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CHAUCERIAN IRONY IN THE BOETHIAN SHORT POEMS: THE DRAMATIC TENSION BETWEEN CLASSICAL AND CHRISTIAN

by Jane Chance

The Boethian poems were among the most popular[1] of Chaucer's short poems, to judge by the number of manuscripts of each. Although the exact dates of composition are unknown, they were probably written in the 1380's, at the time of the translation of Boethius and the writing of *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Knight's Tale*.[2] They differ from the sixteen-odd short poems Chaucer wrote on other subjects—chiefly courtly love complaints and poems on autobiographical pretexts—in two ways: their tone is usually consistently serious and their moralistic themes derive explicitly from Boethian texts. That is, Chaucer not only translated the whole of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* into prose, he also used ideas and passages from the second book in particular in five short poems, "The Former Age," "Fortune," "Lak of Stedfastnesse," "Gentilesse," and "Truth."[3] Perhaps Chaucer was encouraged to do so by the long tradition of commentary on Boethius, reaching back to the ninth century and extending into the fifteenth, in addition to the various Anglo-Saxon, Old High German, and Provençal translations of Boethius by Alfred, Notker Labeo, and the anonymous French translator.[4]

Whatever his authority for so doing, Chaucer found particularly interesting the second book of the *Consolation,* most probably because of its emphasis on Fortune and her effects on man, and also, in meter eight, the famous description of the fair chain of love. It is this book, one might say, that also most heavily influenced the *Troilus,* dealing as it does with the effects of Fortune and misplaced love. The most conventionally Boethian lyrics include "The Former Age" and "Fortune," but even these provide dramatic conflicts comparable to the richer, more complex lyrics like "Lak of Stedfastnesse,"

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"Gentilesse," and "Truth." The last of these in particular develops fully the Boethian theme while it employs humor and incongruity through its imagery and diction to render the poem unconventional and ironic.

The specific passages Chaucer incorporates or glosses stress the decay of the modern world, fortune, true nobility, and true felicity. In particular, in "The Former Age" Chaucer's elaboration of II, m. 5 contrasts the decadent present age with the former Golden Age in a theme drawn from Vergil's *Fourth Eclogue,* Tibullus's third elegy of book one, the first book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* as well as commentaries on Boethius II, m. 5, the ninth-century *Ecloga Theoduli,* and Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose.*[5] "Fortune" dramatizes II, pr. 1–4 and 8 on the blind goddess Fortune, whose deceptions are analyzed by Philosophy in the *prosimetrum* as the cause of Boethius's diseased condition. In "Lak of Stedfastnesse" Chaucer uses as a starting point II, m. 8, a passage which portrays the deceptions of good fortune as seductive and the merits of bad fortune as sober, self-possessed, and prudent because of adversity. "Gentilesse" follows III, pr. 6 on the transitory nature of Fortune's gifts and the idea that good men do not always possess them, nor do they make men good when possessed, and also III, m. 6 on the truly evil Nero (the antitype of the truly good Christ in Chaucer's poem). Finally, in "Truth" two images from Boethius link man with the beasts of the field to develop the Christian theme. In this group of short poems, generally Chaucer uses Boethian philosophical lines, images, and themes ultimately to set into relief Christian concepts of man and his place in this world. The thematic juxtaposition of the Late Classical and the Christian is skillfully rendered through the double levels of each poem apparent in tone, imagery, diction, and even point of view.

"The Former Age" elaborates on Boethius's *Consolation* II, m. 5 but also includes a satiric exposé of corrupt contemporary society.[6] In the former age, food ("mast, hawes, and swich pounage" [7]) and water ("of the colde welle" [8]) provided natural if humble fare, easily obtained and satisfying, in contrast to the more complicated forms Chaucer's materialistic and greedy civilization demands from its tilling of land, making of wine, grinding of spices.[7] Such needs inspire trade and a growing merchant fleet, but they also unfortunately inspire wars, the rise of tyrants, and an increase in pride, envy, and avarice. Chaucer concludes that the Former Age preceding the time of Nimrod was a Paradise before the advent of the deadly sins fathered by gluttony and sloth, that is, a Golden Age before

Jupiter the likerous,
That first was fader of delicacye,
Come in this world.

