

THE THEME OF FORTUNE IN THE PLAYS OF
MARLOWE, CHAPMAN, JONSON AND WEBSTER

by

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B. A., Rockhurst College, Kansas City, 1961

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1965

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

This paper will try to demonstrate the existence of a union between the theme of Fortune and a complex of related thoughts in the drama of Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Webster. It will also attempt to show the different characteristics of the bonds between Fortune and the dramatic vision of each playwright. It will present some important motifs of imagery and ideology connected with this theme in the Renaissance, and it will try to show how the symbolic representation of the theme of Fortune undergoes a transformation from the late sixteenth century to the early seventeenth.

Fortune symbolizes mutability, and the ideas, attitudes and images which delineate and elaborate upon this equation in the Renaissance are present in the plays of Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman, Ben Jonson and John Webster. These playwrights received this classical symbolization and its ideological content largely from the Middle Ages:

Fortune [writes George P. V. Akrigg] held an important place in the thinking of the Middle Ages. During centuries of social insecurity and turmoil, lawlessness and arbitrary rule, plagues, conspiracies, and civil war, it was very natural that men, confronted with such confusion, should adopt the Roman goddess of Fortune and, without probing too deeply into her credentials or her acceptability into the Christian scheme, suppose her whims to cause those sudden reverses that befall good men and bad alike.¹

The Elizabethan writer's use of Fortune frequently differed from the employment of this symbol by a medieval author, however, and this difference is described thus by Akrigg:

The Elizabethans inherited the medieval concept of Fortune, but they differ importantly from their forbears in the manner of their reference to her, extensive though such reference is within their pages. The concept of Fortune was, as we have noted, an organic part of the medieval frame of reference. With related concepts such as the teaching of contemptu mundi, it was a part of the structure of

medieval thought. Thinking in terms of Fortune is a part of the medieval Weltanschauung. The Elizabethans have left behind them the medieval world view. For them the medieval system has broken up, though important elements remain. One of these elements is the concept of Fortune, now a fragment adrift, lacking reference to a broader total view. Men of letters of any era, when pushed for philosophical explanation, are apt to make recourse to the familiar, widely established ideas taken over uncritically from the preceding age. Thus the Elizabethan writers fall back naturally and familiarly to references to Fortune, but with them these are no longer related to a whole philosophy of life, a whole complex of related thoughts. (Italics mine.)²

The italicised statement above is somewhat ambiguous: it can mean that the Elizabethan writer's references to Fortune are no longer related to a whole philosophy of life common to all the members of that writer's audience, or it can signify that these references to Fortune are no longer related to a whole complex of related thoughts in the mind of the writer who uses them. It is not within the scope of this paper to determine the validity or worthlessness of the first possible assertion,³ but examination of the truth or falsity of the second possible assertion concerns directly this paper's stated topic. I hope to show in this paper

- (1) that references to Fortune in the plays of Marlowe, Chapman, Jonson and Webster are related to whole complexes of connected thoughts in the minds of these playwrights and
- (2) that there seems to be a change in the meaning of the Fortune symbol from the drama under Elizabeth to that under James I.

I also hope to reveal

- (3) the various ways in which these references to Fortune are linked to whole complexes of related thoughts in each dramatist and
- (4) some major elements of ideology and imagery that contribute to the theme of Fortune in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century English drama.

To present these four items, I have chosen to write an essay on each playwright and the play(s) he wrote that contain references to Fortune of more than incidental relevance. The essays treat the dramatists and their work in chronological order rather than in any thematic arrangement in order

to suggest the changes in the content of the Fortune symbol from Marlowe to Webster.

A glance at the table of contents will inform the reader that Marlowe and Chapman have received far more extended treatment than have Jonson and Webster. This lack of quantitative proportion is necessary in a paper that deals with these four authors from the aspect of their comments on Fortune, for the number of these comments is far greater in the plays of the former two writers than in those of the latter pair. It also happens that the theme of Fortune is one of the dominant motifs in the dramatic visions of Marlowe and Chapman, but that it forms a minor part of the dramatic presentations of Jonson and Webster. Hence, greater portions of the dramatic visions of Marlowe and Chapman must be dealt with in this paper. The presence of Jonson and Webster in this paper is accounted for by the fact that the theme of Fortune is connected to their dramatic visions by links that differ from those in the plays of Marlowe and Chapman. The various ways in which these four play-wrights achieved this connection apparently exhausted the major methods for such a union and thus the inclusion in this work of one major play from Jonson and one from Webster serves to illustrate the connections between Fortune and their dramatic views, and seems to give this paper a qualitative proportion that would otherwise be missing.

I have quoted very extensively from the plays in an effort to leave nothing undisplayed in the presentation of items one, three and four. In defense of such a practice I would cite T. S. Eliot's remark in Essays on Elizabethan Drama (New York, 1956), p. viii: "And that perhaps is another reason why it is easier to write about minor Elizabethan and Jacobean drama than about Shakespeare: an essay can be worth reading for the quotations alone."

PART II: CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

Marlowe's experimentation with the theme of Fortune as a basis for the plot structure of his plays reflects the changes in his thought about human nature, history and political power. His initial dramatic effort, the first part of Tamburlaine the Great (1587), represents the only major Elizabethan-Jacobean play in which a mighty protagonist succeeds unequivocally in his effort to

. . . cut off from Fortune
Her feather'd shoulders and her winged shoes,
And thrust from her light feet her turning stone
That she may ever tarry by his throne.
(Chapman's Byron's Tragedy, I, 1, 141-144)

At the opening of Tamburlaine, Cosroe complains that the Persian empire is

. . . ruled and governed by a man
At whose birthday Cynthia with Saturn joined,
And Jove, the Sun, and Mercury denied
To shed their influence in his fickle brain!
(I, 1, 12-15)⁴

Later in this scene, Menaphon tells Cosroe that he should rejoice,

Since Fortune gives you opportunity
To gain the title of a conqueror
By curing of this maimed empery. (124-126)

But in the next scene, we see that it is Tamburlaine who is fated to restore order to the Persian "maimed empery" when he praises the worth of Zencrate above possession of a Persian crown "which gracious stars have promised at my birth" (90-92). The hero's determination to yoke the stars to his will appears a few lines later as he advises Theridamas to

Forsake thy king, and do but join with me,
And we will triumph over all the world.
I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains,
And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about . . . (172-175)

Thus by the end of the first act, Marlowe has prepared his audience for the subsequent stage action by presenting the Persian emperor and Cosroe as subject to a wheel of Fortune spun by Tamburlaine.

