

Anderson
378.2

Chaucer and the French Dichotomy:

A Study of the French Influence on
the Poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer

3301 T MUL

English 296
Honors Thesis
1962

William R. Anderson, Jr.

William R. Anderson, Jr.



Rondel

Blanche com lis, plus que rose vermeille,
Resplendissant com rubis d'Oriant,

En remirant vo beaute nonpareille,
Blanche com lis, plus que rose vermeille,

Suis je ravis que mes cuers toudis veille
A fin que serve à loy de fin amant,
Blanche com lis, plus que rose vermeille,
Resplendissant com rubis d'Oriant.

Guillaume de Machaut

Preface

The poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer has traditionally been divided into three periods, delineated by the influence of the predominant style with which he worked in each period. The first of these, from his earliest writings (probably around 1365) until 1372, is the French period. After 1372, when he made a diplomatic trip to Italy and became exposed to the poetry of Boccaccio, Dante, and Petrarch, and before 1386, there falls the Italian period. The last period, from 1386 until his death in 1400, is called the English period. During this time Chaucer supposedly wrote his most original work.

This system is inaccurate and inadequate. Chaucer went through no single English or French period. He was at all times an English poet, writing for English readers. And at all times he showed a definite French tinge in his writings. The Italian influence, while definite, was never as strong as Chaucer's French heritage and English poetic aims.

The purpose of my paper is to show this French heritage, its background, and its influence on the poetry of Chaucer. To do so completely would entail several volumes. Consequently I discuss general themes, and then show specific influences in selected works only.

I have divided this influence into two distinct traditions, and have treated each one separately. I first talk about the tradition of courtly romance, and its influence on Chaucer through Guillaume de Lorris and his followers, Machaut, Froissart, and Deschamps. This influence is shown primarily in Chaucer's early works and lesser poems. As specific illustrations I have chosen three short lyric poems, Complaint to his Lady, Merciles Beaute, the Complaint of Venus, and the longer poem, the Book of the Duchess.

The second tradition is that of the bourgeois literature, the esprit gaulois. It is represented by Jean de Meun, co-author with Lorris of the Roman de la Rose. This tradition had its influence on the later works of Chaucer, particularly the Canterbury Tales. As specific illustrations of its use in Chaucer's poetry I have chosen three selections from the Tales, the description of the friar in the General Prologue, the Summoner's Tale, and the Wife of Bath's Prologue.

It is my sincere hope that this severe limitation of specific discussion has enabled me to be more detailed in my analysis, and to avoid superficiality.

Table of Contents

	Page
Preface.....	1
Contents.....	iii
I. Chaucer's England and the French Heritage.....	1
II. The <u>Roman Courtois</u> : The Development of the Courtly Tradition.....	8
III. Chaucer and the Courtly Tradition.....	23
IV. Jean de Meun and the Bourgeois Tradition.....	43
V. Conclusion.....	59
List of Works Consulted.....	65

I

Following the Battle of Hastings, England became that part of Normandy which lay across the Channel from France. It remained so throughout the High Middle Ages, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, drenched in a culture and atmosphere essentially French. French became the official language of the land, spoken at court and in all the halls of the new Norman aristocracy. English (Anglo-Saxon dialects) was for peasants. But as the fourteenth century broke, so did medievalism. The European community was becoming a series of nations, with England and France in the forefront, each struggling to control the other. England, once subject to the French throne under the feudal system, was her own mistress, and the English king was now claiming the French throne in his own right. War broke out finally, over Gascony, the last Anglo-Norman holding in France. This was the Hundred Years' War, which began in 1337 and continued sporadically until the middle of the next century.¹

Into this tumultuous age, during which England "passed through the first stages of her long journey out of medievalism and came to the foothills of the modern world,"² Geoffrey Chaucer

¹ Robert S. Hoyt, Europe in the Middle Ages (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1957), pp. 521-527.

² Robert Dudley French, A Chaucer Handbook (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1947), p. 1.

was born. The Gallic heritage of his country, especially in letters, as well as the contact between England and France necessitated by the fighting of a war, had an almost overwhelming influence on this "father of English poetry". Obvious biographical facts show that Chaucer was reared in a predominantly Normanized court ruled by a French-speaking monarch. His schooling was in French and Latin, not English, and his earliest existing original compositions were modelled after the most popular French fashions in his contemporary literature.³ England had no particularly outstanding poetic tradition of its own, and the aspiring English writer worked in the tradition of France of the past few centuries. Indeed, in that he was not alone:

In a large sense...twelfth-century French...was the seminal vernacular literature of the high Middle Ages. It is behind Dante and Petrarch, Boccaccio and Machaut, the dolce stil nuovo, Minnesang, and English and German romance. Thus had Chaucer's French not been so good..., nor his particular social milieu so French, he would still very likely have been writing poetry of a French tradition...⁴

But why was Chaucer's French "so good", and just what was his "social milieu"? Without dwelling on biographical detail,

³ Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), p. 5.

⁴ Muscatine, pp. 5-6.

this paper must necessarily say something about Chaucer's life. He was born, according to his own testimony, in approximately 1340,⁵ although this is a rather nebulous date. His father, John, was a wine merchant in London, with a prosperous business and some standing in the court, as well as a modest career in public service, which Geoffrey was to continue. Thus John was enabled to apprentice his son to a noble household, to be educated in the chivalric tradition, the household of Elizabeth, Duchess of Clarence.⁶ With this service began his immersion in the French literary current which flowed through English society. Two years later, in 1359, Edward III of England invaded France in one of the surges of the Hundred Years' War. With him surged young Geoffrey, who was captured at Rheims and soon ransomed by the King himself, at a rate of £16, a price worthy even of a fine charger, not to mention a faithful page.⁷ From this time until 1367, Chaucer disappeared from sight. In that year he reappeared and began, as a Valet of the King's Bedchamber, his lifelong career of public service to the royal household, having in the mean time got married. This career included diplomatic missions to France, Flanders, and Italy and the offices of: Comptroller

⁵ F.N. Robinson, editor, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933), p. xix.

⁶ John Livingston Lowes, Geoffrey Chaucer and the Development of His Genius (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), p. 50.

⁷ French, p. 49.

of the port of London, and Comptroller of petty customs; Justice of the Peace for Kent; Member of Parliament for Kent; Clerk of the King's Works at Westminster and Windsor (including being a member of a commission to repair the banks of the Thames between Woolwich and Greenwich). During this time he received several pensions from the king.⁸ This career was of great importance to Chaucer's writings because it meant that " (his) earlier years...were spent in circles saturated with French culture".⁹ In addition, his frequent travels in France, whether as part of an invading army or as a diplomatic envoy, were sure to bring him into contact with many of the leading French poets of the day. During his captivity at Rheims, for instance:

By a curious coincidence, the old poet Guillaume de Machaut was in all probability at the same time shut up in Reims, besieged by the English, and was training there in the art of verse - making a youth, destined to make illustrious the name of Eustache Deschamps.¹⁰

Chaucer's wife Philippa had been a demoiselle of the chamber of Queen Philippa. When the queen died in 1369, Mme. Chaucer found employment of the same sort with Constance, wife of John of Gaunt, a son of Edward III and a strong political power in

⁸ All the information on Chaucer's career in public service is from: Robert K. Root, The Poetry of Chaucer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), pp. ix - x.

⁹ Lowes, p. 40.

¹⁰ Emile Legouis, Geoffrey Chaucer, translated by L. Lailavoix (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1913) p. 7.

England.¹¹ The poet came, therefore, under the protection of this worthy, which proved not only practical (Philippa received a pension from Duke John of ten pounds annually in 1372, and in 1374, Chaucer himself was presented the same annuity¹²), but also provided Chaucer ample exposure to the zephyr breezes of French literature. Sir Oton de Graunson, for instance, was a leading poet, and nobleman, of Savoy, and was thus an ally of England, but one with a strong French heritage. In 1374, Graunson entered the service of John of Gaunt:

His appearance in the Lancastrian household would have placed him at once en rapport with Geoffrey Chaucer, who was then staying with Gaunt at the Savoy...by 1374 the two poets would be closely associated as fellow members of the Lancastrian party (followers of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster).¹³

A wealthy and noble patron was of course a great asset, almost a necessity, to the medieval writer, but John of Gaunt was even more to Chaucer; he was a good friend, and even eventually a brother-in-law, marrying Philippa's sister Katherine Swynford, long his mistress.¹⁴ Most important, however, he

¹¹ French, p. 50.

¹² Robinson, p. xx.

¹³ Haldeen Braddy, Chaucer and the French Poet Graunson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1947), pp. 41-42.

¹⁴ French, p. 51.

was an opportunity for the poet to meet representatives of French letters.

After Edward III's death in 1377, Richard II became king, and at once Chaucer's offices in the royal service were reconfirmed. In Richard's service he made one, possibly more, trips to France, as well as to Italy. After his final mission abroad, to Calais in 1387, he settled down to domestic tasks, which do not concern this subject. In 1400, on the generally accepted date of October 25, he died, and was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.¹⁵

It is evident that the entire literary fabric of Chaucer's time was French, especially so in the courtly circles in which he moved. The phrase "French influence" is almost misleading. While Chaucer was the true embodiment of English poetry, he was nevertheless in a sense a French poet, not so much influenced by French tradition as an outside force, as naturally growing into the existing manner of writing. It is the Italian influence that he shows so strongly which is a real outside influence. The fact that Chaucer was quite English in his overall writings is really more surprising than that he was greatly

¹⁵ The entire preceding paragraph is paraphrased from Robinson, p. xxii - xxv.

influenced by French conventions. It took a good bit of originality on his part not to be wholly a French poet.

The most prominent source of the style of Chaucer's poetry...is not English, Latin, or Italian; his style is more compendiously and clearly described as stemming from the traditions originated and propagated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in France.¹⁶

¹⁶ Muscatine, p. 5.

II

The question that now arises is just what was the French tradition in which Chaucer was so deeply rooted? What was the general vein of the eleventh and twelfth century poetry which he so readily emulated? The answer is summed up in the phrase "courtly romance". This was the great literary expression of the refined age of chivalry of the late Middle Ages.