(56–58)

Thus now there exist only "covetyse, / Doublenesse, and tresoun, and envye, / Poyson, and manslauhtre, and mordre in sondry wyse" (61–63). Chaucer the humanist explains how and why the present differs from the past when he harmonizes the two divergent views of history and the fall offered by the Bible (Nimrod) and pagan mythology (Jupiter).

The more topical "Fortune" or "Balades de Visage Sanz Peinture"[8] dramatizes Boethius II, pr. 1–4 and 8, on the blind goddess Fortune; it does so by contrasting in its three *balades* the voices of the Pauper, or Pleintif, and Fortune. The Boethian dialogue between man and Fortune, which boasts five parts like Boethius's *prosimetrum,* is envisioned as a courtroom debate before judges. The Pleintif accuses Fortune of falseness and relies instead on his own reason; his refrain in his *balade* is "For fynally, Fortune, I thee defye!" Fortune counters that he may be governor of himself but he still inhabits her realm; her refrain reminds him, "And eek thou hast thy beste frend alyve," the "best friend" being perhaps Richard II, or perhaps himself, but either way, he has this friend courtesy of Fortune's grace. In the final *balade* the refrain for both Pleintif and Fortune in the first three stanzas is the same: "In general, this reule may nat fayle." They agree only in admitting there are absolutes. Pleintif reveals that he will continue to control his appetites rationally because he realizes "wikke appetyt comth ay before syknesse" (55), and the physical and psychological aspects of man open to illness are controlled by Fortune, to whom he does not wish to yield. Fortune re-asserts her governance of this world and his mortal life, for "Thy laste day is ende of myn intresse" (71). In the envoy Fortune addresses "Princes" (line 73, apparently the dukes of Lancaster, York, and Gloucester, two of whom had to authorize any grant made by Richard II), who sit in judgment of this case.[9] This perplexing envoy can be understood ironically: that is, even though Fortune rules this world, she appeals to these heads of state (in effect) to ask, "Lat nat this man on me thus crye and pleyne" and "releve him of his peyne" (73, 77), perhaps by authorizing the king's grant "That to som beter estat he [Chaucer] may atteyne" (79).

It is ironic because she, who controls earthly wealth and status, here seems to be judged and controlled by three mortal princes; it is

also ironic because she concedes to the Pleintif what he seems not to ask for, given his defiance of Fortune and his claim of self-reliance. Chaucer may be suggesting one wins one's case against Fortune only when one refuses to allow her power over one's values—a variation on the "Death, thou shalt die" paradox. Further, because the controlling princes similarly obey reason's dictates and not their appetites, the poem implies, they also will defy Fortune and hence "control" her—like the Pleintif both microcosm and subject—within the macrocosm of the state. Thus the envoy of Fortune signals her defeat and loss and the double triumph of the Pleintif, who wins spiritually because he spurns materialistic values and who will also win materially: he will do so because by her own account Fortune has lost the suit and must pay damages and because these princes, who spurn materialistic values (or so Chaucer hopes), will generously grant him some respite from his poverty by signing authorization for Richard's grant. The intricacies of the poem's argument ingeniously reverse the positions of Pleintif and Fortune at the end, and the poet, in turning it into a "begging" poem, thereby exposes his real purpose—to gain money through the voice of Fortune. The reader, finally, is left to judge the "case": does the poet defy Fortune as he says he does, or is he in fact bound to materialistic values?

"Lak of Stedfastnesse"[10] dramatizes the same Boethian theme as "The Former Age" in that it contrasts present wretchedness and mutability with a former time when "the world was so stedfast and stable" (1), but unlike that poem it does not elaborate upon a Boethian text (it merely begins from II, m. 8 as a starting point). In addition, like the begging poem "Fortune," it ends with an envoy addressed to a prince, here King Richard II. Perhaps for the latter reason it provides, not only a description of the "lack of steadfastness," but also an implicit solution contingent upon the office and ability of the king. The poem then turns upon the plane of correspondence between king and kingdom, microcosm and macrocosm, with reason in man representing the king or ruler in his little kingdom—King Richard II. Thus, in combining the subject matter of mutability and temporal decadence of the first poem with the debate technique of the second, this Boethian "begging poem" illustrates the fundamental ambivalence or doubleness of human nature, which at once laments the materialism of this world and displays it.