In the second act, Cosroe acknowledges Tamburlaine's imperial capacity (II, i. 33-36) and apparently becomes willing to commit much of his own imperial jurisdiction to the Scythian shepherd's direction (II, iii, 1-2). Tamburlaine responds to this by boasting of his martial prowess, and when he speaks of wielding his sword, he uses terms of storm imagery that are characteristically associated with the operations of Fortune:

See where it is, the keenest cuttle-ax
That e'er made passage thorough Persian arms.
These are the wings shall make it fly as swift
As doth the lightning or the breath of heaven,
And kill as surely as it swiftly flies. (55-59)

Just prior to his battle with Tamburlaine, Cosroe prays futilely to the stars (II, vi, 36-40). But Tamburlaine, like capricious Fortune, has made Cosroe king for "sport" (II, v, 101), and when the Scythian shepherd throws his adversary suddenly off the wheel he controls, the victimized Cosroe rails at Tamburlaine in typical anti-Fortune style:

Barbarous and bloody Tamburlaine,
Thus to deprive me of my crown and life!
 . . .
Even at the morning of my happy state,
Scarce being seated in my royal throne,
To work my downfall and untimely end!
(II, vii, 1-2; 4-6)

In the same scene, Theridamas praises his leader in terms of a massive stability in direct contrast to the airy fickleness of Fortune: "For he is gross and like the massy earth" (31).

In the next act, Agydas expresses fear of his impending death at the hands of Tamburlaine in terms of ship-sea-storm imagery sometimes connected with Fortune:

. . . When the seaman sees the Hyades
 Gather an army of Cimmerian clouds
 (Auster and Aquilon with winged steeds,
 All sweating, tilt about the watery heavens,
 With shivering spears enforcing thunder-claps,
 And from their shields strike flames of lightning),
 All fearful folds his sails and sounds the main,
 Lifting his prayers to the heavens for aid
 Against the terrors of the winds and waves,
 So fares Agydas for the late-felt frowns
 That sent a tempest to my daunted thoughts,
 And makes my soul divine her overthrow.

(III, ii, 76-87)⁵

Agydas manages to escape Tamburlaine's fury only through the time-honored exit for Fortune's refugees—suicide.

In the second scene of the fourth act, Tamburlaine uses the beaten Turkish emperor, Bajaseth, as a footstool to mount his imperial throne as he addresses the stars from the zenith of his ascent from the pastures of Seythia:

Smile, stars, that reigned at my nativity,
 And dim the brightness of their neighbor lamps!
 Disdain to borrow light of Cynthia!
 For I, the chiefest lamp of all the earth,
 First rising in the east with mild aspect,
 But fixed now in the meridian line,
 Will send up fire to your turning spheres,
 And cause the sun to borrow light of you.
 My sword stroke fire from his coat of steel,
 Even in Bithynia, when I took this Turk,
 As when a fiery exhalation,
 Wrapped in the bowels of a freezing cloud,
 Fighting for passage, makes the walkin crack,
 And casts a flash of lightning to the earth. (33-46)

Although Bajaseth predicts Tamburlaine's fall (IV, ii, 64-65), the Turk's conqueror is completely immobile in regard to the variations of Fortune; he says to the Turk, ". . . know my customs are as peremptory / As wrathful planets, death, or destiny" (V, ii, 64-65). Bajaseth ultimately admits that

. . . such a star hath influence in his sword
 As rules the skies and countermands the gods
 More than the Cimmerian Styx or destiny. . . (169-171)

before he and his empress share the doom of Agydas. Finally, at the end of this play, Zenocrate's maid can truly tell her:

Your love hath Fortune so at his command
 That she shall stay and turn her wheel no more,
 As long as life maintains his mighty arm
 That fights for honor to adorn your head. (315-318)

The first part of Tamburlaine dramatizes the actions of a hero who represents "a denial of that fundamental limitation of which Fortune was the traditional symbol: the mutability of all things."⁶ But the denial goes farther than this:

Throughout both parts of Tamburlaine there is a strong and direct denial of the role of providence in human affairs. History for Marlowe is created by two things: fortune and human will. Fortune is not conceived of in the medieval Christian manner as the instrument which executes God's providence; Marlowe's is the classical fortune, the capricious, lawless element in the universe which can be controlled and directed only by human wisdom and power. His hero . . . is the man who can master fortune and bend her to his will, for the classical fortune, it must be remembered, is a woman who can easily be swayed.⁷

Thus Marlowe has replaced the medieval Christian controller of Fortune (God) with a human spinner of her wheel (Tamburlaine) in the first part of this play.

The first part of Tamburlaine was highly popular before audiences composed mostly of theists, and it seems that its author imbedded a sufficient modicum of theistic morality in this play to guarantee acceptance of its atheistic theme by an Elizabethan audience. I suggest that this modicum exists in an important connotation of the Fortune symbol: mutability implies disorder. For Marlowe's contemporaries political disorder was analogous to moral disorder, and a reformer of the first kind of anarchy was subordinate in virtue only to a punisher of the latter type of chaos. Tamburlaine begins his climb to power by healing Persia's "maimed empery," and it is the superiority of his imperial strength and capacity, set in contrast to the imperial weakness and incapacity of his opponents, that impels the Scythian to that defied throne from which he "rules the skies and countermands the gods."