It was Chrétien de Troyes who, in the second half of the twelfth century, set up the model for the roman courtois. It is the story of knightly exploits, usually those of a knight errant in search of adventure, performed no longer on behalf of his liege lord but to enhance the glory of his lady-love. A large use is made of the Celtic supernatural element, giants, fairies, monsters. But the great element in the romances is the dominant rôle given to romantic love....Various psychological problems connected with love are treated in a more or less subtle manner according to the strict laws of courtoisie, governing courtly love.¹⁷

Before Chrétien de Troyes, the courtly tradition had found its start in the South of France in Provence. There, as early as the eleventh century, there had evolved a brilliant society, centered around several small ducal courts. In these courts, Woman held sway, and under her influence, great importance was given to social etiquette and the graces, with definite rules of conduct, especially in matters of love. In this society thrived the troubadours, wandering poets, many of them noblemen,

¹⁷ Robert F. Bradley and Robert B. Michell, Eight Centuries of French Literature (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951), p. 7.

whose lays idealized all the conventions of this romantic society.¹⁸ When Eleanor of Aquitaine came north to marry Louis VII, King of France, in the middle of the twelfth century,¹⁹ her troubadours came with her, as well as the whole concept of courtly love. These principles were soon adopted by the trouvères of northern France. These ideals, as expounded by Chrétien de Troyes and contemporaries, such as Andreas Capellanus,²⁰ are essentially these:

1. The whole basis of courtly love is sensual, physical love between the sexes, often illicit and adulterous. This is greatly due to the influence of the works of Ovid, whose Art of Love and other erotic works were greatly emulated by Andreas and other early writers of les romans courtois.²¹ This love is consequently often secret. In addition, because women supposedly held such a lofty position, no love too easily obtained was worthwhile.²²

¹⁸ William George Dodd, Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1913), p. 1.

¹⁹ Hoyt, pp. 266-267.

²⁰ Dodd, p.3.

²¹ Dodd, p. 3.

²² The entire paragraph above is paraphrased from Dodd, pp. 5-8.

2. Idealization and decorum combined to make of these illicit passions exalted virtues. The system demanded constancy. No true lover could be unfaithful; this was the worst possible breach of the system. No one was to choose a lover he or she would not be proud to marry. Mere voluptuousness for its own sake was vulgar; love, though sensual, nevertheless must bring out good in the individual:

Indeed, though according to the courtly ideas love is in essence sensual, and should be secret and furtive, yet it incited the lover to worthy deeds; it demanded of him nobility of character and moderation in all his conduct. It is a love evil at the heart of it, yet it is a love which "loses half its evil, by losing all its grossness".²³

3. The high and "dangerous", i.e. haughty, position of women in the system became refined to an extreme degree:

Idealization and formalization dominate the description of character as well....The ideal courtly lady has blond hair, a white unwrinkled forehead, a tender skin, arched (but not plucked) brows, gray (vair) eyes, well spaced, a straight, well-made nose, a small, round, full mouth, a sweet breath, and a dimpled chin... [She is rather tall] , with smooth, white neck, small hard breasts, a straight, flat back, and a certain broadness of hips.²⁴

4. In view of this creature of perfection, the poet would become entirely submissive, absolutely devoted. His love for her became the only important thing in his existence, and the slightest recognition from her was his absolute joy. Often he adored

²³ Dodd, p. 9.

²⁴ Muscatine, p. 18.

her as a goddess, willing to perform the most Herculean task merely for the slightest token, even to a hair from her head. The lover even went so far as to develop symptoms of love -- extreme suffering, swooning, sleeplessness, confusion in the presence of the lady, fear to express his love to her, and dread of detection.²⁵

5. The above-mentioned haughtiness in the lady, originating with the instinctive reluctance on the part of the lady to yield herself too easily, was exaggerated into a convention of disdain, capriciousness, and coldness. The poet pleaded for her mercy, but she met him in unabated rigor. This cold-shoulder convention became one of the key ideals of the vast majority of courtly romance, indeed of almost all French love poetry for the next four hundred years.²⁶

These were the basic essentials of courtly romance as it came to the thirteenth century. To these Provençal traditions, the writers of northern France added action, a hand-me-down from the chansons de geste of the previous century. These were sagas of knights at war, such as the Chanson de Roland, which dealt with battles, and heroic action. The merger of the courtly love theme with the deeds-of-derring-do tradition culminated in the

²⁵ Dodd, p. 13.

²⁶ Dodd, p. 12.

romans courtois of the thirteenth century. Chrétien de Troyes, of course, is the prime example, combining the Celtic legends of early knights and their heroic actions, la matière de Bretagne, with the courtly romantic tradition to produce long romans about the legendary Arthur of Britain, and his Knights of the Round Table, as well as the great medieval love story, Tristan et Iseult.²⁷ Other prominent poets, however, turned to Greek and Roman classics for their heroic action, which they then embroidered with romantic conventions:

The three great Latin epics, the Aeneid, the Thebaid, and the Pharsalia, though still accessible in the original, were far more widely known in Chaucer's century through the enormously popular twelfth-century romances, the Roman d'Eneas, the Roman de Thèbes, and Li Hystore de Julius Cesar.... And the story of the Trojan War, by way of two very early and curious psuedo-historical Latin narratives ascribed to a pair of mythical participants, Dictys Cretensis and Dares Phrygius, had undergone transformation in the Roman de Troie of Benoit de Saint Maure.²⁸

All these long poems followed essentially the conventions of courtly love, emphasizing in their action sequences the devotion of the hero to his lady-love, his willingness to die for her, and his quickness to battle evil knights and a variety of monsters so that he could come and swoon at her feet, trembling and quaking with love as he never did with fear.

²⁷ Bradley and Michell, p. 7.

²⁸ Lowes, p. 101.

One more important refinement was now added to the courtly romance. The formality of description which became conventional led to adoption of allegory in several of the writings. Thus the poet could fully idealize the qualities and aspects of love, the loved one, and the act of loving.

The stage was now set for the great tour de force of courtly romance, the work in which all the ideals and aspects of the romantic tradition reached their culmination. This work was the Roman de la Rose. Written in two sections by two different authors, with an interval of forty years between, the Rose was the masterpiece of the courtly-romance tradition. It was read by everyone who read at all in western Europe, and especially by Geoffrey Chaucer. Lowes called it "one of the half dozen books most closely woven into the very texture of his mind and art."²⁹ To Chaucer was long attributed the earliest English translation of this work. A raging dispute now exists among authorities as to the authenticity of all, or at least part, of the fragmentary translation attributed traditionally to Chaucer. The 7000-line partial translation is broken into three fragments, only one of which is now generally conceded to be Chaucer's work.³⁰ But whether he translated the Rose or not, Chaucer was assuredly familiar with it, both in French and in the fragmentary translation.

²⁹ Lowes, p. 75.

³⁰ French, p. 80.

It was almost solely through this acme of the roman courtois that he became familiar with the principles of courtly romance. It is doubtful that he read many of the earlier works, at least more than cursorily:

Did Chaucer explore French poetry [before] the Roman de la Rose? Very little, it seems, although for his Troilus, beside Boccaccio, he very probably made use of the Roman de Troie by Benoît de Saint-More, and had elsewhere possible reminiscences of Marie de France. But he does not appear to have been acquainted with the best of the French trouvères.³¹

The first author of the Rose was Guillaume de Lorris. About him we know almost nothing, save that he was a young poet when he wrote his portion of the Rose, around 1237.³² His portion of the poem, 4058 lines in the French version,³³ was less than a quarter of the 23,000-line total. But its reputation as the "great poetical well"³⁴ from which the age drew lyric inspiration was largely due to him. It was Lorris who set the style of the poem, with all the romantic conventions. Its second author, Jean de Meun, or Jean Clopinel, who wrote 18,000 lines, merely followed stylistically the framework. His influence was in matter, rather than in style. Meun, born at Meun-sur-Loire in the late thirteenth century, was evidently of lower-class heritage, whereas Lorris was of the courtly circles. It was

³¹ Legouis, p. 55.

³² Robinson, p. 564.

³³ Ernest Langlois, editor, La Roman de la Rose, by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, 5 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et Cie., 1920), II, p. 202.

³⁴ Legouis, p. 54.

reflected in their work:

...Guillaume de Lorris was a seer of 'such sights as youthful poets dream', and was himself a poet of delicate fancy and sensitiveness to beauty. Jean de Meun, on the other hand, was a disillusioned and caustic satirist, trenchant, ruthless, mordant, and far more alive to human follies than to youthful dreams.³⁵

Lorris, then, was in the mainstream of the romantic tradition, while Jean de Meun was something quite different. Since he has little to do with the courtly romance's effect on Chaucer, this paper will wait to deal with him in another section.

Lorris's Roman de la Rose is a dream allegory, not an original form, but one which he made extremely popular. As the poem opens, the poet is arguing for the ability of dreams to foretell real events. He then proceeds to tell of a dream he had as a youth. On a beautiful May morning, the dreamer dreams that he comes upon a beautiful garden, surrounded by a wall. Discovering a gate, he knocks, and is admitted by Idleness (Oyseuse), a beautiful lady. She tells him the garden belongs to Mirth (Dedit), and lets him wander. He happens upon Mirth and a party of friends, including Love, personified in an Ovidian³⁶ god with bows and arrows, capable of producing both good and bad qualities and emotions in their targets. The Dreamer comes upon a gorgeous rose (representing his lady love),

³⁵ Lowes, p. 77.