In the first stanza Chaucer indicates there is no *stedfastnesse,* or "fixed place-ness," because the world has been turned *up-so-doun* by the discrepancy between word and deed in the individual man, who subverts his reason for "mede and wilfulnesse" (6–7). The "world" here represents the macrocosm of human society which mirrors the

microcosm of man and is composed of many men interacting with one another. In the second stanza Chaucer indicates there is no *stedfastnesse* in society because this fallen and disordered individual man cannot co-exist harmoniously with his equally fallen neighbor:

> What maketh this world to be so variable
> But lust that folk have in dissensioun?
> For among us now a man is holde unable,
> But if he can, by som collusioun,
> Don his neighbour wrong or oppressioun.
> (8–12)

The cause of such division, once again, is "wilful wrecchednesse," which damages not only the microcosm but also the macrocosm through the bond of human relationships rent and sundered. In the third stanza the little world has grown into a large world peopled by vices, for the virtues have been exiled as if traitors. They include the secular virtues of *trouthe* and *resoun* and the Christian virtues of *vertu, pitee,* and mercy (15–17). The usurping ruler of this upside-down (unsteadfast) country is *cupiditas, radix malorum:* "Through covetyse is blent discrecioun." Will has overcome reason in this macrocosm. The progression of stanzas and hence of the development of the Boethian concept of mutability within the world actually depends upon Augustinian ideas about good and evil in the microcosm man, who is invited to love himself and his neighbor for the sake of God (*caritas*) rather than for themselves (*cupiditas*)—see, especially, *De doctrina christiana.*

The solution to the problem of lack of *stedfastnesse* here similarly conjoins sacred and secular values. In the envoy Richard II is asked to display secular and chivalric virtues: "desyre to be honourable," "love trouthe and worthinesse" (22, 27). In addition he must manifest the regal virtue of justice, both secular and sacred: "Shew forth thy swerd of castigacioun, / Dred God, do law" (26–27). Finally, he must "Cherish thy folk and hate extorcioun" (23) in the most Christian fashion, so that as a kind of priest he can "wed thy folk agein to stedfastnesse" (28). The priest who sets an example for his flock is also the king who must set an example for his people by ruling first himself well and then his kingdom: Chaucer again synthesizes two value systems in his *balade,* the Boethian and Christian, the secular and sacred, through the structural and thematic development of his argument.

"Gentilesse," like "Lak of Stedfastnesse" Boethian in its inspiration (from III, pr. 6 and m. 6) and Christian in its positive solution to the problem of mutability,[11] is similarly dramatic in its structural interplay of idea and image. The synthesis of Classical and Christian is

reminiscent of Dante's *Commedia,* to whose third *cantica* "Gentilesse" is in part indebted for the idea of true nobility. In canto sixteen of the *Paradiso,* Dante's great-great-grandfather Cacciaguida had explained to him the limitations of "poca nostra nobilità di sangue"; appropriately, in this *balade* Chaucer employs the image of father and heir to reveal the descent of true nobility—"vertuous noblesse" (17). Reference to "The firste stok" (the opening words) proves gently ironic as the poem develops, for the breeding the poet has in mind is the multiplication of virtues rather than children and the species. Interestingly, the poem lives through the various "generations" as it moves from stanza to stanza. The father of the first stanza is Christ, whose spiritual heir is the *gentil* man; in the second stanza the heirs have multiplied—one true (who loves *vertu*) and one false (who does not, "thogh he riche seme"). In the third stanza, the "old richesse" ("antica richezza" in Dante's *Convivio* 4.3, 45, 50, 54; 4.14, 5) in the third generation fathers *vyce,* but the true spiritual heir is unfortunately unable to bequeath his "vertuous noblesse" to his own heir (16–17). Only Christ as "firste fader in magestee" picks his heirs without siring them (a miracle like the Virgin Birth), and then only those "heyres that him queme" (20). The physical image of the "firste stok" then ultimately becomes spiritual: we have all literally descended from the first father, Adam, and more figuratively we continue to breed vices derived from him, but only through our virtues do we emulate our first spiritual father, Christ, and thus become his heir although he has not actually sired us. Whatever our social position, whether bishop, king, or queen—the "mytre, croune, or diademe" in the refrain—whatever our riches, we acquire *gentilesse* not through inheritance but through earning on our own.