In the second part of Tamburlaine (written before 1590), the atheistic conqueror makes it clear that he regards his task as theistic:

. . . since I exercise a greater name
The Scourge of God and terrour of the world,
I must apply my selfe to fit those tearmes,
In war, in blood, in death, in cruelties,
And plague such Pesants as resist in me
The power of heauens eternal maiesty. (IV, 1, 3627-3632)⁸

By the first scene of the last act, Tamburlaine has apparently become converted to theism; he says that

There is a God full of revenging wrath,
From whom the thunder and the lightning breaks,
Whose Scourge I am, and him will I obey (4294-4296)

Tamburlaine's acknowledgment of an over-ruling universal force outside himself is repeated just before his death. He who held "the Fates bound fast in iron chains" throughout the first part of Tamburlaine advises his son at the end of the second part to "admit necessity":

Tamburlaine. Nor bar thy mind that magnanimitie,
That nobly must admit necessity:
Sit vp my boy, and with those silken raines,
Bridle the steeled stomackes of those Iades.
Theridamas. My Lord, you must obey his maiesty,
Since Fate commands, and proud necessity.
(V, iiii, 4593-4598)

Johnstone Parr maintains that Marlowe has adequately motivated Tamburlaine's end:

Tamburlaine's end is, therefore, quite adequately motivated if we consider that his dominant characteristic is his inordinate passion--the passion of ambition, hatred, wrath, and revenge--from which the Elizabethan readily perceived that devastating results may be wrought upon the body. In thus allowing his gigantic and powerful character to die suddenly from some peculiar "distemper," Marlowe has not (as Horace might say) "brought on the gods." The catastrophe of Tamburlaine is not at all out of joint with his character; for his peculiar distemper has been occasioned by his innate passions, and in the light of sixteenth-century psychophysiology it was perfectly obvious to an intelligent Elizabethan that the wrathful Scythian should have been dispatched in such a manner.⁹

Marlowe's dramatic connection of Tamburlaine's demise with an excess of passion is indicated by the title-page of the second part of this play which proclaims:

TAMBURLAINE THE / GREAT. / With his impassionate furie,
for the / death of his Lady and Lous faire Zenocra- / te:
his forme of exhortation and discipline / to his three
scenes, and the manner of / his owne death. / The second
part.

Furthermore, at the opening of the final scene, Theridamas calls upon the stars, which commonly direct the fortunes of passionate men, to commiserate the fate of the stricken Tamburlaine (V, iii, 4393-4397). Thus Marlowe's primitive attempt at complex human characterization in the second part of Tamburlaine produces a realization on the part of the Marlovian protagonist that his self-will is not entirely invulnerable. As Paul Koehler writes, ". . . there is a muted strain in the drama [i. e., in the second part of Tamburlaine] of recognition that human power is ephemeral and of nascent understanding of other men. In this strain lie the seeds of future development."¹⁰

These seeds sprout rather vigorously in The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus (1592). I believe that the success of the play springs mainly from the crackling dramatic tension created by the juxtaposition of contradictory historical perspectives that are apparently irreconcilable. Marlowe has treated an age-old Christian thesis from an antithetical historical viewpoint: the traditionally horizontal Christian struggle between the forces of heaven and hell for possession of a man's immortal soul rides the pagan wheel of Fortune to its predestined end.

At the outset of this play, the Chorus announces, "We must perform / The form of Faustus' fortunes, good or bad," (7-8) and it nominates Faustus as a candidate for contention with the universal force controlling his destiny

by indicating his inordinate interest in black magic:

His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
 And, melting, heavens conspired his overthrow,
 For, falling to a devilish exercise,
 And glutted with learning's golden gifts,
 He surfeits upon curst negromancy. (21-25)

The purpose of the Evil Angel's first message to Faustus is to swell the doctor's ambition for absolute sovereignty:

Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art
 Wherein all Nature's treasury is contained.
 Be thou on earth, as Jove is in the sky,
 Lord and commander of these elements. (1, 73-76)

Faustus' limitless ambition, like that of Tamburlaine, is inextricably bound up with the stars: in the middle of the play, the Chorus reappears to tell how

Learned Faustus,
 To know the secrets of astronomy
 Craven in the book of Jove's firmament,
 Did mount himself to scale Olympus' top . . . (vi, 200-203)

And when the Chorus returns again, it relates Faustus' conversation with his friends about the stars:

. . . in their conference of what befell,
 Touching his journey through the world and air,
 They put forth questions of astrology,
 Which Faustus answered with such learned skill,
 As they admired and wondered at his wit. (vii, 103-107)

As the play nears its end, Faustus becomes more vividly aware of his hastening doom:

Now, Mephistophilis, the restless course
 That Time doth run with calm and silent foot,
 Short'ning my days and thread of vital life,
 Calls for the payment of my latest years . . . (xi, 1-4)

Damned art thou, Faustus, damned; despair and die.
 Hell calls for right, and with a roaring voice
 Says, "Faustus, come! Thine hour is come!"
 And Faustus will come to do thee right. (xiv, 51-54)

. . . Ah, Faustus,
 Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,

And then thou must be damned perpetually!
 Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
 That time may cease, and midnight never come!
 You stars that reigned at my nativity,
 Whose influence hath allotted death and hell,
 Now draw up Faustus like a foggy mist
 Into the entrails of yon lab'ring clouds. . . (xv, 84-88; 106-111)

Finally, the Chorus comments on Faustus' evil fortune:

. . . burned is Apollo's laurel bough
 That sometime grew within this learned man.
 Faustus is gone; regard his hellish fall,
 Whose fiendful fortunes may exhort the wise
 Only to wonder at unlawful things,
 Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits
 To practice more than heavenly power permits. (xv, 9-12)

The faintly visible threads of dramatic tension produced in Tamburlaine by theistic-atheistic friction have expanded in Faustus to the broad and clear strands of a paradoxical portrayal of the serene action of the eternal God of Christianity in terms of the turbulent wheel of a temporal goddess of classical paganism. Thus the ambitious and passionate Doctor Faustus burns himself out "while circling Time moves round in an eternal sphere."

Edward the Second (1594) is typical of late Elizabethan drama because it is a tragedy based upon a situation involving political disarray and revolt. King Edward upsets the order of his court hierarchy by foolishly elevating his favorite, Gaveston, above the ranks of the established nobility. The king's immoderate passion for Gaveston, which destroys not only the macrocosmic balance of the state but also the microcosmic harmony of the domestic relationship between Edward and Queen Isabella, begins the fall of the king and his court favorite.