³⁶ Dodd, p. 16.

and is at that moment pierced with Love's arrows of good passion, courtly romantic sentiments. He becomes Love's slave, and is determined to pluck the Rose, which is surrounded by a hedge. He meets a youth, Fair Welcome (Bel-Acueil), who engages in assisting him to cross the hedge and attain his goal, in spite of the Rose's guardians, Dangier (haughtiness), Evil Tongue, Shame, and Fear, ever the enemies of courtly romance. Dangier, however, chases the pair away, and the Lover (as the Dreamer is now called) wanders in despair, counseled by Reason to forget his love and leave the garden. However, he rejects this advice, and is counseled by Ami, a faithful friend, to return and attempt to win Dangier over. Presenting himself as a hopeless slave of Love, the Lover succeeds in persuading Dangier to allow him to rejoin Fair Welcome, who immediately leads him back to the Rose. Venus then appears, representing sexual love, and the Lover kisses the Rose, awakening Jealousy, Shame, and Fear, who persuade Dangier to imprison Fair Welcome in a guarded tower. Without his ally, the Lover is at a loss, and bemoans his fate at being alienated from Fair Welcome, and thus from the Rose.³⁷

Translated into plain language, the elaborate allegory of the Romance becomes a simple tale. The lover "has beheld his beautiful lady and been charmed by her beauty, her grace, her courtesy; she has received him with gentleness, but when he declares his love, she grows alarmed. He gains at last the kiss which tells of her affection; but her parents, intervening, throw

³⁷ F.S. Ellis, translator and editor, The Romance of the Rose, Temple Classics, 3 vols. (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1940), pp. 1-145, xix - xxix.

obstacles between the lovers."³⁸

Lorris drew directly from the chief twelfth century trouvères for his work. From Andreas Capellanus he drew the cardinal virtues of the courtly lover, all of which Love teaches to the Dreamer, courtesy, humility, gaiety, generosity, constancy.³⁹ In lines 2076-2086, for instance, Love is condemning villainy (acts below the dignity of a gentleman, not necessarily evil):

«Vilanie premierement»
ce dist Amors, «vueil e comant
Que tu guerpisses senz reprendre,
Se tu ne viaus verr moi mesprendre.
Si maudi e escomenie
Toz ceus qui aiment vilainie:
Vilainie fait les vilains,
Por ce n'est par droiz que je l'ains,
Vilains est fel e senz pitie,
Senz servise e senz amitie.⁴⁰

Again, in lines 2240-2244, Love cautions:

Vueil je e comant que tu aies
En un seul leu tot ton ceur mis,
Si qu'il n'i soit mie demis,
Mais toz entiers, senz tricherie,
Car je n'ain pas moiteierie.⁴¹

With similar passages, Love points out to the Lover the pains and sorrows, as well as the pleasures, he will undergo:

Lors te vendront sospir e plaintes,
Frigons e autres dolors maintes;
En plurors senz seras destroiz,
Une eure chaux e autre frois...⁴²

³⁸ Dodd, p. 32. The inner quotation is from Dowden, A History of French Literature, New York, 1903, p. 35.

³⁹ Dodd, p. 28.

⁴⁰ Langlois, II, p. 107.

⁴¹ Langlois, II, p. 115.

⁴² Langlois, II, ll. 2275-2278, p. 116.

In reward for this constant process of sighing, complaining, freezing and burning up, the Lover will be able to dream of happiness with the loved one; of holding her

Entre tes bras trestoute nue,
Ausi con s'el fust devenue
Dou tot t'amie e ta compaigne...⁴³

Thus Lorris brought to completion feelings prominent before in French literature, a sort of codification of the principle expressed in the works of Chrétien de Troyes and Andreas Capellanus.⁴⁴ Lorris' part of the Rose was completed a century before Chaucer's birth. Was there a continuance of the courtly tradition in Chaucer's own fourteenth century? Indeed there was. In fact, there was little else:

The successors of Lorris in French poetry were long dominated by his influence, and the Romance of the Rose thus perpetuated the use of conventions which were already worn threadbare before it was written. Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries love-visions and love-lyrics in various forms were widely composed; love allegory was enormously cultivated...It is important...to observe that the courtly tradition was well represented by several poets - Machaut, Deschamps, Froissart, and Granson - by whom Chaucer was certainly influenced...⁴⁵

These poets wrote almost entirely in the romantic conventions, but their poetry was unfortunately just that - stylized convention, lacking for the most part the freshness and natural appeal

⁴³ Langlois, II, 11. 2439-2441, p. 124.

⁴⁴ Dodd, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Idem.

of the Roman de la Rose, but carrying a certain formal beauty, nevertheless. Their romances were written in various forms, most of which were initiated, but not necessarily invented, by Machaut. These included the dit, a long, roman-like poem, often in allegory, and usually in dream-sequence, often personalized by dedication to some supposed lady acquaintance of the author's; and the virelais and roundels, soft, sweet ballads full of languishing love sentiments.⁴⁶

Guillaume de Machaut was the direct linear descendant in the romantic tradition of Guillaume de Lorris. He was born with the fourteenth century, and was therefore about forty at Chaucer's birth. His life reads like that of Chaucer's knight; he fought all over Europe and the Middle East, wherever a Christian sword was needed. Machaut's longest poem celebrated the taking of Alexandria by Pierre Lusignan, King of Cyprus, at which siege the Canterbury Knight was present.⁴⁷ Machaut's poetry consisted chiefly of polished tales, sometimes lively and full of adventure, but more often long, drawn-out and full of superficial learning. He never soared, but his dependably long monologues on love and life were never unconscionably dull. At any rate, he had a very pronounced effect on Chaucer's early works:

At all events, Machaut's facile display of erudition

⁴⁶ Legouis, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁷ Lowes, pp. 72-73.

could not but impress the youthful Chaucer, who was by way of becoming vastly, and far from superficially learned himself.⁴⁸

Machaut played quite heavily on variations of Guillaume de Lorris's dream motif, especially in his La Fontaine Amoureuse and Le Dit dou Lyon, which Chaucer is said to have translated. It is no wonder that four of Chaucer's earlier poems have dream-sequence settings.⁴⁹ Machaut's poetry also had an almost overwhelming effect on French poets of Chaucer's own generation. Two of these, Jean Froissart and Eustache Deschamps, both of them within five years of Chaucer's own age, were the leading poets of their day, in France, and they were both pupils of Machaut. They were also both acquainted with Chaucer. Froissart was a cleric, whose life was not as exciting, perhaps, as Machaut's but whose major work, the Chronicles, a history of the past few centuries, and of the first half (all he had seen) of the Hundred Years' War, were as full of deeds of action and pageantry as his mentor's life.⁵⁰ More important, however, to our study are his romantic writings, particularly L'Espinette Amoureuse and Le Paradys d'Amour, conventionally dull romantic dits, which have the saving grace of brilliantly lyrical descriptions of actual experience inserted between the long Machautesque discourses.

There are few more charming passages in poetry than

⁴⁸ Lowes, p. 93.

⁴⁹ Lowes, pp. 86-87.

⁵⁰ Lowes, p. 75.

Froissart's account in L'Espinette Amoureuse of his childhood - of his love for all those who love dogs and birds; of his schoolboy gifts of a buckle, an apple, a pear, or a glass-set ring to pucelettes [little girls] who were jonettes [pretty little things] ;...There is nothing in Machaut which approaches in freshness and simplicity that exquisite tissue of childhood memories.⁵¹

Deschamps, who was a personal pupil of Machaut's,⁵² was, like to this tutor and to Chaucer, a poet, a soldier, a courtier, and an homme des affaires.⁵³ Of the three French poets, Deschamps was the closest to Chaucer. Whether they ever met in person is doubtful, but they were in correspondence with each other on several occasions. The Miroir de Mariage, Deschamps' best balade, he sent Chaucer to read.⁵⁴ Deschamps was much the most varied of the three, but he wrote in a strain derived more from Jean de Meun than from Guillaume de Lorris. Therefore his influence on Chaucer was not in the courtly tradition, and does not now concern us as directly as does that of his comrades.

Of Chaucer's friendship with the Savoyard poet Oton de Graunson some mention is made above.⁵⁵ It was that poet whom Chaucer termed, in the Lenvoy to his Complaint of Venus, the "flour of hem that make in Fraunce".⁵⁶ However, despite this supreme

⁵¹ Lowes, p. 94.

⁵² See footnote 10, above.

⁵³ Lowes, p. 74.

⁵⁴ Lowes, p. 96.

⁵⁵ See note 13.

⁵⁶ Robinson, The Complaint of Venus, l. 82, p. 538.

tribute (made chiefly, one suspects, because this Complaint consists of three of Graunson's rondeaus translated)⁵⁷, Graunson remained a relatively minor poetic influence on the English bard, in comparison with the writers of the Roman de la Rose, and Machaut, except that he did provide ample opportunity for Chaucer to see a trouvère in operation, as he assuredly must have written from time to time in the presence of Chaucer, and they must also have exchanged poetic theories and ideas with their political interchanges in the House of Lancaster.

Thus we see the development of the courtly romantic tradition, and its transmission through Guillaume de Lorris's Roman de la Rose to Chaucer and to Chaucer's contemporary poets, who of course would retransmit it to Chaucer. What he did with it is the subject of the following section, as shown in several selected works.

⁵⁷ Braddy, pp. 2-3.

III

When Chaucer began to write, English poetry was practically nil. What had been written was either the unwieldy, rough Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse or awkward attempts at courtly romance in Anglo-Norman French patois.⁵⁸ English was considered unfit for poetic usage, but Chaucer felt otherwise. He deliberately chose this common tongue, because he felt it was a warm, living language. His problem was how to endow it with poetic grace and refinement. Certainly all literary connection with the awkward and harsh poetry of England had to be broken. He decided to adapt the lyrical and graceful poetic conventions of French courtly romance to English, in an attempt to fulfill both the poetic form and the budding language. And he did it:

To infuse into the native vocabulary the courtliness of France, was his first and most essential task. He cast the English words of a purely Teutonic origin, and the already acclimatized words of French origin, into the poetical modes of France. He expressed in English all the graces and delicate shades of meaning which he found in French poetry. His severance from the literary past of England is as clear and as final as his resolve to stand by the particular English of his district. That is why all the primary sources of his poetic art must be looked for in France. They are to be found, not in Anglo-Norman poetry, unimaginative and formless, but in the pure specimens of proper French poetry, which he happened to know.⁵⁹

As we have just seen, the gracious and delicate French forms which

⁵⁸ Legouis, pp. 46-7.

⁵⁹ Legouis, p. 48.

Chaucer would have to adapt were those which found expression in Guillaume de Lorris and his fourteenth-century imitators, Machaut, Froissart, and Deschamps. Chaucer set out to emulate these emulators, and for the rest of his life his poetry showed their direct influence. He wrote no work, from the Book of the Duchess to the last Canterbury Tale, which does not somewhere show the touch of the courtly ideals, but it was primarily in his early writings, before he had fully developed his distinctly Chaucerian earthy touch, that he showed the prime French accent. His first attempts were straightforward adaptations of the favorite styles of Machaut and his disciples - the virelais, ballades, and rondels. Chaucer's virelais have all been lost, along with the majority of the rest of his other early short lyrics, but a number of ballades and "complaints", commentaries or formal lamentations on particular catastrophes⁶⁰, remain to us. Let us look at three of these as examples of adaptation of French ideas, the Complaint to His Lady, Merciles Beaute, and the Complaint of Venus.

