DESTINY, FORTUNE AND PREDESTINATION IN *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*

In order to discuss our subject, we must take into account the cosmological beliefs and ideas that the Middle Ages shared in respect of Fortune, of Fate, and Predestination, so that we can apply them to Chaucer's works.

To the medieval mind, divine intelligence was divided into several manifestations, Providence among them; but it revealed itself through Destiny, in different ways and at different times. We thus find that Destiny is the ordering and the rules inherent in mutable things through which Providence relates one thing to another and establishes their proper order.[1]

Destiny is carried out by divine spirits (who are the servants of Providence), by a soul ("anima mundi"), by Nature, by the heavenly movement of stars, by the virtue of the angels, the machinations of the devils, or by all these together.

Destiny is highly divided and its influence reaches very far from its main function, although above everything there is Fortune, a blind, whimsical force sometimes personified by a goddess, who determines the course followed by the various human baings in this world. The main characteristics of Fortune are mutability, instability and

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[1].- Walter Clyde Curry, 1971, "Destiny in Troilus & Criseyde" II. In Richard J. Shoeck, ed. *Chaucer Criticism,* Indiana Univ. Press: 34-5.

irrationality - all of which tantamount to saying that, within the realms of Fortune, we can find the events a man may go through in his life.

This force, chaotic and illogical, can be either common or personal, depending on whether we deal with the universal experience of mankind or with the combination of two or more forces of destiny which affect specific events in the life of a person, such as birth, wealth or poverty, happiness or unhappiness, friendship, love and many others.

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer shows us how the common fate of the protagonists is caused by "Nature as Destiny"[1], that is to say, by the union of the various elements of the universe and the keeping of their own status as a result of the universal bond of love. The resulting fate is the work of Destiny, which is inherent in the movements of the stars and other planets. Thus we find in other works by the same author, "The Knight's Tale", for example, how the fate of Palamon and Arcite is presided over by the planets Mars and Saturn. At the end of "The Nun's Priest's Tale", Fortune, personified as the goddess Venus, changes the destiny of Chanteclair:

> How, goode men, I prey yow hokneth alle
> Lo, haw Fortune turneth sodeynly
> the hope and pride eek hir enemy[2].

In *Troilus and Criseyde,* Chaucer sometimes presents Fortune referring to some planet, with mysterious hints, about the tragic end of Troy in oracles, dreams and divinations.

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[1].- Ibi.: 36-39.

[2].- Chaucer, "The Nun's Priest's Tale". In *The Canterbury Tales*: Lines 470-472.

In Book I, the author[1] begins with the double sorrow of Troilus, who loved Criseyde and whose love was rejected by her; but, imitating the tragedies of old, he develops this love story in the context of the long and cruel war of Troy, which will eventually end in the total destruction of the city.

Calchas, astrologer and magician, receives, in this work, several signs from different sources that strange powers are going to converge on Troy. The movements of the stars also agree with the forebodings of disaster, and, finally, Apollo, through an oracle, tells him of the triumph of the Greeks -and that is why Calchas looks for shelter among the vanquishers:

> 10 - Now fell it so that in the town there was
> Dwelling a lord of great anthovities
> A great dewign that cleped was Calchas,
> that in science so expert was that he
> knew well that Troye Sholde destroyed be
> by answer of his god that hights thus:
> Dan Phoebus or Apollo Delphicus.[2] (Book I)

This "Nature as Destiny" appears again when the love-story starts, with the prophecy that a powerful force of destiny will rule over the life and the actions of Troilus; it is love's force, which will subdue the proud heart of Troilus, since no man can escape the blind power of love:

1.- Walter Clyde Curry, op. cit.,: 40-41.

2.- All the quotations which will, gradually, appear in the present essay and refer to *Troilus and Criseyde* are from the following edition by John Warrington, ed. 1966, *Troilus & Criseyde*, London: Everyman's Library.

30 - And with that word he gan cast up the browe,
Ascaunces, Lo, is this not wysly spoken?
At which the god of love gan looken rowe
Richt for despyt, and shoop for to be wroken,
He kidde anoon his bowe nas not broken;
For suddenly he hit him at the fulle;
And yet as proud a peacock can he pulle.

31 - O blinde world! O blind entencicum!
How ofte fallet all th' efect contraire
of surquidry and foul presumpcioun;
for caught is proud, and caught is debonnaire.
This Troilus is clomben on the stairs;
And little weeneth that he must descenden,
But alday falleth thing that fools ne wenden. (Book I)

Afterwards, in love with Criseyde, he bemoans the fact that "Nature as Destiny" has put him in chains and that it should be precisely Criseyde, and not another Trojan woman, his particular Fortune made him fall in love with. Troilus does not understand the path followed by his fortune, cannot see why Destiny led him into this; therefore, when Pandarus offers him his help, he rejects it, but he is comforted by Pandarus´s words on the equitableness of Fortune towards all men, now favourable, now unfavourable; but for ever turning its wheel and never giving it a rest.