The plot movement of Edward II is much more complex than that of Tamburlaine or Faustus. The play is at its midpoint when the first battle between the king and his rebellious nobles apparently reinforces Edward's position at the top of Fortune's wheel and deposits the rebel nobles' leader, Mortimer

Junior, at the bottom. The subsequent decline of Edward's position and the total revolution of Mortimer's fortunes in the somewhat constricted space of half a play emphasize the picture of Fortune's wheel turning in its irresistible round.

The first overt reference to Fortune in this play does not appear until the eleventh scene (which I would call the concluding scene of Act III), when Mortimer Junior defiantly asks himself:

What, Mortimer, can ragged, stony walls
Immure thy virtue that aspires to heaven?
No, Edward, Edward's scourge, it may not be;
Mortimer's hope surmounts his fortune far. (255-258)

Two scenes later, John of Hainault asks Prince Edward to "shake off all our fortunes equally" (19-20), and events are moving fast by the time King Edward resolves to defy his fate and Baldoek warns him that "this princely resolution / Fits not the time" (xvi, 8-9). Then Edmund, the king's brother, enters and cries:

Edward, alas! my heart relents for thee!
Proud traitor, Mortimer, why dost thou chase
Thy lawful king, thy sovereign, with thy sword?
Vild wretch, and why hast thou of all unkind,
Borne arms against thy brother and thy king?
Rain showers of vengeance on my cursed head,
Thou God, to whom in justice it belongs
To punish this unnatural revolt! (11-18)

After this speech, Isabella installs her son a notch below her lover on Fortune's furiously turning wheel by appointing the prince lord warden of the realm (33-38).

In the next scene, Leicester arrests the king's followers while briefly meditating on the Senecan proverb, "Quem dies vidit veniens superbum, / Hunc dies vidit fugiens jacentem." (53-54) and Edward complains, "O my stars, / Why do you lour unkindly on a king?" (62-63). Baldoek tells the king, "Our lots are cast; I fear me, so is thine," (78) and then says to Spencer:

To die, sweet Spencer, therefore live we all;
Spencer, all live to die, and rise to fall. (110-111)

Just prior to resigning his crown, Edward cries to the stars like *Theridamas* and *Faustus* before him:

Continue ever, thou celestial sun;
Let never silent night possess this clime.
Stand still, you watches of the element;
All times and seasons, rest you at a stay,
That Edward may be still fair England's king!
But day's bright beams doth vanish fast away,
And needs I must resign my wished crown. (xviii, 64-70)

In the following scene, Mortimer tells one of the king's prison guards:

As thou intendest to rise by Mortimer,
Who now makes Fortune's wheel turn as he please,
Seek all the means thou canst to make him ^{i.e., Edward} droop. . . (51-53)

Two scenes later, Mortimer again expresses supreme self-confidence: "Major sum quam cui possit fortuna nocere," (69) and even in the final scene,

Mortimer tells himself:

As for myself, I stand as Jove's huge tree,
And others are but shrubs compared to me. (xciii, 11-12)

But when Mortimer ultimately falls, he stoically accepts his fate:

Base Fortune, now I see that in thy wheel
There is a point to which when men aspire,
They tumble headlong down. That point I touched,
And, seeing there was no place to mount up higher,
Why should I grieve at my declining fall? (59-63)

From Marlowe's use of the theme of Fortune in *Tamburlaine*, *Faustus* and *Edward II*, two general conclusions can be drawn:

- (1) that Marlowe experimented considerably with this theme as a basis for the plot structure of his plays, and
- (2) that the development of Marlowe's philosophy of history, political power and biography is reflected in this progressive experimentation and in his concept of the symbolization of Fortune.

In *Tamburlaine*, the Marlovian protagonist is the unalterable source of dramatic, political and historical action, and as long as Marlowe's hero retains

his unconquerable will, nothing but death can prevent his rise to the top of Fortune's wheel and his sojourn there. Clifford Leech writes that "Marlowe, we can be sure, was originally attracted to the theme of Tamburlaine because he was fascinated by, and sympathetic with, the aspiring mind: as he began to dramatise the story, he was gradually led to an awareness of suffering, in the hero and in his victims, and to a consideration of his inevitable fall."¹¹ The maturing Marlowe came to see more clearly that the source of human suffering and of human, political and historical tragedy was an excess of human passion and ambition. Marlovian tragedy comes to flow from "a predestination of desire",¹² the hero's overweening passion and ambition release him from the stable world of moral order and degree, and bind him to the more inexorable laws of mutability. If the tragic protagonist's will remains inflexible, he will suffer the fate of Faustus, and feel both the upward and downward motion of Fortune's wheel, but if the hero's nature is flexible, it will alter with the revolution of his fortunes and he may gain insight into the moral significance of his experience.

Flexibility in a dramatic personage does not merely reflect vulnerability to the pressure of external forces, but also permits the development of character, such as Marlowe achieved in Edward II. By this achievement, Marlowe

prepared the way for Shakespeare's great historical tragedy of Richard II, and not least in that he gave a new tragic significance to the de casibus theme of rise and fall . . . As Edward falls, young Mortimer rises in his place, only to fall himself as the new King Edward III assumes his position. Edward and Mortimer are fashioned by Marlowe as protagonist and antagonist, two parallel characters, each serving as foil to the other. All of Edward's weaknesses are mirrored in Mortimer's strength; what private virtue Edward may have is set off by Mortimer's total lack of it. Those elements which cause Edward to fall cause Mortimer to rise.¹³

Irvin Ribner finds in Mortimer's final apostrophe to Fortune "merely a calm acceptance of the inevitable destruction at the hands of fate of all who aspire beyond a certain point. What we have is a stoical acceptance of fortune in

the manner of the classical historians. It is largely in this pessimism that the view of history to which Marlowe came in Edward II differs from that in Tamburlaine. . . . The flamboyant optimism of the earlier play is now replaced by a more tragic view of life, perhaps most evident in the decline of Mortimer.²⁴ Marlowe's Mortimer clearly points to Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois, Jonson's Sejanus and Webster's Bosola.