The Complaint to His Lady has no direct source in French literature. However, it shows similarity to some of the writings of Machaut⁶¹, as well as to the Roman de la Rose. Part of its rime scheme is Italian, Dante's terza rima; so it was probably written

⁶⁰ Robinson, p. 520.

⁶¹ French, p. 98.

about 1373, after Chaucer's trip to Italy.⁶² But the style and content are all French. The general theme is that of the poet's slavery to love for a haughty and ruthless lady. Although she will never notice him, he will remain completely devoted to her till death, no matter how much he suffers the vicissitudes of love's symptoms:

Allas! whan sleping-tyme is, than I wake;
Whan I shulde daunce, for fere, lo, than
I quake;⁶³

Love is personified, a god who makes Chaucer his slave with a flaming arrow, and then teaches him to be faithful and loving:

Thus am I slayn with Loves fyry dart.
I can but love hir best, my swete fo;
Love hath me taught no more of his art
But serve alwey, and stinte for no wo.⁶⁴

In the Rose, Love pierced the Dreamer with several "golden-headed darts",⁶⁵ before making him a slave and instructing him, among other things, to be constant.⁶⁶ Therefore it appears that the Complaint follows all the courtly precepts laid down by Lorrin. In addition, it bears a heavy resemblance to much of Machaut's work. In a fragmentary Complainte, addressed like Chaucer's to

⁶² Root, p. 68.

⁶³ Robinson, A Complaint to His Lady, ll. 50-51, p. 528.

⁶⁴ Robinson, A Complaint to His Lady, ll. 36-39, p. 528.

⁶⁵ Ellis, l. 1772, p. 59.

⁶⁶ See quotation 42.

a disdainful lady, Machaut calls her "fleur de toute fleur mondeinne",⁶⁷ and goes on to say:

Toute biauté est en vous assevie
Et mo bonté nuit et jour mouteplie
Pour ce plaisence ha dedens moy norrie
Joie sans peinne,⁶⁸

Compare to this of Chaucer's:

Her name is Bountee, set in womanhede,
Sadness in youthe, and Beautee pridelees
And Plesaunce, under gouvernaunce and drede;⁶⁹

True, Machaut anticipates a trouble-free love, while Chaucer's is painful, but a definite similarity of wording exists. Chaucer says:

But I, my lyf and deeth, to yow obeye,
And with right buxom herte hooly I preye,
As is your moste plesure, so doth by me;
Wel lever is me liken yow and deye
Than for to anythyng or thynke or seye
That you myghte offende in my tyme.⁷⁰

Machaut also is very solicitous not to offend his lady love:

Ne ja n'avray cuer, penser ne desir
De vostre honneur en nul cas ameurrir,
Qu'a moy poez, douce dame, merir
En ce moment
Plus que ne puis en mil ans desservir.⁷¹

In Complaint to His Lady, Chaucer expresses none but conventional ideas, of course. The poem is devoid of any trace of the author's

⁶⁷ Guillaume de Machaut, Complainte, from Anthologie de la Poesie Francaise, edited by Marcel Arland (Paris: Editions Stock, 1947), 1. 2, p. 82.

⁶⁸ Machaut, Complainte, ll. 8-11, p. 82.

⁶⁹ Robinson, A Complaint to His Lady, ll. 24-26, p. 528.

⁷⁰ Robinson, A Complaint to His Lady, ll. 118-123, p. 528.

⁷¹ Arland, Complainte, by Machaut, ll. 25-29.

personality, but it certainly reflects his acquaintance with Lorris and Machaut.

The next lyric, Merciles Beaute, is a triple roundel, an intricate form initiated by Machaut and adopted by Chaucer from Deschamps, to several of whose works this poem bears strong resemblance.⁷² In the three rondels a theme is logically developed. The first one deals with the ability of his lady to slay him with her eyes alone, yet her ability also to heal his wounds with one kind word. The second rondel deals with the haughtiness of the lady, which withholds the needed kindness, therefore allowing the poet to die from his unrequited love. The third rondel brings in a clever Chaucerian twist. Love is likened to a prison-keeper, who starves his captives. But since the poet has been rejected by his lady, he has escaped with all his flesh whole and well filled out:

The contrast between the apparent seriousness of the first two parts and the playfulness of the third gives the poem its charm. It is a good example of Chaucer's ability to work with materials and ideas which are thoroughly conventional, and yet to vitalize them with his own individuality.⁷³

In the form of the poem itself, Chaucer owes much to Deschamps. The rondel as used by Deschamps is a thirteen-line lyric, with

⁷² French, pp. 104-105.

⁷³ Dodd, pp. 101-102.

a rime scheme ABBABABABB, the first three lines of which form a refrain which reappears at the end. The first two lines are repeated in the middle, lines six and seven. Deschamps wrote hundreds of roundels, and doubtless many times expressed much of the sentiments of Chaucer's first two rondels. Chaucer's lady's eyes pierce him with a beauty he cannot bear, which will cause his death:

Your yen two wol slee me sodenly;
I may the beautee of hem not sustene,
So woundeth hit thurghout my herte kene.⁷⁴

She is, then something highly desirable, but something that destroys him. Deschamps says:

Je ne say que ce puet estre:
J'aime ce qui me destruit,
Et plus l'aime et plus me nuit,⁷⁵

Chaucer's second rondel, whose basis is the pitiless haughtiness of the lady, even though the poet is innocent of any cruelty against her, is expressed thus:

Giltles my deth thus han ye me purchaced:
I sey you sooth, me nedeth not to feyne;
So hath your beautee fro your herte chaced
Pitee, that me ne availleth not to pleyne.⁷⁶

Deschamps, in a rondeau whose subject is a plainte à une dame, says:

Treschiere dame, ayez de moy mercy,
Comme ignocent, ou je muir pour vous cy:

⁷⁴ Robinson, Merciles Beaute, ll. 1-3, p. 542.

⁷⁵ Eustache Deschamps, Oeuvres Complètes, 11 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et Cie., 1884), vol. IV, Rondel DCC, ll. 1-3, p. 159.

⁷⁶ Robinson, Merciles Beaute, ll. 17-20, p. 542.

Se vous estes en tel ploy longuement
Et que pitez ne vous meuve vers my,
Vous occirez sans cause vostre amy.⁷⁷

While, of course, neither of these two Deschamps poems carry exactly the same meanings as do Chaucer's first two rondels, they are indicative of conventions held by the French poet which Chaucer was undoubtedly following. In the third rondel, however, Chaucer seems to have, while perhaps following a conventional theme of Love as a cruel personality, embellished this theme with Chaucerian originality of images, rather un-Deschamps-like. This Chaucerian addition, nevertheless, is still quite in the romantic vein, personifying Love as a hard and cruel master or jailor, much like a feudal lord.

The final lyric work which this paper will examine, the Complaint of Venus, is really essentially a translation of three short works of Oton de Graunson, the first, fourth, and fifth ballads of Graunson's Cinq balades ensuivans.⁷⁸ Chaucer, however, did not follow Graunson's words literally, and in his overall work he changed the presentation of the French poems quite liberally. Chaucer's poem is spoken by Venus of her lover, a distinct change from the usual (and Graunson's) presentation of the lover speaking of his lady. To follow the courtly prerequisites of the lover worshipping the lady, Chaucer had to rewrite large

⁷⁷ Deschamps, Oeuvres, ll. 8-13, p. 41.

⁷⁸ Braddy, p. 61.

portions of two of the Graunson ballads, because these were spoken by the man. Therefore, where Graunson has the lover say:

Il a en li bonte, beaute et grace
Plus que nulz homs ne saroit deviser.
C'est grant eür quant en si pou de place
Dieux a voulu tous les biens assembler.

•••
Onques ne ni si belle et plaisant dame
De toutes gens avoir si noble fame,
Car chascun a joye de lui louer.⁷⁹

Chaucer is up against a problem. He cannot have Venus praise beauty and grace, nor can he have the gods assembling all goodness in a manly knight. So he has Venus say:

In him is bounte, wisdom, governaunce,
Wel more than any mannes wit can gesse;
For grace hath wold so ferforth hym avaunce
That of knyghthod he is parfit richesse.

•••
Therto so wel hath formed him Nature
That I am his for ever, I him assure;
For every wight preyseth his gentillesse.⁸⁰

Since the second ballad is addressed to Love, it could easily be spoken the same way by either sex. Thus Chaucer is able to translate it almost literally. In the third ballad, however, he has once more to change wording quite freely. Graunson has his knightly lover forswear conquest of lands:

Ne quiers plus royaume ne empire,
Car si bonne jamais, ne trouveras,
Ne si belle par mes yeux ne verras.⁸¹

Chaucer's Venus, of course, has never sought after new kingdoms

⁷⁹ Idem.

⁸⁰ Robinson, The Complaynt of Venus, ll. 9-12, 14-16, p. 537.

⁸¹ Braddy, p. 63.

anyway. So she must renounce seeking for some undefined something, which presumably would be another lover:

Seche no ferther, neyther wey ne wente,
Sith I have suffisaunce unto my pay.⁸²

But these small differences are made in the translation to uphold romantic ideals. Chaucer took three unconnected ballads and gave them a central theme of Venus' complaint, quite in the romantic tradition. But to preserve the conventional picture of ladylike demureness and restraint, the words necessarily had to be somewhat reworked. In the Lenvoy, Chaucer freely acknowledges the debt he owes Graunson, protesting that the dearth of poetry in English expressions forces him to turn to the courtly Frenchman for worthy phraseology.

But the poems we have seen so far have all been quite minor works. Let us now look at one of Chaucer's more pretentious writings, and one which more than any other he wrote, shows the influence of the French romanticists. This is his Book of the Duchess. The Duchess is probably the first work Chaucer wrote. It is fixed by its subject matter, an elegy on the untimely death of the young wife of his patron, John of Gaunt, at about 1369.⁸³ In order to offer consolation to Duke John, Chaucer cast his elegy in the courtly form of a love-vision, or dream allegory. The overall style and conventions of the poem are straight from

⁸² Robinson, The Complaynt of Venus, ll. 69-70, p. 538.