In Book II, the movements of the stars, the Moon and Venus - above all- have a powerful influence on character; thus, Pandarus, before talking to his niece about Troilus's love for her, considers it necessary to ascertain whether the stars will be propitious on those days:

11 - And gen to call and dress him up to ryse,
Remenb'ing him his errand was done
From Troilus, and eke his great empryse;
And cast , and knew in good plight was the mone
to do viage, and took his way full sone
Unto his niece's palace there besyde.
Now Janus, god od entry, thou him gyde! (Book II)

When at last Troilus wins Criseyde's love, Venus is in the perfect position in the sky[1] to further the cause of love; this planet is favourable when it occupies the seventh house in the sky. Chaucer mentions that the other planets were also in the adequate position to help Troilus, although he only specifies clearly the position of Venus in its seventh house.

With this example, the author tells us that Criseyde, at the time when she bestows her love, is under the influence of "Nature as Destiny" and the position of planets which helps to bring about the special fortunes of character, different from the general power of Destiny.

In Book IV of the narrative there is a change of mood: personal fortune becomes adverse and tragedy begins to loom. So far the lovers had been happy, but "Nature as Destiny" has decreed their love and all the power of the movement of the stars had determined the conditions of their happiness; but now, as Chaucer says, following Boethius, a happy station is short-lived, since Fortune takes Criseyde from Troilus's arms and brings into its fateful wheel the Greek Diomedes:

[1].- Walter Clyde Curry, op. cit., : 44-47.

1 - But all too little (welaway the whyle!)
Lasteth such joy, Y - thanked be Fortune
By sort, and by augury eke, trewely,
I dare well say the time is faste by
That fyr and flame on all the yown shall spread;
And thus shall Toye turn in ashen dead,

18 - For certain, Phoebus and Neptunus bothe,
That makeden the walles of the town,
Ben with the folk of Troy alwal so wrothe,
That they will bring it to confusioun
Right in despyt of King Laomedoun:
Because he nolde payen theme their hyre
The town of Troye shall ben set on fyre. (Book IV)

Chaucer,[1] having written Book IV, in which the forces of Destiny pushed the characters towards the final catastrophe, realized that the overall effect was not as precise or as complete as he had intended, and therefore, when Fortune turns against the protagonist, he introduced Troilus's famous monologue about predestination and free-will in relationship to God.

Critics are rather reluctant to accept this insertion. For example, Professor Kean,[2] thinks that the monologue is more important as a description of Troilus's character than because of the philosophy it contains. Professor Root[3] considers that it is longer than it should

1.- Ibid., : 52-53.

2.- Patricia Margaret Kean, 1972, "The Philosophy of *Troilus & Criseyde*" In *Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: 175.

3.- R.K. Root, 1922. *The Poetry of Chaucer*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin: 122.

really be, but that Hamlet´s soliloquy is as much of a digresion, and that it totally agrees with Troilus's character as seen by Chaucer.

Professor Rollin Patch[1] tries to find, first of all, the relationship between the monologue and the events in the rest of the story; for example, Troilus obtains ideas about these topics from clerks he talks to, and afterwards draws his own conclusions about God's foreknowledge of everything and about man's choice of action. In his story, Chaucer follows Boethius, with whom he is well acquainted, since the speaker in *De Consolatione Philosophiae* asks Lady Philosophy whether freedom of action exists; she answers it does, but he, after Lady Philosophy's intervention, states his own ideas, which like Troilus's, are of an opposed nature. Troilus thinks that man is not responsible for his actions, his merits or his shortcomings, since his reward or his punishment has been decided *a priori.*

On the other hand, there are passages where Chaucer tends to depart from his source. Thus, at the beginning of the monologue, he uses a text from Boethius different from what would seem adequate, in view of the fact that the sin of mankind would be almost perfect as an ending, but he uses it for the beginning in order to avoid any misinterpretation. At the end of the monologue in Boethius, Lady Philosophy also answers the young man in a surprising manner:

> 16 - I axe why thon wenest that thilke resouns
> of hem that assoilen this questioun ne ben hat
> speedful y-nough ne sufficient: the which "solicioun,
> or the whiche risoun", for that it demeth that the
> prescience his nat cause of necessitee to thinges to
> comen, that he weneth it nat that freedorn of

[1].- Howard Rollin Patch, 1969. "Troilus on Predestination". In Edward Wagenknecht, ed *Chaucer, Modern Essays of Criticism*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press: 369-371.

wil be destorbed or y-let by prescience,
(De consolatione philosophiae, Book II - Prose IV)

After this speech by Lady Philosophy, the speaker admits his error; Troilus, however, maintains his fatalistic points of view and does not offer any sort of possible solution to the problem.

Troilus's monologue on Predestination is really adequate to his dramatic character, but we cannot think that it contains Chaucer's views in this subject. Professor Rollin Patch[1] considers that Chaucer's sympathies are fully with his hero and that he went wholeheartedly into the difficulties of the lovers, but that he never set his values at this sentimental level or wanted, for a moment, to turn his work into a moral treatise.

At the end, we do not know Chaucer's views on Predestination, but we cannot enter into this because it would require a profound study of Destiny, Fortune and Predestination in all his works[2]. What we can assert is Chaucer's great interest in these subjects, probably under the influence of Boethius.

Professor Kean[3] considers that, notwithstanding all the circumstances involved in this work, this is really a love-story, allowing for the forms of philosophy it contains.

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1.- Ibid.,: 374-375.

2.- See, for example in "The Nun's Priest's Tale" the following lines "Witnesse on him that any parfit clerk is, / That in scole ...": 480-490.

3.- Patricia Margaret Kean, op. cit., : 177.

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