PART III: GEORGE CHAPMAN

Although Chapman sometimes uses the theme of Fortune as a basis for the plot structure of his drama, his dialogues and soliloquies contain Chapman's characteristic manipulation of this theme. Consequently, there is more quotation from Chapman's plays in this paper than from those of the other three dramatists.

The plot of Chapman's greatest play, Bussy D'Ambois (1607), has the standard pyramidal structure of drama that represents the rise and fall of a heroic protagonist.¹⁵ The track of Chapman's tragic hero is dramatically reinforced and philosophically charted through the play's lines in terms of Fortune, which forms the topic of a long, play-opening soliloquy by Bussy D'Ambois:

Fortune, not Reason, rules the state of things;
 Reward goes backwards, Honor on his head;
 Who is not poor, is monstrous; only Need
 Gives form and worth to every human seed.
 So great men flourish, and do imitate
 Unskillful statuaries, who suppose,
 In forming a colossus, if they make him
 Straddle enough, strut, and look big, and gape,
 Their work is goodly. So men merely great
 In their affected gravity of voice,
 Sourness of countenance, manners' cruelty,
 Authority, wealth, and all the spawn of Fortune,
 Think they bear all the kingdom's worth before them,
 Yet differ not from these colossic statues,
 Which, with heroic forms without o'erspread,
 Within are naught but mortar, flint, and lead.
 Man is a torch borne in the wind; a dream
 But of a shadow, summed with all his substance;
 And, as great seamen, using all their wealth
 And skills in Neptune's deep invisible paths,
 In tall ships richly built and ribbed with brass,
 To put a girdle round about the world,
 When they have done it, coming near their haven,
 Are fain to give a warning-piece, and call
 A poor, staid fisherman, that never passed

His country's sight, to waft and guide them in;
 So when we wander furthest through the waves
 Of glassy glory, and the gulfs of state,
 Topped with all titles, spreading all our reaches,
 As if each private arm would sphere the earth,
 We must to Virtue for her guide resort,
 Or we shall shipwreck in our safest port. (1-33)¹⁶

The ideas and images in this speech are those conventionally associated with the theme of Fortune: the goddess of mutability rules an irrational world in which hypocritical men, who are insignificant of themselves,¹⁷ strive for the external greatness and stability symbolised by a large tree, statue or ship, thus subjecting themselves to Fortune's battering storms, from which the sole haven is virtue. Chapman's manipulation of this family of images in Bussy's soliloquy "serves to state the 'moral' of the play, to characterize the hero, and to outline the general situation-- as well as to point ironically to the succeeding action."¹⁸

The subsequent action of this play is triggered by Monsieur's offer of a bribe to Bussy. When tending this offer, Monsieur stresses the blindness and swiftness of Fortune's operations so that Bussy will not delay acceptance of her gifts through him:

. . . the old Scythians
 Painted blind Fortune's powerful hands with wings.
 To show her gifts come swift and suddenly,
 Which, if her favorite be not swift to take,
 He loses them forever. (I, 1, 113-117)

Bussy then meditates to the conclusion that opportunity knocks but once:

The king hath known me long as well as he [i.e., Monsieur],
 Yet could my fortune never fit the length
 Of both their understandings till this hour.
 There is a deep nick in Time's restless wheel
 For each man's good; when which nick comes, it strikes;
 As rhetoric yet works not persuasion,
 But only is a mean to make it work,
 So no man riseth by his real merit,
 But when it cries "Click" in his raiser's spirit.
 Many will say, that cannot rise at all,
 Man's first hour's rise is first step to his fall.

I'll venture that; men that fall low must die,
As well as men cast headlong from the sky. (131-143)

When Bussy accepts Monsieur's bribe, he mounts Fortune's wheel; the immediate consequence of his act is dramatically shown by the hero's climactic striking of the steward from whom he took the bribe. The ultimate effect of Bussy's decision is foreshadowed in the steward's scene-closing line: "These crowns are set in blood, and blood be their fruit!" (222).

The fruit of Bussy's tainted crowns begins to mature in the first scene of Act II. A messenger to the King of France relates a duel involving Bussy:

D'Ambois, that like a laurel put in fire
Sparkled and spit, did much more than scorn
That his wrong should incense him so like chaff
To go so soon out, and like lighted paper
Approve his spirit at once both fire and ashes.
So drew they lots and in them Fates appointed
That Barrisier should fight with fiery D'Ambois,

And then like flame and powder they comixed.
(69-75, 77)¹⁹

By the end of this scene, Bussy is thoroughly committed to a course which can lead only to his destruction, for his intention contains the fatal elements of blood, ambition and lust:²⁰

And now through blood and vengeance, deeds of height
And hard to be achieved, 'tis fit I make
Attempt of her [i. e., Tamyra's] perfection. (214-216)

As Tamyra anticipates a visit from Bussy, she asks the "peaceful regents of the night" to "make the violent wheels / Of Time and Fortune stand . . ." (108, 115-116). In contrast to Friar Lawrence, the chaplain encourages Bussy's passion because "our affection's storm, / Raised in our blood, no reason can reform" (140-141). Thus does Chapman link the storms of Fortune with those of passion.

By the first scene of the third act, Bussy has become "Fortune's proud mushroom shot up in a night" (117), and he petitions the king to let him

"hawk" at any great man, so "that, like a huge, unlading argosy, / He shall confess all . . ." (III, ii, 38-39). Bussy is now close enough to the throne to seek royal permission to make the huge argosies (great men) of the king's realm unload their cargoes of vice.