⁸³ Root, p. 59.

the Roman de la Rose. Many other more specific sources of courtly romantic influence exist in the poem, however. Chaucer borrowed from nearly every French poet of any ability who was then writing. His chief source, however, was Guillaume de Machaut, at least eight of whose poems Chaucer draws from. The three main sources, however, are Machaut's Jugement du Roy de Behaingne, Remede de Fortune, and the Dit de Vergier.⁸⁴

The Duchess opens with the poet suffering from insomnia, for which he decides to read a book, the Tale of Ceyx and Alcyone. This is a story of thwarted love - Alcyone loses her lover to a cruel sea - and it subtly sets the mood for the story in the main body of the poem. Within his reading the poet discovers that a prayer to Morpheus may bring sleep, and offers the god a feather bed. He does sleep, and dreams, thus bringing about the main body of the poem. He dreams he arises and joins a hunting party which is, in dream-logic, that of Octavius Caesar. But he strays from the hunt, and is led by a friendly young puppy to a strangely unhappy young knight, dressed in black. The knight, who represents John of Gaunt, begins (allegorically) to condemn Fortune, who has beaten him in a chess game, and taken his queen. The dreamer, who is somewhat slow-witted, cannot see through the allegory and is extremely puzzled by the Black Knight's deep sadness at so trivial a loss. The knight then retells his story, in straight language. He met, once, a beautiful maiden

⁸⁴ French, p. 88.

all White (Blanche was the name of the late Duchess of Lancaster, wife of John of Gaunt), with whom he at once fell in love. He goes into a long and beautiful description of his agonies of love, of his long courtship of the lady, and of the exquisite life they led together. But alas, she is now lost to him. How is this, asks the Dreamer, if she is so perfect and faithful? The knight tells him she is dead, and the Dreamer, sympathetic, is just beginning to commiserate with the knight when bells in a nearby church begin to peal. He awakes to find the book of Ceyx and Alcyone still in his hand, the dream, and the poem, are over.

The entire poem, of course, owes much to the Roman de la Rose in general style and convention. Besides the dream-allegory setting, the knight embodies every symptom of love that Lorrin described, and his lady is a perfect description of the ideal courtly dame. But specific references are in general not to the Rose, but to the works of its fourteenth-century emulators. There are so many of these that I shall only attempt to show the influence of the major sources. Needless to say, there are hundreds of one-line references to poems of all the French romanticists. However, in theme Chaucer was original to a greater extent than is perhaps realized, in the vitality he gave the work; and in his extremely warm treatment of Lady Blanche, which seems to make us feel he knew and admired her, and was not merely conventionalizing.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Dodd, p. 118.

The opening of the poem is extremely suggestive of both Jean Froissart's Le Paradys d'Amour and Machaut's La Fonteinne Amoureuse. The first of these is, however, based on the second, and since Chaucer's Duchess was based on both, I shall describe the effect of Machaut's poem only. In it, the poet had, like Chaucer, had trouble sleeping, and had exposed himself to Ceyx and Alcyone, but by overhearing it as a lament from an unhappy lover next door. Chaucer, having been introduced to the Ceyx and Alcyone, which Machaut had adapted from Ovid, probably went back to the original source for his story,⁸⁶ although he also shows similarities to Froissart's Paradys d'Amour, especially in his description of Morpheus and his minions, one of whom, Eclempostre, Chaucer adopted as Eclympasteyr.⁸⁷ After the Ceyx and Alcyone interludes, however, neither of the French poems bear much resemblance to the Duchess.

After the introduction, Chaucer continues on his own for much of the poem, free of all but spot French references. He awakes on a May day to the beautiful trilling of birds, and goes outside to join the hunt. All the very beautiful and clear description of the forest, the excitement of the hunt, seem to be entirely Chaucer's own. It leads smoothly to the real meat of the poem - the Lover's complaint and story. This comes in essentially three sections; (1) the condemnation of Fate and the chess-game allegory;

⁸⁶ French, p. 86.

⁸⁷ Lowes, p. 120.

(2) the long descriptive passage on the Lady White; and (3) the passage at the end telling how the Lover won the Lady and lived blissfully with her till her death. Each of these three sections has strong influence from Machaut. Let us examine them thoroughly.

In lines 617-709, the Lover roundly condemns Fortune in extremely vitriolic and piercing language. He calls Her false, deceiving, spiteful, monstrous, in telling of the "chess game," and how she took his queen. This condemnation derives from Machaut's

Remede de Fortune:

Fortune est amour haineuse,
Bonneürté maleüreuse;
C'est largesse advaricieuse;
C'est orphenté;
C'est santé triste et dolereuse;
C'est richesse la soufferteuse;
C'est noblesse povre, honteuse,
Sans loiauté;
C'est l'orguilleuse humilité;
C'est l'envieuse charité;
C'est perilleuse seürté;
Trop est douteuse;⁸⁸

This is Machaut's description of Fortune. Chaucer says:

She ys th'envyouse charite
That ys ay fals, and semeth wel,
So turneth she hyr false whel
Aboute, for hyt is nothing stable,
Now by the fire, now at the table;
For many oon hath she has yblent.
She ys pley of enchaument,
That semeth oon and ys not soo.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Guillaume de Machaut, Oeuvres, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et Cie., 1908), Remede de Fortune, ll. 1129-1140, p. 41.

⁸⁹ Robinson, The Book of the Duchess, ll. 642-649, p. 273.

False Fortune delights, both poets feel, in misleading poor mortals.
She presents two faces at all times. Chaucer's knight tells the
Dreamer:

Hir moste worshippe and hir flour ys
To lyen, fa that ys hir nature;
Withoute feyth, lawe, or mesure
She ys fals; and ever laughynge
With oon eye, and that other wepynge.⁹⁰

This description, especially the parallel of the two eyes of happiness and sadness, came straight from lines 1157-1162 of Machaut's

Remede:

Les fleur [of Fortune] sont de desloyauté,
Et les feuilles d'iniquité,
Mais li fruis est de povreté
Dure et crueuse.

La teste a peleé a moitié;
D'un oeuil rit, de l'autre larmie;

For the idea of the chess game allegory, Chaucer perhaps turned to the Roman de la Rose,⁹¹ although here too there is a definite parallel to the Remede. Compare Chaucer's

Therewith Fortune seyde 'Chek her!
And 'Mat!' in myd poynt of the Chekker,
With a poun errant, allas! 92

with this passage (lines 1189-1192) from Machaut's poem:

Mais partout ou elle s'embat,
De ses gieus telement s'esbat
Qu'en veinquant dit: Eschac et mat?
De fiere vois.

The next chief section of the knight's story is the crowning beauty

90 Robinson, The Book of the Duchess, ll. 642-649, p. 273.

91 Robinson, notes, p. 776.

92 Robinson, Duchess, ll. 659-661, p. 273.

Duchess Blanche must have been the fourteenth-century equivalent of our own beautiful princess, Grace of Monaco. She is a graceful, demure, yet sensitive woman, with features and figure the ultimate of refined beauty, a woman to delight even Guillaume de Lorris:

"And goode faire White she het;
That was my lady name ryght.
She was bothe faire and bryght;
She hadde not hir name wrong.
Ryght faire shuldres and body long
She had, and armes, every lyth
Fattysh, flesshy, not gret therwith;
Ryght white handes, and nayles rede,
Rounde brestes; and of good brede
Hyr hippes were, a streight flat bak.
I knew on hir noon other lak
That al hir lymmes nere pure sewynge
In as fer as I had knowynge."⁹⁵

This seems an acute personal description from actual observation, even to the detail of fingernails. But it is drawn almost exclusively from two Machaut passages. The first parallel, from the Remede de Fortune, lines 54-56, is also in praise of a lady hight Blanche. The poet's thoughts turn constantly

Vers ma dame, qui est clamée
De tous seur toutes belle et bonne.
Chascuns par droit ce nom li donne:

He obviously feels his Blanche is as appropriately named as Chaucer's knight says the Lady White is. The rest of Chaucer's description comes from the Behaingne, lines 364-83, some of which read as

⁹⁵ Robinson, Duchess, ll. 948-960, p. 276.

follows:

...je parle de ses bras lons et drois
Qui estoient bien fais en tous endrois;
Car elle avoit blanches mains et lons doits.

A mon devis

Avoit le sein blanc, dur et haut assis,
Poignant, rondet, et si estoit petis

...

Avoit le corps par mesure pourtret,
Gent, joint, joli, jeune, gentil, grasset,
Lonc, droit, faitis, cointe, apert et graillet.

Tres bien tailliez

Hanches, cuisses, jambes ot, et les piez
votes, grossez, bien et bel enjointiez.

Chaucer's lines 966-974, describing the lady in terms of a mirror of beauty which would reflect the lesser beauty of ten thousand dames, are drawn from the Fortune, where the Lover says his lady

M'estoit miroir et exemplaire
De tous biens desirer et faire.
Et pour le bien faire me penoie
De tout bien faire me penoie...⁹⁶

Chaucer's composite picture of Duchess Blanche is thus, while quite descriptive, one feels, in a real way, nevertheless formed almost exclusively from his French readings.

The final sequence in the poem describes the winning of the fair lady by the knight; how he overcame his fear of daring her haughtiness again after being once rejected, and of the happiness she gave him when she consented to be his. This whole passage relies

⁹⁶ Machaut, Remede de Fortune, ll. 171-174.

heavily on both the Fortune and the Behaingne. When Chaucer's lover decides, in lines 1183-1196, to brave the disdain of his lady, and tell her of his amorous woe, he is following the Behaingne lover, who in a long passage (lines 453-462), declares:

Car volontiers li alasse retraire
Comment de cuer l'amoie, sans retraire.
Mais la paour d'escondire ce faire
Me deffendoit;
Et d'autre par Bel Accueil m'appelloit,
Son Dous Regart riant m'asseüroit,
Et Dous Espoirs doucement me disoit
En loiauté
Et m'affernoit qu'onques si grant biauté
Ne pot estre, qu'il n'i eüst pité.

The Behaingne knight goes on to tell his lady of his love in halting words, caused by his fear and trembling of courtly love symptoms, as well as doubts of his own powers of self-expression. Chaucer's knight says:

In this debat I was so wo,
Me thoghte myn herte braste atwayne!

...

