Troilus and criseyde in comparison to hippolytus

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In Troilus and Criseyde, a poem which presents tragedy as a necessary component of love, Chaucer explains that fortune, the planets, and free will all control the fall of the protagonist. These forces, none of which lead to his ultimate benefit, exist in two different forms, forces aligned with human control, and forces controlled by the divine. Similarly, the Decameron identifies Fortune as a product of the divine's will, interchangeable with the uses of the words Nature, Fate, or God. In Greek plays, the inability to manufacture one's own fortune leaves a character often with ill fate. Specifically, in Hippolytus, rejection of the divine's will is returned with an abundance of persecution, as shown by Phaedra's pitiful demise. Between Troilus and Criseyde, the Decameron, and Hippolytus, the opposing forces of Fortune versus human choice are presented as the sole cause of tragedy in a protagonist's life.

In order to analyze aspects of Fortune in the respective texts, it is pertinent to understand the understand its most universally accepted definition. The most significant example, yet not the most obvious, comes from Troilus and Criseyde, where the text says, " But, O Fortune, Executrice of wierdes" (3. 617). The word " wyrd", a product of Anglo-Saxon culture, was understood as relating to fate, or personal destiny. Yet in stories such as Beowulf or Troilus and Criseyde, the protagonists and supporting characters show loyal faith in " wyrd". This idea of Fortune ran parallel with Christian beliefs that man should have faith in God and his grace but was often equated with similar beliefs. In fact, wyrd is not under the control of God, who is actively attempting to achieve his divine goals, but works in a way which humans cannot understand, and is exclusive of all deities' influence. Wyrd, or

Fortune, is not a work of gods, though characters may interpret ill fortune as consequence of the divine.

With this being said, Troilus and Criseyde is not a battle between man and God, it is man's disagreement with his own destiny. Troilus constantly laments his demise throughout Book IV, while he is lower on the Ferris Wheel upon which Fate operates. Troilus says, " Fortune! Allas the while! What have I don? What have I thus agylt? How myghtestow for rowthe me begile?" (4. 260-263). He blames Fortune for his adversity, though he is quick to direct his lamentations towards gods further in the passage. For example, Troilus begs the god of love that he not " repeal" his grace (293-294) in book IV as well. An explanation for Troilus' constant pleadings to Fortune is because of the concept of the wheel, which the reader was introduced to. Gods were not introduced as the composer of a human's score, but the image of Fortune was. It was explained when a man is at the top of Fortune's wheel, he is blessed, and considered to be in good fortune. Yet, he is at the mercy of the wheel and can lose favor at any time. Book I warns that Troilus will move " from woe to joy, and then out of joy", meaning that his fate leads to his demise. It is then appropriate to project blame not on the divine, but on a third-party concept which no entity may control. Troilus, a staunch believer of the divine's inclusion in his troubled life, often only addresses Fortune with regard to his concerns.

Fortune's liability for all sorts of catastrophe is very apparent in the Decameron, specifically on Day Two. The assigned topic of Day Two is " changes of fortune", which leads to stories of volatile swings between favorable and unfavorable chance. In Day Two, the unpredictability of human

affairs is highlighted, with characters often finding then losing (or vice versa), wealth or love. In many stories, fortunes of characters are so twisted such that their true demise or climaxes cannot be determined until the full story is read. For example, the tale of Andreuccio the horse-dealer is explained with shifts in luck analogous to a pendulum. While in the wheel of Fortune's favor, Andreuccio is tricked that he has a long-lost sister, falls through the floor, and is made stuck a tomb, but he is led between situations by seemingly promising propositions. He is often led through the premise of being made prosperous or content with the outcome of an action, but instead, the opposite occurs. Day Two reflects a complex of nature taking the course, as opposed to the " divine will" explanations read in the introduction. Boccaccio, as mentioned before, ran Fate and Fortune along parallel tracks, equating the divine's will with how humans ended up on Fortuna's wheel. Boccaccio introduced the work by telling his readers that the plague was caused either by " heavenly bodies" (6) or that it's a " punishment signifying God's righteous anger at our iniquitous way of life" (8).

Though not similar in its writing structure, the parallels been the Decameron and Troilus and Criseyde are heavily apparent. Both works have the heavy emphasis on God and/or the divine's inclusion in man's predetermined fate, but fortune is described as a third variable which neither mortal nor the immortal can control. While Cupid may shoot a character with an arrow in either story, the true cause of later events is completely due to a sort of educated coincidence. While an educated guess is the attempt made to predict an outcome based off of values given, an educated coincidence

seems to be the result of multiple unrelated and uncorrelated factors yielding a result which could have been predicted by characters, but usually are not.

Greek plays heavily emphasize the importance of the divine's will in every character's lives, but there many passive implications of fortune in the texts. Hippolytus tells a similar tale to that of other Greek tragedies, a character's greatness, no matter how righteous they made be, violates a law of fate set by the divine, who in turn dole out consequences generously. Hippolytus' superhuman resistance to the force of desire causes the gods to take notice. Desire, which causes the fate of human life, is what ruins Phaedra from within. The role of Fortune is often overlooked in this story, because of its structure, yet the relationship between man and the gods is very central to the idea of the wheel. Hippolytus' refusal to worship Aphrodite was a violation of the proper respect a goddess like she deserved, but it very difficult to distinguish if Hippolytus was at the top or the bottom of the wheel when he initiated the entire conflict. If Fortune is viewed as a third party, uninfluenced by any mortal or divine, he was upholding his own dignity, which implies that he was on the top of the wheel. This story is not one of volatile, pendulum-like changes in Fortune like Day Two of Decameron, but it offered a view of how Fortune can continuously be unfavorable to you. This also yields the question if the divine is subject to Fortune since they do not influence outcomes of such happenstance. And if the divine is subject to Fortune, where on the wheel they stayed throughout the play.

Troilus and Criseyde can be compared to Hippolytus as well, because of the heavy emphasis on a god's role in human fate. Fate and Fortune are heavily

implied to be somewhat related to gods, which are in actuality, not able to influence fortune in any way. In both texts, Troilus views his unrequited love as fate, and Phaedra views the feelings which she cannot act upon as her future which she cannot change. While this perception is reasonable, Fortune holds more responsibility than fate in both texts. Fate is a palpable concept which can point to a single source as the initiator. Fortune cannot be blamed on any party. Troilus cannot blame Criseyde' humanity for changing her romantic feelings for him, once she was shipped away, while Hippolytus cannot blame the gods for Phaedra taking her own life. Phaedra's suicide was not necessarily her fate, the combination of other factors in addition to her feelings for her son led her to take her own life. These " other factors" were a direct result of her positioning on the theoretical " wheel of Fortune".

Many ancient tales, poems, and plays often stress fate as the sole cause of the human condition, while equating their downfall with the misfortune they had. Troilus and Criseyde, The Decameron, and Hippolytus all prove Fortune's greater role in the demise of certain characters. Through these stories, it is understood that fate is almost always directly attributed to gods, while Fortune is a variable unchanged by mortal or immortal actions. The downfall of a protagonist is not based solely on the divine, but also the " wyrd", an external source which causes pain and suffering.

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