As soon as the king's nobles perceive their peril from the fact that Bussy has reached the top of Fortune's wheel, they plot to "set snares for his ranging greatness" and Monsieur suggests that the trap be laid

. . . amongst our greatest women;
 For there is no such trap to catch an upstart
 As a loose downfall, for you know their falls
 Are th' ends of all men's rising. (III, ii, 148-149; 150-153)

Monsieur alludes to the ship-sea imagery so often connected with Fortune and includes fog imagery commonly associated with Fortune when he subsequently rails against women:

O, the unsounded sea of women's bloods,
 That, when 'tis calmest, is most dangerous;
 Not any wrinkle creasing in their faces
 When in their hearts are Scylla and Charybdis,
 Which still are hid in dark and standing fogs. . . . (332-336)

In the second scene of Act V, Monsieur delivers two speeches on the defects in Nature which allow Fortune to wield her power, and the first of these unites the formerly separate strands of ship-sea and powder-fire imagery:

Now shall we see that Nature hath no end
 In her great works responsive to their worths;
 That she, that makes so many eyes and souls
 To see and foresee, is stark blind herself;
 And, as illiterate men say Latin prayers
 By rote of heart and daily iteration,
 Not knowing what they say, so Nature lays
 A deal of stuff together, and by use,
 Or by the mere necessity of matter,
 Ends such a work, fills it, or leaves it empty
 Of strength or virtue, error or clear truth,
 Not knowing what she does; but usually
 Gives that which she calls merit to a man,
 And belief must arrive him on huge riches,
 Honor, and happiness, that effects his ruin,
 Even as in ships of war, whole lasts of powder
 Are laid, methinks, to make them last and guard,

When a disordered spark, that powder taking,
Blows up with sudden violence and horror
Ships that, kept empty, had sailed long with terror. (1-20)

In his second speech, Monsieur talks eloquently in terms of trees, wind and seas:

. . . here will be one [i. e., Bussy D'Ambois]
Young, learned, valiant, virtuous, and full manned—
One on whom Nature spent so rich a hand
That with an ominous eye she wept to see
So much consumed her virtuous treasury.
Yet, as the winds sing through a hollow tree
And (since it lets them pass through) lets it stand,
But a tree solid (since it gives no way
To their wild rage) they rend up by the root,
So this whole man
(That will not wind with every crooked way,
Trod by the servile world) shall reel and fall
Before the frantic puffs of blind-born chance,
That pipes through empty men, and makes them dance.
Not so the sea raves on the Lybian sands,
Tumbling her billows in each other's neck;
Not so the surges of the Euxine sea

Swell, being enraged, even from their inmost drop,
As Fortune swings about the restless state
Of virtue, now thrown into all men's hate. (32-48, 51-53)

As Bussy enters the fateful room in Montsurry's house at the beginning of the last scene, he shares Mortimer's miscalculation of Fortune's cycle. Although it is always the top of Fortune's wheel from which men fall, Bussy can still say of his enemies' stratagem that

. . . 'twas ill plotted;
They should have mauled me here
When I was rising. I am up and ready. (V, iv, 34-36)

So Bussy is ripe for his "worthless fall" (110) instead of ready to repulse his enemies, and, after he has fallen, he gains the tragic protagonist's perception of truth:

O frail condition of strength, valor, virtue,
In me (like the warning fire upon the top
Of some steep beacon on a steeper hill)
Made to express it, like a falling star
Silently glanced that like a thunderbolt
Looked to have struck and shook the firmament. (141-146)

Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois possesses the passionate ambition of Marlowe's Tamburlaine for an earthly crown;²¹ Bussy tells the King of France:

Who to himself is law, no law doth need,
Offends no law, and is a king indeed. (II, 1, 203-204)

However, the pessimism from which Bussy's ambition originates is in sharp contrast to the optimism that generates Tamburlaine's desire. The disorder that forms a controllable condition of Tamburlaine's world infects Bussy's universe with an incurable pestilence. Throughout Chapman's play, "an evil Fortune is equated with a corrupted Nature."²² The sea, whose cyclic motion typifies the movement of Fortune's wheel, never penetrates to the oak-like Tamburlaine's fortified heart until his fatal illness. It also remains external to Faustus, Edward II and Mortimer, striking them down from outside the vital centers of their beings. But the sea pulses through Bussy, causing a tenuous restlessness which vainly turns upon itself for peaceful resolution:

His [i. e., Bussy's] heart will not down, 'tis like the sea,
That partly by his own internal heat,
Partly the stars' daily and nightly motion,
Their heat and light, and partly of the place
The divers frames, but chiefly by the moon,
Bristled with surges, never will be won,
(No, not when th' hearts of all these powers are burst)
To make retreat into his settled home,
Till he be crown'd with his own quiet foam. (I, 11, 185-193)

The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, unlike its predecessor, is a revenge tragedy and, hence, not structured as de casibus tragedy. But Bussy's brother, Clermont, is more concerned with his personal attitude toward Fortune, chance and necessity than with the enactment of his dead brother's revenge.

Clermont's first comments on Fortune refer to the same kind of court life that had contributed to Bussy's downfall:

But as those men that make their houses greater,
 Their households being less, so Fortune raises
 Huge heaps of outside in these mighty men,
 And gives them nothing in them. (I, 1, 309-312)²³

Who more joy takes that man his good advance
 Than in the good itself, does it by chance. (III, 11, 35-36)

Although Clermont retains a touch of his brother's fiery temperament (IV, 1, 11-17), he is the epitome of virtue and learning. Yet he suffers a fall in the third act of this play, causing an observer to comment:

It is Virtue's fortune,
 To keep her low, and in her proper place;
 Height has no room for her. (III, 1, 28-30)

Thus the positive state of virtue is powerless to resist Fortune's restless round and, at the close of the third act, Clermont places his trust in the neutral state of stoic detachment:

Chance what can chance me, well or ill is equal
 In my acceptance, since I joy in neither,
 But go with sway of all the world together.
 In all successes Fortune and the day
 To me alike are; I am fix'd, be she
 Never so fickle; and will there repose
 Far past the reach of any die she throws. (III, 1v, 159-165)

By the end of the fourth act, Clermont's microcosmic personal dilemma has been resolved, but Bussy's unavenged murder leaves the macrocosm of the world still disproportioned; so the ghost of Clermont's brother announces at the start of Act V:

Reform, ye ignorant men, your manless lives,
 Whose laws ye think are nothing but your lusts,
 When leaving but for supposition' sake
 The body of felicity, religion
 (Set in the midst of Christendom, and her head
 Cleft to her bosom, one half one way swaying,
 Another th' other), all the Christian world
 And all her laws, whose observation
 Stands upon faith, above the power of reason--
 Leaving (I say) all these, this might suffice
 To fray ye from your vicious swings in ill,
 And set you more on fire to do more good,
 That since the world (as which of you denies?)