For many a work I over-skipte
In my tale for pure fere
Lest my wordes myssset were.
With sorweful herte, and woundes dede,
Softe and quakyng for pure drede
And shame, and styntinge in my tale
For ferde, and myn hewe al pale,
Ful ofte I wex bothe pale and red.97

The lady, of course, in true courtly fashion declines his advances. Heartbroken, he retires, silent "for pure fere," not unlike the narrator of Machaut's Fortune:

De devant ma dame honnourée,
Son respondre et sans plus atendre,

Me departi...⁹⁸

But she relents, because his devotion is so complete, even after a full year. She "takes him into her governance", and they live in bliss - two souls melting into one:

Oure hertes wern so evene a payre,
That never nas that oon contrayre
To that other for no woo.⁹⁹

The lover of the Behaingne says, in lines 166-169:

De nos deus cuers estoit si juste paire
Qu'onques ne fu l'un a l'autre contraire;
Einsois estoient
Tuit d'un acort;

Here Chaucer takes over completely for himself, however, and brings about the "surprise" ending, already heavily hinted at but still not obvious to the naif Dreamer. The Black Knight explains in short, pungent words that his lady was taken by Death. Chaucer manages to make his ending climactic in spite of all the forewarnings by its abruptness and sharpness of tone.

The work itself, while a patchwork of French influence, direct and indirect, is nevertheless original and fresh. It is merely more in the French romantic vein than any other of his works. But everything Chaucer wrote was romantic in style tone, to a greater or lesser degree. Even the Canterbury Tales themselves. As he matured, he merely began to handle the romantic strain more maturely, to subordinate it to his ends in writing, rather than subordinating

⁹⁸ Machaut, Remede de Fortune, ll. 254-256.

⁹⁹ Robinson, Duchess, ll. 1289-1291, p. 279.

his content to courtly conventions. He also became exposed to other influences, particularly the Italian ones of Boccaccio and his fellows. This showed up strongly in his later works, especially in Troilus and Criseyde and the Tales, the framework of which, of course, was suggested by the Decameron and similar story-groups, as well as some of the thematic material itself. Never, though, was the grand tradition of the roman courtois, as taught Chaucer by Lorris, Machaut, Deschamps, Froissart, Graunson, and others, completely shut out.

IV

The French influence in Chaucer did not, however, end with the romantic tradition. At the same time that this eminently medieval and aristocratic literary style was reaching its culmination, in the Roman de la Rose, an entirely new style and theme in French literature was being born, the bourgeois style:

By the literature of the "bourgeois" tradition is meant that cluster of genres, some of them stemming in form and theme from the Orient and classical antiquity, which seems, appearing freshly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, to attend the emergence of the new middle class. The commonest ...genre is the fabliau - the short humorous verse tale. The tradition also includes the mime, the beast epic, the fable, a miscellany of satiric and comic poems, and some secular plays.¹⁰⁰

The bourgeois style existed for some 200 years alongside the dying tradition of courtly romance, before it developed ultimately into the great style of the early Renaissance. Its earmarks were earthy humor, light didacticism, and a "realistic" attitude toward life. It found its chief subjects in low life, that of common folk, but it treated all degrees of society with impartial politeness. Its special touch was satire, more or less constructive criticism, but it always managed to present itself as dealing with life directly, if in a somewhat exaggerated manner. The fabliau, its chief genre, was a spicy and minutely descriptive tale of some action in life. It dealt in characters and characterization, not in conventions and stylized personifications, as did the roman courtois. Descriptions, while brief, were often individualized.

¹⁰⁰ Muscatine, pp. 58.

It was peopled, not with haughty, refined ladies, but with warm, usually all-too-accessible young harlots, perhaps "reed of hewe", but certainly "gat-tothed (passionate)", and "bold of face"; not with swooning young knights, faithful to an impersonal ideal, but with lecherous priests, greedy misers, and silly but rich old cuckolds. Its idea of love was totally sensual, but rarely depraved, absolutely immoral, but quite light-hearted and guiltless. Obscenity was completely rife, and the tales were full of medieval slang. All of this style came to be a convention in its own right, but a convention much freer than that of courtly romance.

The beast epics, or fables, were parodies of the romans courtois and chansons de geste, in which animals played the heroic roles of the knights and ladies of the earlier aristocratic works. The Roman de Renart, the most famous, was a collection of tales by various authors, in which a wily fox had mischievous adventures and misadventures among the feudalistic characters of the animal kingdom, from the noble and Arthurian king, the lion, down to Chantecler the libidinous rooster, hero of Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale.¹⁰¹

Chaucer, of course, must have been familiar with all these tales. As I expect to show, he was greatly indebted to the French bourgeois tradition as much as to the courtly romances. By the most bizarre

¹⁰¹ Muscatine, pp. 67-70.

of paradoxes, moreover, he received the most tutelage in both strains from the same work, the Roman de la Rose. Thus far, only the first section of the Rose has been discussed in this paper, although it was less than a quarter of the total work. This is because only the romantic influence was being examined, and the second part of the poem, by far the larger, was not essential to this influence. On its own, however, Jean de Meun's 18,000-line continuation of Lorris' fragment exerted immense influence on Chaucer, in his later works, particularly the Canterbury Tales. This influence was in the vein of the bourgeois literature, not the roman courtois.

Jean Clopinel (the Limper), was born in Meun-sur-Loire about 1240, one hundred years before Chaucer. Forty years after Guillaume de Lorris stopped writing the Rose, presumably because he died, Jean de Meun took it up, and completed it at great length. Meun was an excellent scholar, widely read in classical literature, as well as in French, and the writer of several works, including, like Chaucer, a translation of Boethius' Consolations of Philosophy.¹⁰² The influence of the latter work was heavy in Meun's Rose, and he passed it on to Chaucer. It is hard to imagine a man more opposed to Guillaume de Lorris than Meun:

If Guillaume de Lorris is a conservative and an idealist, Jean de Meun is a realist and a revolutionist. To him

¹⁰² Root, p. 46.

the chivalric ideal is mere nonsense. In his democratic creed noble birth is but an accident; personal worth is the only patent of true nobility. Woman is a vain and fickle creature, a snare for men's feet. Love is but a game played for the prize of sensual gratification...His personality is not lovable, but commanding. Unquestionably inferior to Guillaume in artistic form - for his work seems a mere hodge-podge of ideas, - he as unquestionably surpasses him in range and intellectual scope. For the graceful delicacy of Guillaume's diction, Jean de Meun offers a nervous, incisive, yet polished style, which is as superior to that of Guillaume as Shakespeare to Spenser.¹⁰³

Why Meun chose to finish Lorris' work is unknown. But he did continue it, using the same allegorical setting and characters, but completely changing the character and purpose of the tale. He used it chiefly to allow a pretext for airing his views on several subjects, in five long monologues delivered by allegorical characters, but they no longer represented Lorris' courtly ideals or impersonal evils; they all represent Jean de Meun in his often scathing, usually humorous, and always interesting views on the foibles of his society.

Meun took the story up where Lorris had dropped it. The first long monologue is given by Reason on the foibles of Fortune (from which Machaut, then Chaucer, drew material which appeared in the Book of the Duchess). It is addressed to the Lover, and attacks

¹⁰³ Root, pp. 48-49.

Fortune for being two-faced, and for playing with men's lives. Then Reason leaves, and the Lover disconsolately seeks out his Friend, to get advice on how to release Fair Welcome from the tower. After some advice, the Friend delivers the second long tirade, an attack on women, as told by a jealous husband. This diatribe eulogizes the classical Golden Age because it believed in Free Love, and then totally condemns marriage, telling classic tales of ruinous love affairs. When he finishes, the Lover leaves and finds the God of Love, whom he persuades to fight on his side against the guardians of Fair Welcome and the Rose. One of Love's barons, False-Seeming, then delivers the third discourse, a scourging attack on the hypocrisy of mendicant friars, going to far as to liken the Franciscans to Anti-Christ. After this monologue, the barons destroy the guardians of the Tower, and succeed in getting a message from the Lover to Fair Welcome, by the Duenna, an old woman who is the guardian of the Rose. The Duenna now relates to Fair Welcome, to whom she has taken a liking, the fourth of the great diatribes, a long and zestful history of her love life, detailed and sensual. She then smuggles the Lover in to see Fair Welcome, past Jealousy. But the Lover tries to possess the Rose, who by now is presented more as a real woman than as a true flower, and is driven out by Haughtiness. The legions of Love arrive again, just in time to engage in an epic battle with the remaining guardians of the Rose and Fair Welcome. When Love's forces begin to lose, he summons Venus, his mother, the sworn enemy of chastity, and a final siege takes place. Finally the

forces of Love win out, and Fair Welcome is released, implying of course, that the Lover now has access to the Rose. Before, however, the battle is over, the last great discourse takes place:104

Apropos of nothing, Nature and Genius are introduced, and for just a little short of five thousand lines... they hold the stage. And into these five thousand lines Jean de Meun tumbled everything for which he had earlier found no place - a discourse on nature and art, more slurs on women, an entire cosmogony, the conflict of predestination and free-will, magic mirrors, the significance of dreams, the degeneration of human kind, the approach of a new Golden Age.105

All through the poem, and especially in the last long monologue, Meun displayed a profound knowledge of hundreds of classical and early French authors, historians, and philosophers, especially the works of Ovid and Boethius. This tendency to use long illustrations from these authors was emulated strongly by Chaucer, especially in the Canterbury Tales, but I am very inclined to believe that a man of Chaucer's innate curiosity and widespread reading would have run across both Ovid and Boethius on his own, had there been no Jean de Meun. What he certainly would not have run across is Meun's strong bourgeois literary tradition, and this was an extremely great influence on Chaucer, especially in the Canterbury Tales.

104 Ellis, ed., The Romance of the Rose, II and III, summaries of chapters and the poem itself.

105 Lowes, pp. 82-83.

The framework of the Tales was suggested by any number of medieval story collections, perhaps including Boccaccio's Decamean, although Chaucer may not have known this last work. The sources of the tales themselves were as varied as Chaucer's omniverous reading.¹⁰⁶ But throughout the whole work there prevailed an atmosphere of the esprit gaulois, the heady, sensual, biting yet humorous spirit of the bourgeois fabliaux. This influence is the real contribution of Jean de Meun to the poetry of Chaucer. Why this is so will be discussed in the next section. To show that this influence existed, let us examine it as evidenced in several segments of the Canterbury Tales. Two of Meun's long monologues seem especially to have interested Chaucer - the diatribe of False-Seeming against the corruptions of the Church, and the warmly ribald confessions of the old Duenna. The first of these gave birth to Chaucer's Friar, as well as to the friar described in the Summoner's Tale. The second was the genesis of the Wife of Bath. I wish to discuss, therefore, the description of the Friar in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, the Summoner's Tale, and the Wife of Bath's Tale.