In addition to the stock image which ties together the physical and spiritual levels of ancestry in the poem, Chaucer uses the concept of the Old and New Man to distinguish the false and true heir. In the first stanza the spiritual heir of Christ as "fader of gentilesse" must "folowe his trace, and alle his wittes *dresse* / Vertu to love [*to sewe* in most manuscripts], and vyces for to flee" (3–4, my italics). The clothing image suggests "putting on" the New Man of Christ, whatever clothes the individual actually wears: "Al were he mytre, croune, or diademe." In the second stanza the specific attributes of the *gentil* New Man are rehearsed: he is "ful of rightwisness, / Trewe of his word, sobre, pitous, and free, / Clene of his gost, and loved besinesse / Ayeinst the vyce of slouthe, in honestee" (9–11). The New Man does not necessarily wear fine clothes, boast a lofty social position, or possess riches, all material and social successes again connoted by the metonymies of the refrain, "Al were he mytre, croune,

or diademe." For, the very oldness of family line which frequently leads to aristocratic position, wealth, title, is the oldness of the Old Man: "Vyce may wel be heir to *old* richesse," Chaucer declares (15). Established wealth and lineage in themselves father *vyce*—perhaps pride in name, position, or wealth. True nobility belongs to a spiritual family outside social rank and class. There is no virtue in "oldness" but only in "newness," not the newness of riches or of members of the court newly-pleasing to the King but the newness of a life of "vertuous noblesse." Such a quality "is appropred unto no degree" but to all those who please Christ. The poem's brilliance consists of its ability to compress dramatically opposed concepts of nobility and inheritance through the image of the father as "stock," the typology of the father as Adam and Christ, and the paradox of the spiritual father as Son, the Old Man as New Man. The singularity of the father who cannot beget expresses, as an oxymoron, the resolution of the paradox of the poem.

Like the other lyrics, "Truth" is indebted to Boethius (both for individual lines and for the general Boethian counsel), although it is dominated by a single controlling Christian image and idea, that of the meek beast of burden. While this was the most popular of all the lyrics (if the number of extant manuscripts is any gauge), no study has yet fully comprehended Chaucer's use of the beast image within the poem. The controlling image of the beast appears in the "beste" of line 18 and in the word *vache* of the envoy, which appears in only one manuscript.[12] *Vache* apparently refers to the name of Sir Philip La Vache, who married Elizabeth, the daughter of Chaucer's friend Sir Lewis Clifford; his crest was a cow's hoof and his home was called "La Vache."[13] Vache's financial setback in 1386–90 supposedly so worried Chaucer that he advised him to attain "hevenlich mede" (27) through prayer—not only heavenly reward but a meadow, heavenly enough to a *vache* or cow.[14] For Chaucer wishes his friend to understand the difference between true and false felicity and live accordingly: "And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede." The refrain in this Boethian *balade* is actually taken from John 8:32: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Once again the wisdom of the Boethian moral is conjoined with the Christian, here an adage from the Gospel, in an attempt to harmonize the secular and the sacred, the philosophical and the biblical.

Specifically, man frees himself when he understands the falseness of that felicity stemming from trust in fame, success, social position, wealth, good health. He must avoid the court throng ("Flee fro the press" [1]), money-grubbing ("For hord hath hate" [3]), and social climbing ("and climbing tikelnesse" [3]), for the throng suffers envy

of the successful man ("Prees hath envye" [4]) and the successful man blinds himself because of his prosperity ("and wele blent overal" [4]—perhaps also a pun on the "wheel" of Fortune). Thus to "dwelle with sothfastnesse" (1) Vache should instead "Reule wel thyself," presumably by controlling will through reason, in order "that other folk canst rede" (6).