Stands by proportion, all may thence conclude
 That all the joints and nerves sustaining nature
 As well may break, and yet the world abide,
 As any one good unrewarded die,
 Or any one ill scape his penalty. (15-32)

So Clermont undertakes Bussy's revenge at the beginning of the final scene, and Clermont's stoicism accompanies his performance of a task which is antithetical to the passive spirit of the philosophy that has sustained him through the king's disfavor and his mistress' loss of vision. But Clermont's stoic resolve ultimately collapses with the demise of its sole external prop, Guise, and Bussy's brother expresses his suicidal desolation in terms of ship-sea imagery, thievery and bestiality:

Now, then, as a ship,
 Touching at strange and far-removed shores,
 Her men ashore go, for their several ends,
 Fresh water, victuals, precious stones, and pearl
 All yet intentive (when the master calls,
 The ship to put off ready) to leave all
 Their greediest labours, lest they there be left
 To thieves or beasts, or be the country's slaves:
 So now my master calls, my ship, my venture,
 All in one bottom put, all quite put off,
 Gone under sail, and I left negligent,
 To all the horrors of the vicious time,
 The far-remov'd shores to all virtuous aims,
 None favouring goodness, none but he respecting
 Piety or manhood--shall I here survive
 Not cast me after him into the sea,
 Rather than here live, ready every hour
 To feed thieves, beasts, be the slave of power?
 I come, my lord! Clermont, thy creature, comes. (175-193)

The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron form a loosely-constructed de casibus tragedy featuring a Bussy D'Ambois-type hero. Although the second play conventionally dramatizes Byron's decline, the first presents a temporary regression and eventual recovery of the duke's fortunes instead of revealing their steady rise.

When Byron is first tempted to subject himself to Fortune's power, he expresses his reaction in terms of change and blood: "The blood turns in my

veins; I stand on chance, / And shall dissolve in changing. . ." (I, ii, 27-28). In the first scene of the next act, Byron issues a ringing challenge to Fortune:

I am put off from this dull shore of ease
 Into industrious and high-going seas;
 Where, like Pelides in Scamander's flood,
 Up to the ears in surges I will fight,
 And pluck French Iliou underneath the waves! (149-153)

In the following scene, the King of France describes the composition of a man who would be great:

. . . men whom virtue
 Forms with the stuff of Fortune, great and gracious,
 Must needs partake with Fortune in her humor
 Of instability, and are like to shafts
 Crown crook'd with standing, which to rectify
 Must twice as much be bow'd another way. (26-31)

The Duke of Savoy then describes Byron in contrasting terms of imperturbable constancy:

Your Majesty hath miss'd a royal sight:
 The Duke of Byron on his brave beast Pastrana,
 Who sits him like a full sail'd Argosy
 Danc'd with a lofty billow, and as snug
 Flies to his bearer, both their motions mix'd. . . (66-70)

By the first scene of Act III, Byron is a professed enemy to such cherished Elizabethan-Stuart values as were expressed by the ghost of Bussy D'Ambois (cf. above, pp. 22-23). The duke tells La Fin:

Byr. There is no truth of any good
 To be discern'd on earth; and, by conversion,
 Nought therefore simply bad; but as the stuff
 Prepar'd for arras pictures is no picture
 Till it be form'd, and man hath cast the beams
 Of his imaginous fancy through it,
 In forming ancient kings and conquerors,
 As he conceives they look'd and were attir'd,
 Though they were nothing so: so all things here
 Have all their price set down from men's conceits,
 Which make all terms and actions good or bad,
 And are but pliant and well-colour'd threads
 Put into feigned images of truth;
 To which to yield and kneel as truth-pure kings,
 That pull'd us down with clear truth of their gospel,
 Were superstition to be hiss'd to hell.

La F. Believe it, this is reason.

BYR.

Of reason and of wisdom.

'Tis the faith

(47-64) 24

Byron's ambition finally swells to such a height that it can be revealed only in terms of the most massive magnitude and immobility:

. . . I will have my image promis'd you,
Cut in such matter as shall ever last,
Where it shall stand, fix'd with eternal roots
And with a most unmoved gravity;
For I will have the famous mountain Oros,
That looks out of the duchy where I govern
Into your Highness' dukedom, first made yours,
And then with such inimitable art
Express'd and handled, chiefly from the place
Where most conspicuously he shows his face,
That, though it keep the true form of that hill
In all his longitudes and latitudes,
His height, his distances, and full proportion,
Yet shall it clearly bear my counterfeit,
Both in my face and all my lineaments;
And every man shall say: This is Byron! (III, 11, 151-166)

In the next scene, Byron apparently realizes the precariousness of his position at the top of Fortune's wheel:

. . . daily and hourly proof
Tells us prosperity is at highest degree
The fount and handle of calamity:
Liks dust before a whirlwind those men fly
That prostrate on the grounds of Fortune lie;
And being great, like trees that broadest sprout,
Their own top-heavy state grubs up their root. (III, 111, 24-30)

But in spite of this consideration and an astrologer's forecast of the duke's fall, Byron climaxes this scene with one of the boldest challenges to the stars in all dramatic literature:

Spite of the stars and all astrology
I will not lose my head; or if I do
A hundred thousand heads shall off before.
I am a nobler substance than the stars,
And shall the baser overrule the better?
Or are they better, since they are bigger?
I have a will and faculties of choice,
To do, or not to do: and reason why
I do, or not do this: the stars have none;
They know not why they shine, more than this taper,
Nor how they work, nor what: I'll change my course,