I speak of worthless monks and nuns,
Felonious and malicious ones,
Who care alone for holy dress,
And clothe their hearts with wickedness.¹⁰⁷

Thus did Meun begin his long attack on mendicant friars, in the

¹⁰⁶ Robinson, pp. 2-6.

¹⁰⁷ Ellis, II, 11. 1515-1518, p. 132.

guise of False Seeming. In the next thousand lines he accused them of just about every hypocrisy imaginable, plus unmitigated greed and complete irreligion. Chaucer's Friar is a perfect example of everything Meun was attacking. To begin with, Chaucer accuses him of being a complete roué, of knowing

...Muchel of daliaunce and fair langage.
He hadde maad ful many a mariage
Of yonge women at his owene cost.¹⁰⁸

In Comparison, Meun's friar, the "Servant of Antichrist", finds himself

Fulfilled of all rapacity;
Or steeped in luxury one be,
Or prelate living joyful life,
Or priest who leman hath as wife;¹⁰⁹

Chaucer's Friar is well-liked throughout the countryside, because he could hear confession so handily, without making any demands of repentance on the penitent (ll. 218-223).

For he hadde power of confessioun,
As seyde hymself, moore than a curat,
For of his ordre he was licenciat.
Ful swetely herde he confessioun,
And plesaunt was his absolucioun;
He was an esy man to yeve penaunce...

The friar of the Rose also gives easy absolution and confession, so that when local curates press their sinful parishioners to confess, they can say

Father, I lately have confessed
To such an one, and he my breast

¹⁰⁸ Robinson, General Prologue to Canterbury Tales, ll. 211-213, p. 19.

¹⁰⁹ Ellis, II, ll. 12385-12388, p. 161.

Hath clean absolved from every sin
That might the wrath of Heaven win,
My conscience suffers no such pain
As pricks me to confess again.¹¹⁰

Chaucer then embellishes Meun's ordinary mendicant knave by making his Friar carry small bribes to give pretty housewives, as well as making him a rather dandy and affected fop, dressed in a well-pressed double-worsted cape, and assuming a lisp to sound more refined. But the chief fault Meun finds in friars, that despite vows of poverty they inevitably forsake the poor to minister to the rich:

...But willingly
I leave both priests and prelates free
Poor men and women to confess,
Who for most part are penniless;
But little guerdon thence were got,¹¹¹

is also the supreme vice of the Canterbury Friar:

It is nat honest, it may nat avaunce,
For to deelen with no swich poraille,
But al with riche and sellires of vitaille.
And over al, ther as profit sholde arise,
Curteis he was and lowely of servyse.¹¹²

It is probable that Chaucer knew mendicant friars of this type, but it is also obvious that he had read quite closely Meun's piercing exposé of their hypocrisy.

The Summoner's Tale also tells of a mendicant friar of the same ilk. While the tale itself has no roots in Meun's Rose, it is

¹¹⁰ Ellis, II, ll. 11768-11774, p. 140.

¹¹¹ Ellis, II, ll. 11853-11856, p. 143.

¹¹² Robinson, General Prologue to Canterbury Tales, ll. 246-250, p. 19.

interesting to note that it is of the fabliau type, basing its humor on a rather gross animal level, in the reward of the friar with a fart, and its relevancy on quite acute observation of the nature of the friar. In its general theme the tale is of course in step with False Seeming's attack on clerical hypocrisy, as well as in several specific instances. The Summoner's friar, hearing of the illness of a wealthy old man in his limits of mendicancy, goes to see him, and spends some time trying to persuade the oldster that he has been working very hard for the sick man's salvation. He expects to be rewarded, but the old man, Thomas, is not taken in. He "rewards" the friar in a singularly gross way (because of course the Summoner was trying to insult the Friar of the company of pilgrims), and the rest of the tale is spent in making fun of the friar, who is foolish enough to tell the lord of the manor what has happened, expecting redress, but of course he receives only ridicule. As the story ends, the squire of the lord has just made a joke at the friar's expense, as to how the friar might share his legacy with his brother mendicants. Chaucer first describes the Summoner's friar with the typical comments on his greed, in taking anything he can squeeze out of his parishioners, from "a busshel whete" to the last "Goddess halfpenny" they possess. His next touch of Meun influence is in describing the foods the friar asks Thomas' wife for, Capon's liver, good soft bread, a roasted pig's head (ll. 1839-1841).

Meun's friar likes:

Eel, salmon, pike, or other fish,
Tarts, custard, delicate cream cheese
(Which pleasantly our gullets grease),
Sweet apple, and soft melting pear,
Fat goose and sucking-pig's rich fare;
Or other delicacies tasty
As highly savored roebuck pasty,
Or capon fat, sweet dainty bit...113

In hopes of winning reward from Thomas, the friar tells him he and his brothers have been praying for Thomas' health, both day and night. The friar of the Rose gives advice which Chaucer's friar is surely following:

If one of us have done some good
We amplify its magnitude,
Although, pardee, 'tis oft but feigned;
Or if that one of us hath deigned
To vaunt some good he ne'er hath done
To this or that, as we were one
With him we cry aloud that we
Helped such good work right royally,
In hope the love and confidence
To gain of wealthy men.114

Finally, the familiarity Chaucer's friar shows for the feudal lord, and his lady, in the tale shows Chaucer's familiarity with lines 12237-12241:

Nought care I for [poor people's] mean distresses:
But emperors and great princesses,
The wives of noble palatines,
Rich abbesses and sleek beguines,
Fat bailies' spouses, knight-wed dames...

Chaucer was obviously thoroughly familiar with the entire passage

113 Ellis, II, 11. 12398-12446, p. 162.

114 Ellis, II, 11. 12321-12330, pp. 159-160.

from Meun's Roman de la Rose condemning the worldly friars.

But he was just as familiar with the passage in which the Duenna proudly tells Fair Welcome of her past love life. Out of it was born his Wife of Bath. The Wife is a person infinitely more alive, more real, fuller, than the Duenna, but without the Duenna, the Wife of Bath probably would never have existed.¹¹⁵ For over two thousand lines the Duenna regales Fair Welcome with tales of her past, advice on how love should be accomplished, the secrets women use to preserve their beauty, and various other of her concepts of love. She is often quite earthy, and always preserves the idea that love is for sensual gratification. She is not, however, gross in this principle. She keeps a light, pleasant, humorous outlook on sex, one which the Wife of Bath does well to adopt, as she does. Compare the Wife's open joy in sex, even though she knows virginity is purer, with that of the Duenna:

Telle me also, to what conclusion
Were membres maad of generacioun,¹¹⁶

says the Wife, and a little later:

In wyfhod I wol use myn instrument
As frely as my Makere hath it sent.
If I be daungerous, God geve me sorwe!
Myn housbonde shal it have both eve and morwe.¹¹⁷

The Duenna reminisces to Fair Welcome:

Dear friend, believe the woes I felt,

¹¹⁵Lowes, p. 82.

¹¹⁶ Robinson, Wife of Bath's Prologue, ll. 115-116, p. 77.

¹¹⁷ Robinson, Wife of Bath's prologue, ll. 149-152, p. 77.

Or how mine eyes in tears would melt,
When rose the picture in my mind
Of good old days when kisses kind
Were showered upon me 'mid delights
Of joyous days and passioned nights -
Sweet words to sweeter actions wed.118

But the Wife is a basically practical woman, and she combines physical love in marriage with practical gain. Her first three husbands were all wealthy old men who willingly signed over all their lands and treasure to her, in return for which she gave them access to her person, but made them work hard at love's game. Thus she could have both physical pleasure and monetary rewards, as well as domination of her husbands. The Duenna gives similar advice:

Suffer your heart at will to roam,
Nor lend nor give it to one home,
But let it be your constant boast
That, his it is who pays the most

...
For good it is to give, I trow,
When one can make the gifts bear fruit;119

Chaucer develops the Wife's story from this point for a good bit with no direct pungent references to the Rose. The Wife goes into great detail as to how a woman can control her husband by brow-beating him and always putting him in the wrong, making him feel badly about his suspicions. She then goes on to tell about her fourth husband, who really pleased her. Thinking of him reminds her of her youthful pleasures, and of her lost beauty:

But age, allas! That al wole envenyme,
Hath me birafte my beautee and my pith.

118 Ellis, II, ll. 13557-13563, p. 202.

119 Ellis, II, ll. 13745-13748, 13762-13763, pp. 208-209.

Lat go, farewell! the devel go therwith!
The flour is goon, ther is namore to telle;¹²⁰

The Duenna also, in lines 13462-13467, laments her lost beauty:

...I consider mournfully
My outworn visage, and repine
At every pucker, seam and line,
When of my beauty lost I think,
Whereof gay lovers fain would drink
Long draughts to quench their lovesick heat.

Then the Wife comes to her fifth and last husband. She loved him best, because he was young and fresh, especially of course in the marital bed. But he was also quite haughty and disdainful toward her, a taste of her own medicine that made her love him all the more, so much that she gave him all that she had gleaned from her former husbands, just as the Duenna does:

By God and St. Thibaud I swear
That all I had amassed I gave
Unto a false and traitorous knave,
Who pleased me above all, though he
Put me to shame most cruelly:

...
Alas! though tender, true, and keen
My love, he prized me not a bean.¹²¹

The Wife then goes into a long description of how she managed to trap this haughty young man, depending greatly on assistance from her Confidante Alisoun, her godmother, who helps her trap him, in a good Meun fashion:

To fleece a gull may many aid:
Her valets, and her chambermaid,

¹²⁰ Robinson, II, 474-477, p. 80.

¹²¹ Ellis, II, 11, 15172-15176, 15179-15180, p. 254.

Her sister, nurse, and many another,
And e'en with equal zest her mother.¹²²

To do this, Alisoun advises the Wife to take him as her lover, even though she is still married to her fourth husband, following the philosophy that even in marriage one should nevertheless have another recourse, just as any self-respecting mouse has more than one hole to run to. This proverbial philosophy is an almost direct translation from the Rose, lines 13854-13860:

The mouse who must perforce repair
To one hole only, needs must be
In peril when 'tis his time to flee.
And so a damsel fair, ywis,
When mistress of the field she is,
And may at will her suitors fain,
Good right hath she their gold to gain.