Such Boethian counsel is easily wed to Christian doctrine. If man ignores the "croked" nature of this world (8) and his own temptation to straighten it, he can become a pilgrim who will instead "Know thy countree, look up, thank God of al," and pursue the "heye wey" up to that country (19–20). It is his *gost* or soul that leads him (20), as the specific suggestions of the envoy make clear:

> Crye him mercy, that of his hy goodnesse
> Made thee of noght, and in especial
> Draw unto him, and pray in general
> For thee, and eke for other, hevenlich mede.
> (24–27)

The image of the *beste* allows Chaucer to punctuate this serious Boethian-Christian counsel with philosophic levity about the nature of man as both pilgrim *gost* and *beste*. Note that man is advised to "Flee fro the press," that is, the pushing, shoving throng, as if this herd consisted of cattle and not people (1, 4). The *hord* of line 3 may well mean a herd of such cattle as well as hoarding of wealth; cowlike, man should "*Savour* no more than thee *bihove* shal" (5), or enjoy only whatever fodder and grass he needs as he moves from hoof to hoof. In addition he should not kick against the pricks ("Be war also to sporne ayeyns an al" [11]). He should accept what *is* with bovine placidity, or "buxumnesse" (15). Because this world is a wilderness the beast is invited to leave his stall ("Forth, beste, out of thy stal" [18]) and follow the "heye wey" behind his *gost* in obedient, oxlike fashion. He will thus arrive at the *hevenlich mede* or meadow (27), his true *hoom*. The image of the beast patient in the midst of adversity beautifully captures the nature of the spiritual state of the true pilgrim intent on ignoring this world for the heavenly reward of the Other World. Ironically, however, such a pilgrim achieves his reward only by controlling his bestial appetites through rational governance. The poem explicitly mentions as sins to be avoided avarice (*hord*), wrath (*hate*), envy (*envye*) and, implicitly, sloth (through lauding the "Gret reste" of "litel besinesse" [10]), and gluttony (by advising the consumption of "no more than thee bihove shal" [5]). The entire *balade* constitutes a lesson on the chief sin of pride: man must realize he is, after all, only a *beste* and accept his lot humbly. He must

know himself: "And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede." Lies and sin shackle man in his stall, but truth and virtue free him to journey homeward on his *pilgrimage.* Chaucer here turns the conventional image of man as beast and angel upside down to epitomize, through the humble *beste,* man's ideal state as a pilgrim, and in so doing he unites the Boethian and Christian levels of the poem's message. More importantly he establishes the double nature of man which his most complex lyrics celebrate through their dramatic contrast of voices.

Within this group of five short poems Chaucer shifts from a strictly Boethian adaptation in the first, "The Former Age," to a much more complex intertwining of Boethian ideas in the last, "Truth." From the secular condemnation of the state of the world Chaucer moves to a more explicitly Christian, or, specifically, Augustinian point of view in the more sophisticated poems. The development is subtle: three of the poems focus on the lamentable state of Chaucer's world, and within it the sway of Fortune over all. "The Former Age" dramatizes Boethian themes through contrasting images, "Fortune" through contrasting points of view in its two speakers, and "Lak of Stedfastnesse" through combining ideas and techniques drawn from the previous poems to contrast their Boethian problem with a more Christian (Augustinian) solution. "Truth" and "Gentilesse" as well offer Christian solutions to the problem of this mutable world defined in the other poems, but in so doing they also undercut their serious tone through incongruous images and diction that reveal a doubleness of voice, and thereby underscore the more fundamental psychological doubleness of man Chaucer portrays in form and subject throughout his works. This doubleness Chaucer might have found in Boethius, given the double-nature of the protagonist, dispirited and desperate at the beginning of the *Consolation* and calm and rational at the end, and of the *prosimetrum,* a mixture of prose and poetry, which in its very form suggests conflict and division.

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1. The popularity of these moralistic poems is not surprising. It has been speculated that the later broadside ballad with its moral or didactic nature grew out of the literary French *balade* form adapted by the English. The popularity of Chaucer's moral *balades* may provide support for this argument. See Albert B. Friedman, "The Late Medieval Ballade and the Origin of Broadside Balladry," *MÆ,* 17 (1958), 95-110.

2. Dates used in this essay are taken for the most part from John Koch, *Geoffrey Chaucers Kleinere Dichtungen: nebst Einleitung, Lesarten, Anmerkungen and einem Wörterverzeichnis* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1928), pp. 4–17 especially. But there is no agreement in regard to dates for most of the short poems. While many critics accept the

1380's as a rough time frame for these five, J. Norton-Smith believes "The Former Age" and "Lak of Stedfastnesse" were written in the late 1390's (see "Chaucer's *Etas Prima, MÆ,* 32 [1963], 117–24); and most recently, Heiner Gillmeister has revived the argument that "Truth" is a deathbed (hence late 1390's) lyric, in *Discrecioun: Chaucer und die Via Regia* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1972), pp. 200–13.

