In light of this training, it is not at all inappropriate that Daun Piers should know the formal definition of tragedy or that he can employ rhetorical devices in his tale.

The second important remark that Leclercq makes is that one of the philosophers honored by the monks was Boethius.²⁶ Monastics, comments Leclercq, thought of the Consolation as a work that taught "the joy of divine grace and the hope of eternal reward."²⁷ Boethius, consequently, was frequently among the philosophers studied by the monks, and again the suggestion is that if Chaucer

²⁵Leclercq, p. 22.

²⁶Ibid., p. 147. For further reference to monastic respect for Boethius, see Knowles, p. 336.

²⁷Leclercq, p. 147.

was at all familiar with monastic learning, he would have felt that assigning a proper Boethian tale to Daun Piers was quite appropriate.

Scholars of medieval monasticism point out further that beyond spending a year studying as novitiates, monks often spent their days or part of their days reading. Jean Canu remarks that monks were required to spend four hours each day studying either in their cells or in the monastery's library.²⁸ Dom David Knowles also notes that reading and transcribing were common monastic practices, and cites as an example the monastery at Durham, where the monks were said to have "studied upon these books everyone in his carrel all the afternoon."²⁹ Pointing out that numerous collections of books were left to monastic libraries by deceased brothers, Knowles believes that private study and reading were popular among medieval monks.³⁰ According to

²⁸Canu, p. 24.

²⁹Knowles, p. 235.

³⁰Ibid., p. 236.

Maurus Wolter, who notes that monasteries hired masters to teach the brothers theology, philosophy, science and the arts, "the advance of knowledge was important to medieval monks."³¹ Daun Piers, of course, no longer studies, but before he became an administrator, he may have had no choice. In fact, his reference to pouring over a book until he becomes "wood" (A 184) suggests that he has had to do his share of reading and studying and indicates that he would have had the background to tell a sound Boethian tale.³²

In addition to providing Daun Piers with the knowledge to tell his tale, monastic education would also have influenced his choice of theme.

³¹Maurus Wolter, The Principles of Monasticism, translated by Bernard A. Sause (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1962), p. 487.

³²Dom David Knowles pauses in his discussion of monasticism to mention that the Monk's tragedies are especially appropriate to Daun Piers. According to Knowles, collections of tales using history and myth to teach some moral lesson were quite common in monastic libraries. The Monk's performance is just another example of a familiar type of monastic work. See p. 112.

Monks were continuously reminded that a proper ascetic despises the material gifts of earthly existence. According to Jean Canu, "Renunciation of the world is at the heart of monasticism, and is a central theme of its precepts and counsels."³³ Maurus Wolter also comments that a familiar theme of monastic writings is the deceptiveness of the world with its transient goods and its short-lived promises of happiness,³⁴ and George Owst points out that earthly decay and death were common topics of monastic sermons.³⁵ This ascetic contempt of the world, explains Canu, was prompted by such Biblical passages as I John 2:15, which says, "Love not the world nor the things that are in the world."³⁶

³³Canu, p. 24.

³⁴Wolter, p. 54.

³⁵Gerald Robert Owst, Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period, c. 1350-1450 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), pp. 260-68.

³⁶Canu, p. 24.

The false happiness of this world and the perfect joy of heaven, therefore, is the one theme that would have been familiar to all medieval monks, even to those who did not pour over their books. If Daun Piers were casting about for a proper tale to tell, he certainly would have been aware that a narrative on the nature of true and false felicity was an entirely appropriate selection for a respectable member of an order which espoused asceticism. Furthermore, the prevalence of this theme in monastic study and life would have made it a topic that he could manage successfully. The Monk's education and training, then, would have prepared him to tell a sound philosophic tale and in fact may have determined his choice of theme.

A last matter of appropriateness that deserves consideration is the brilliance of Chaucer's decision to give the Monk a narrative that elicits pathos. To have Daun Piers demonstrate the imprudence of seeking true felicity in the world and then to have him express sympathy for people who indulge in this folly represents a remarkable achievement in matching tale to teller.

As a novice in an ascetic order, the Monk would have been taught repeatedly that happiness based on the accumulation of worldly goods is certain to pass away (see pp. 238-39, above). In fact, the ascetic belief in the perfection of heavenly bliss and the mutability of earthly prosperity would have encouraged a point of view that placed little importance on material being and that consequently underplayed the fact of physical suffering. Monastics were hardly cold-hearted, but they would have thought in spiritual terms that made earthly suffering virtually insignificant.

Daun Piers, however, although a respected member of his monastery, is no strict ascetic. Like his characters, the Monk prizes earthly position and prosperity. Thus, because he shares their values, the Monk understands precisely the sorrow that prosperous men experience when they lose their worldly good fortune. His thoughts are not so entirely set on heaven that he loses touch with the misery that people endure when their earthly gifts pass away. He is sensitive to his characters' sorrow over their physical losses, and he responds

with sympathy.

The Monk's Tale, therefore, reflects the dichotomous nature of the Monk. As an ascetic, he has been shown the inevitable physical tragedy that daunts humanity and he has been encouraged to forsake the world to seek the true happiness of heaven. But as the man who values worldly goods, he does not forget the unhappiness of those people who love and lose material prosperity, and he expresses sympathy for them in their adversity.

A reading of the Monk's Tale, then, as philosophically and artistically refined creates no inconsistencies in the Canterbury Tales. The interruptions of the Knight and the Host merely reflect their prejudices and do not indicate any defects in the tale. Furthermore, the tragedies are wholly consonant with the development of the Monk's character in the General Prologue and in the links to his tale. In fact, a recognition of the sound philosophy and of the pathos in Daun Piers's stories accounts more completely for the elements in the Monk's portrait than do the interpretations that find the Monk's narrative theologically and

artistically inept. Indeed, the effect of recent criticism of the Monk's Tale has been to reduce the richness of this literary performance. In assigning the Monk the seventeen solemn narratives, Chaucer was not trying to satirize Daun Piers's worldliness. Instead, he had a three-fold purpose: to teach the lesson of true and false felicity, to show that people should be pitied who are foolish enough to seek true happiness in the accumulation of worldly goods, and to develop the complexity of Daun Piers's character. Only the reading which shows these three elements of the Monk's Tale reveals the full measure of Chaucer's artistry.

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