The Duenna, to illustrate points she wishes to make on the foibles of love, quotes extensively from classical works, covering everything from the story of Dido and Aeneas to that of Vulcan trapping Venus and Mars. Chaucer's Wife of Bath would not ordinarily know these learned allusions, so he cleverly makes this much-desired fifth husband a clerk, who has many learned works of erotic literature, which he quoted so extensively to her in his constant repro- bations that she soon became an authority on the three he quoted the most, the Epistola Valerii ad Rufinum de non Ducenda Uxore by the medieval scholar Walter Map, Theophrastus's Liber de Nuptiis, and Saint Jerome's Epistola adversus Jovinianum.¹²³ These were

¹²² Ellis, II, ll. 14418-14420, pp. 229-230.

¹²³ Robinson, note 670, p. 701.

all anti-marriage tracts very much in the vein of Jean de Meun. Finally, able to stand her husband's bullying no more, the Wife rebelled, tearing one of the hated books and hitting him, for every woman loves liberty:

And every woman doth possess
Within her that same restlessness,
Whatever her condition be,
Matron or maid; unceasingly
One only thought hath she in mind,
Which is, how she may some way find
Her ancient liberty to get,
Thereon, 'fore all, her heart is set.¹²⁴

With this, he struck her back, and was so appalled at her helplessness that he forgot all his former mistrust and made her full mistress of the household. With that ends the Wife of Bath's Prologue, perhaps the most interesting of all Chaucer's writings, and certainly, with the description of the Wife in the General Prologue, one of the most frank and well-rounded portraits of an individual in English literature.

¹²⁴ Ellis, II, 11. 14673-14680, p. 238.

Among the individual authors from whom Chaucer drew the material which he thus took up unto himself, four stand out preëminent. They are Boethius, Jean de Meun, Boccaccio, and Ovid.¹²⁵

Of these four, only one of them is French, Jean de Meun. Thus although the French influence in Chaucer's works was unquestionably stronger than any single other one, it would be safe to say that the proportionate influences of the two strains of French literature I have been speaking about are not of the same strength. The bourgeois tradition, represented chiefly, indeed almost exclusively, by Meun, was much more basic, particularly in Chaucer's best work, the Canterbury Tales. Certainly Meun's importance to Chaucer far outweighs that of any single writer of the courtly romance tradition, even Guillaume de Lorris. Yet I have devoted almost twice as much of this paper to discussion of the courtly influence in Chaucer as to that of Meun and the bourgeois tradition. There are several reasons for this.

The first one is that the romantic tendency was evident in Chaucer for a much longer period than was that of Meun. From his very first poem, whatever that may be, until the end of the Canterbury Tales Chaucer was influenced by the conventions of Lorris, Machaut, and company. This influence was naturally stronger at first. Chaucer was a fledgling poet and quite naturally started out with many borrowed ideas, both stylistic and thematic. As he matured,

¹²⁵ Root, p. 19.

he adopted many more outside ideas, particularly from the Italians and the burgeoning new bourgeois literature in France. But also as he matured, these ideas began to be more and more merely stylistic borrowings, and he developed more and more thematic originality, culminating, of course, in the Canterbury Tales. Thus in a way Chaucer relied more heavily on French literature in his earlier works than later, and this early influence was, of course, predominantly in the vein of the roman courtois.

My second reason for spending more time on the courtly romance tradition is merely that, while doing so, I was in a way preparing for the section on Meun and the bourgeois tradition. Section II, on the development of the courtly romance sets a mood for my paper. Since its main focal point is the evolution of the Roman de la Rose, it allows me to follow logically into section IV on Meun. The courtly and bourgeois traditions had existed side by side in France for a century or more before Chaucer, but since the two influences did not make themselves felt in his works simultaneously, I was able to facilitate handling them by separating them in the discussion. Nevertheless, discussion of one implies at least setting the mood for the other, and that is what I did.

The third reason is by far the most important. By the time Chaucer began the Canterbury Tales, he was an established writer and had developed a style of his own. Yet this work is the one which Jean de Meun influenced the most. Meun's influence was, however, more

one of spirit than of content or style. He and Chaucer were much alike: realistic, critical, outspoken, yet with a strong sense of humor. Chaucer could much more naturally adopt the warm, ribald bourgeois style to his own thinking and personality than he could the formal, artificial idealism of the romans. Therefore the earlier poems were more directly influenced in that there was more direct borrowing of style and ideas foreign to Chaucer's nature, if not to his education and background. The influence of Meun was subtler, much less definite, more abstract. The Canterbury Tales are distinctively Chaucer's own creation with a definite personal flavor to them, no matter how much debt they owe Meun as a spiritual father. The earlier poems, on the other hand, particularly the dream allegories, while definitely Chaucer's own, nevertheless have a smack about them that immediately tell the experienced reader that Chaucer's exuberantly earthy spirit was laboring under a set of restrictions foreign to his nature in writing a work based on the conventions of the court of love. In being restrictive rather than inspirational, I feel, the earlier French influence made itself felt more strongly in Chaucer's works, although in the long run the more congenial mood of the later bourgeois influence is more important.

A question keeps rising in my mind. Why, if the bourgeois influence was there in the Roman de la Rose and in contemporary French writers all the time Chaucer was writing in the courtly tradition, did he not

turn to it sooner? I think the answer lies in the fact that Chaucer, determined to revitalize English poetry with French moods, had got so caught up in the courtly conventions that it took him a long time to subordinate their strong influence to his own natural poetic tendencies. By the time he got to Troilus and Cryseide and the Canterbury Tales, however, he had come out from under this influence enough to realize that the bourgeois fabliau style suited him better. By then Chaucer had the upper hand, and his personality never got buried beneath poetic convention again, whether it was the courtly romantic style, which remained with him to some extent for the rest of his life, or the newly accepted bourgeois influence. Jean de Meun influenced Chaucer, I feel, because Chaucer wanted him to. Chaucer had all the makings of a fine gaulois poet before Meun, and they would have developed without him; however, not to so great a peak perhaps. Without Meun, Chaucer would have been able to leap to respectable heights; he did this even in the highly conventionalized romantic poetry. With Meun, whose wide reading and learned but never stuffy or unlikelike style served him almost more as an example than as a source, Chaucer soared.

I do not mean to imply that Chaucer's early poems were poor, or even stuffy. The roman courtois, for all its long-windedness and stultifying conventionalism was a beautiful style of literature, and one which would do justice to any good poet's talents (but not as the only genre in which he writes). In addition, Chaucer brought

to it his inimitable spirit of originality and life. Only in a few of the minor lyrics is convention so heavy as to drown out the Chaucer touch. Even in so heavily influenced a poem as the Book of the Duchess there is that indefinable spark of descriptive power that makes one feel the writer must have known the character being described personally, and even the Eagle of the Parlement of Fowls seems to have been a personal acquaintance of the author's, as of course the later personalities of the pilgrimage to Canterbury appear. This power of personal description was Chaucer's real forte, the ability to bring out such small details of character and appearance that the reader is sure the individual lived and was studied by Chaucer. The conventionalized personages of the courtly romances offered little opportunity to express such a talent, but Chaucer did his best to do so while he was under this influence.

It is an extremely fortunate thing that he escaped the overbearing weight of that influence before the Canterbury Tales, but it is also extremely fortunate that he did not run away from it entirely. Imagine the Prioress without the lyric touches of romantic conventionalism in her description, or the Franklin's Tale without the courtly style for which it was so obviously intended.

In closing let me say merely that Chaucer would be inconceivable without the French influence as a whole, and would be greatly

lessened by the absence of either of the two traditions. We must remember, however, that he is always preeminently an English poet, who knew and loved the English language and the English people, and brought them together in the first great English verse.

List of Works Consulted

1. Adams, Henry, Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959).
2. Arland, Marcel, ed., Anthologie de la Poesie Francaise (Paris: Editions Stock, 1947).
3. Chaucer, Geoffrey, The Canterbury Tales, trans. Nevill Coghill (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1952).
4. Braddy, Haldeen, Chaucer and the French Poet Graunson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1947).
5. Bradley, Robert F., and Robert B. Michell, eds., Eight Centuries of French Literature (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951).
6. Deschamps, Eustache, Oeuvres Complètes, 11 vols. [Paris: Librairie de Firmin - Didot et Cie., 1884 (Société des Anciens Textes Francais)].
7. Dodd, William George, Courtly Love in Gower and Chaucer Boston: Ginn and Company, 1913 (Harvard Studies in English, vol. I) .
8. Fansler, Dean Spruill, Chaucer and the Roman de la Rose New York: Columbia University Press, 1914 (Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature) .
9. French, Robert Dudley, A Chaucer Handbook (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1947).
10. Giese, William F., ed., French Lyrics in English Verse (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1946).
11. Hammond, Eleanor P., Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual (New York: MacMillan Company, 1908).
12. Hoyt, Robert S., Europe in the Middle Ages (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1957).
13. Kittredge, George L., Chaucer and his Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920).
14. Legouis, Emile, Geoffrey Chaucer, trans. L. Lailavoix (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1913).

15. Lorris, Guillaume de, and Jean de Meun, Le Roman de la Rose, 5 vols. Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et Cie., 1920 (Societe des Anciens Textes Francais) .
16. -----, The Romance of the Rose, trans. F.S. Ellis, 3 vols. London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1937 (The Temple Classics) .
- * 17. Lounsbury, Thomas R., Studies in Chaucer: His Life and Writings, 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1892).
18. Lowes, John L., Geoffrey Chaucer and the Development of his Genius (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934).
19. Machaut, Guillaume de, Oeuvres, 2 vols. [Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et Cie., 1908 (Societe des Anciens Textes Francais)] .
20. Muscatine, Charles, Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).
21. Root, Robert K., The Poetry of Chaucer: A Guide to its Study and Meaning (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1922).
22. Robinson, F.N. ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959).
- * 23. Skeat, Walter W., The Evolution of the Canterbury Tales [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Limited, 1907 (Chaucer Society Publications)] .
- * 24. -----, ed., The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894).
- * 25. Tatlock, John S.P., The Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Co., Limited, 1907 (Chaucer Society Publications)] .
- * 26. Whiting, Bartlett Jere, Chaucer's Use of Proverbs [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934 (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, vol. xi)] .

* Starred volumes were not used as direct sources for the paper, but were scanned for background material.