3. "The Former Age" draws upon Book II, meter 5; "Fortune" dramatizes Book II, prose 1–4 and 8; "Lak of Stedfastnesse" begins from Book II, meter 8 as a starting point; "Gentilesse" is inspired by Book III, prose 6 and meter 6; and "Truth" is specifically indebted to many passages—II, prose 5.15ff.; II, prose 4.96–101; II, prose 2.51–57; II, prose 1.91–94; I, prose 5.8–25; III, prose 12.51ff.; IV, prose 1, meter 1, and prose 4; V, prose 1 and 2, meter 4 and 5; I, meter 7.13ff.; IV, prose 1.64ff. See F. N. Robinson's notes in his second edition of the *Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961); B. L. Jefferson, *Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius* (Princeton: University Press, 1917), pp. 90–91, "The Former Age"; pp. 57–60, 134–45, "Fortune"; pp. 106–07, "Lak of Stedfastnesse"; pp. 94–101, "Gentilesse"; and pp. 104–19, "Truth." For this and other sources see the Variorum Chaucer, vol. 5: *The Minor Poems,* ed. George B. Pace and Alfred David (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1980), pp. 49–52, 67–72, 77–79, 91–92, and 103–05.

4. In the ninth century we find the anonymous commentaries of Saint Gall and Remigius of Auxerre, in the twelfth century those of Guillaume de Conches and the Erfurt Commentator. In the fourteenth century there was a burgeoning of commentary, initiated by Nicholas Trevet around 1314, followed by eight others: Tholomaeus de Asinariis, Guillaume d'Aragon, the False Thomas Aquinas, all in the earlier part of the century, and in the later decades Pierre d'Ailly, Guillermus de Cortumelia, Pietro da Muglio, Giovanni Travesio, and Dionysius the Carthusian. In the fifteenth century there were only two commentaries, those by Arnoul Greban and Josse Bade d'Assche. The popularity of Nicholas Trevet's Latin commentary, probably known to Chaucer, is attested by the fact that mythological glosses from it were added by Thomas Richard to the 1410 English verse translation of Boethius by John Walton. For an overview see especially Pierre Courcelle, *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire: Antécédents et postérité de Boèce* (Paris; Études Augustiniennes, 1967).

5. See the Variorum Chaucer edition of Pace and David, p. 92, for the excellent table of correspondences between the poem and all the sources mentioned except the *Ecloga Theoduli* and the Boethius commentaries.

6. See Norton-Smith, pp. 117–24. Other studies of the poem are slight—a discussion of its irregular rhyme scheme in lines 41–48 in J. Burke Severs, "Two Irregular Chaucerian Stanzas," *MLN,* 64 (1949), 306–09; a more accurate text in George B. Pace, "The True Text of 'The Former Age,' " *MS,* 23 (1961), 363–67; and an identification of the Ovidian source of its last two lines in Raymond Preston, " 'Poyson, Manslauhtre, and Mordre in Sondry Wise,' " *N&Q,* 195 (1950), 95. For a summary of the critical problems and a helpful introduction, see Pace and David, pp. 91–92.

7. All references to Chaucer derive from the F. N. Robinson edition. See the Variorum Chaucer edition of Pace and David for the complete textual apparatus.

8. This poem has been analyzed only infrequently. For textual criticism, see Victor Langhans, *Untersuchungen zu Chaucer* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1918), pp. 247–52; and Robert E. Nichols, Jr., "Chaucer's *Fortune, Truth,* and *Gentilesse,*" *Speculum,* 44 (1969), 46–50; for biographical and political allusions, see Margaret Galway, "Chaucer Among Thieves," *TLS* (April 20, 1946), p. 187; and Edna Rideout, "Chaucer's 'Beste Frend,' " *TLS* (February 8, 1947), p. 79. For its place in discussions of the concept of Fortune in Chaucer and throughout the Middle Ages, see Howard R. Patch, "Chaucer and Lady Fortune," *MLR,* 22 (1927), 377–88, esp. 381–83, and *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1927); and Karl Hammerle, "Das Fortunamotiv von Chaucer bis Bacon," *Anglia,* 65 (1941), 87–100. For a summary of the criticism and a helpful introduction, see also the Variorum edition by Pace and David, pp. 103–05.

9. Only in the unique line 76 is there support for understanding the "Princes" as the three dukes, two of whom had to authorize grants made by Richard II—"At my requeste, as three of you or tweyne," the line reads. If it refers to the Privy Council ordinance, then this line (or possibly the whole envoy) must have been written after March 8, 1390. See Pace and David, p. 104.

10. Textual criticism of "Lak of Stedfastnesse" can be found in Lucius Hudson Holt, "Chaucer's 'Lac of Stedfastnesse': A Critical Text," *JEGP*, 6 (1907), 419–31; George B. Pace, "Four Unpublished Chaucer Manuscripts," *MLN*, 23 (1948), 457–62; and the Variorum volume of Pace and David. For a date (in the nineties rather than in the eighties) and Deschamps as a possible source, see Haldeen Braddy, "The Date of Chaucer's *Lak of Stedfastnesse*," *JEGP*, 36 (1937), 481–90. For a literary parallel see J. E. Cross, "The Old Swedish *Trohetsvisan* and Chaucer's *Lak of Stedfastnesse*—A Study in a Mediaeval Genre," *Saga-Book*, 16 (1965), 283–314. For discussion of diction and word choice see A. Wigfall Green, "Structure of Three Minor Poems by Chaucer," *Studies in English* (*University of Misissippi*), 4 (1963), 79–82. For a summary of the criticism and a helpful introduction, see also Pace and David, pp. 77–79.

11. Note, however, that George McGill Vogt has cited passages from a variety of medieval texts to prove the universality of the theme of *gentilesse* in the Middle Ages: see "Gleanings for the History of a Sentiment: Generositas Virtus, Non Sanguis," *JEGP*, 24 (1925), 102–24. There has been little written on this poem: see Green, "Structure of Three Minor Poems," pp. 79–82; and the helpful critical introduction in Pace and David, pp. 67–72. Textual studies include those by Norman Davis, "Chaucer's *Gentilesse:* A Forgotten Manuscript, with some Proverbs," *RES*, n. s., 20 (1969), 43–50; Nichols, pp. 46–50; and the Variorum volume of Pace and David.

12. For a discussion of the envoy, see John M. Manly, "A Note on the Envoy of Truth," *MP*, 11 (1913–14), 226; for textual and exegetical problems concerning the *vache*, see David E. Lampe, "The Truth of a 'Vache': The Homely Homily of Chaucer's 'Truth,' " *PLL*, 9 (1973), 311–14. The Boethian image of man as a divine beast suggests to Lampe the symbol of the evangelist: *vacca* or *vache* means ox. But Alfred David responds that *vacca* is a feminine form of *bos* (ox) and always means "cow"; further, Lampe ignores the fact of the appearance of "vache" in a unique envoy, one of only thirty manuscripts. See David, "The Truth about 'Vache,' " *ChauR*, 11 (1977), 334–37; for a summary of critical problems and a helpful introduction, see Pace and David, pp. 50–51.

13. Edith Rickert, " 'Thou Vache,' " *MP*, 11 (1913–14), 209–25. However, Gillmeister has suggested that the name Vache does not address Sir Philip but does allude exegetically to Gregory the Great's commentary on 1 Samuel (1 Kg) 6:12, and the "heye wey" to the *via directa* of heavenly contemplation (pp. 202–05). More recently, Gillmeister has discovered the name Vache (in conjunction with "leve") translates the Old French "reis, vache!"—which is (e)Chavsier spelled backwards: see *Chaucer Newsletter*, 2:1 (1980), 13–14.

14. James F. Ragan, "The *hevenliche mede* in Chaucer's *Truth*," *MLN*, 68 (1953), 534–35. For a brief analysis of word choice and diction elsewhere in the poem see Green, "Structure of Three Minor Poems," pp. 79–82; and also the helpful introduction in the Variorum edition of Pace and David, pp. 49–52.