I'll piece-meal pull the frame of all my thoughts,
 And cast my will into another mould:
 And where are all your Caput Algols then?
 Your planets all, being underneath the earth
 At my nativity, what can they do?
 Malignant in aspect, in bloody houses?
 Wild fire consume them! One poor cup of wine
 More than I use, than my weak brain will bear,
 Shall make them drunk and reel out of their spheres
 For any certain act they can enforce.
 O that my arms were wings that I might fly,
 And pluck out of their hearts my destiny!
 I'll wear those golden spurs upon my heels,
 And kick at fate; be free, all worthy spirits,
 And stretch yourselves for greatness and for height,
 Untruss your slaveries; you have height enough
 Beneath this steep heaven to use all your reaches;
 'Tis too far off to let you, or respect you.
 Give me a spirit that on this life's rough sea
 Loves t' have his sails fill'd with a lusty wind,
 Even till his sail-yards tremble, his masts crack,
 And his rapt ship run on her side so low
 That she drinks water, and her keel plows air.
 There is no danger to a man that knows
 What life and death is; there's not any law
 Exceeds his knowledge; neither is it lawful
 That he should stoop to any other law.
 He goes before them, and commands them all,
 That to himself is a law rational. (106-145)

Although the end of Byron's Conspiracy sees the duke forsake his plotting against the French king, he resumes his atheistic treachery and defiance of the stars in Byron's Tragedy. The duke's Bussy-like passionate nature draws comment in the familiar imagery of powder, fire and blood:

His [i.e., Byron's] fever may be past, but for his passions,
 I fear me we shall find it spic'd too hotly
 With his old powder. (V, ii, 6-8)

My definite sentence, then, doth this import:
 That we must quench the wild-fire with his blood
 In which it was so traitorously inflam'd. . . . (295-297)

In this play's closing scene, Byron hurls final defiance at his fortune: "I'll break my blood's high billows 'gainst my stars," and concludes the play with this advice to courtiers:

Fall on your knees then, statist, ere ye fall,
 That you may rise again: knees bent too late,

Stick you in earth like statues; see in me
 How you are pour'd down from your clearest heavens;
 Fall lower yet, mix'd with th' unmoved centre,
 That your own shadows may no longer mock ye. (253-258)

In his last major play, The Tragedy of Caesar and Pompey, Chapman created a hero whose completely stoic attitude is tinged with Platonic eschatology. But the philosophy of Cato leaves him absolutely impregnable to Fortune's mischances, and thus the remarks of Pompey, whose career follows the pyramidal path of a de casibus victim, are more dramatically relevant to the theme of Fortune.

In the fourth scene of Act II, Pompey uses the vocabulary of Fortune to utter a Byronic wish (cf. above, p. 4):

O may now our Fortune
 Not balance her broad breast 'twixt two light wings,
 Nor on a slippery globe sustain her steps;
 But as the Spar'ans say the Paphian queen
 (The flood Eurotas passing) laid aside
 Her glass, her ceston, and her amorous graces,
 And in Icyrgus' favour arm'd her beauties
 With shield and javeline; so may Fortune now,
 The flood of all our enemy's forces passing
 With her fair ensigns, and arriv'd at ours,
 Displume her shoulders, cast off her wing'd shoes,
 Her faithless and still-rolling stone spurn from her,
 And enter our powers. . . (129-141)

Pompey extracts from his suffering the same paradoxical perspective gained by Byron at the end of his experiences:

At lowest, things lie fast; we now are like
 The two poles propping heaven, on which heaven moves,
 And they are fix'd and quiet; being above
 All motion far, we rest above the heavens. (V, 1, 194-197)

The readiness of Chapman to incorporate Fortune and its coterie of ideas, images and attitudes into his muddy view of human nature and Jacobean court life denotes that the classical goddess of mutability was as important for his drama as she was for Marlowe's. Chapman's arrangement of Fortune imagery and vocabulary shows a Marlovian movement from a kind of rapt admiration for human passion to advocacy of detachment from its influence on human action.

But Chapman's images focus upon an entirely different aspect of this movement from that revealed by Marlowe's imagery: the Elizabethan playwright uses images to project the hero himself before the audience, whereas Chapman uses them to explore problems of the heroic nature.²⁵ The Jacobean dramatist's prominent inclusion of ship-sea-storm-and powder-fire-blood imagery in his dramatic vision emphasizes the extreme instability of human nature and its precarious existence in a fiercely fluctuating environment. For Chapman, man's body is

. . . but a sink of folly
 The ground-work and rais'd frame of woe and frailty,
 The bond and bundle of corruption,
 A quick corse, only sensible of grief,
 A walking sepulchre, or household thief,
 A glass of air, broken with less than breath,
 A slave bound face to face to Death till death... .
 (Byron's Tragedy, V, iv, 32-38)

And so, for Chapman, only through the portals of death can a man "make retreat into his settled home," and there "be crown'd with his own quiet foam."

PART IV: BEN JONSON

Jonson's use of Fortune in Sejanus His Fall illustrates the heart of his tragic vision and his philosophy of history. Jonson derives much of his philosophy of history from the Roman historian, Sallust. In an article on the nature of Jonsonian tragedy, Joseph Bryant describes Sallust's theory of history:

. . . everything that man achieves--institutions, cities, states--partakes of the corrupt nature of man's physical body and has "an end as well as a beginning . . . rise and fall, wax and wane." . . . "If men had as great regard for honourable enterprises as they have in pursuing what is foreign to their interests," he [i. e., Sallust] wrote in his Bellum Jugurthinum, "They would control fate rather than be controlled by it, and would attain to that height of greatness where from mortals their glory would make them immortal."²⁶

Bryant believes that Jonson

was the first to make drama serve as a medium for presenting the tragedy of a whole state; . . . What he gives us in Sejanus, . . . is a representation of that part of civil tragedy in which the virtuous element of the commonwealth, in this case the remnant of all that was essentially Rome, has been reduced to inactivity by its own complacency and blindness. The activity in the play is largely confined to that of the evil forces which Rome has blindly let grow until they have all but destroyed her.²⁷

Sejanus dramatizes the rise and fall of its protagonist against the backdrop of the decline of Rome. The macrocosmic degeneration of Rome is mirrored in the opening scene of the second act by the microcosmic corruption represented in Livia's attempt to preserve her fading beauty through artificial "painting." Then in the following scene, Sejanus reveals his titanic ambition (20-21),²⁸ which is, like that of Tamburlaine, Mortimer, Bussy D'Ambois and Byron,

All for a crown.

The prince who shames a tyrant's name to bear
 Shall never dare do anything but fear;
 All the command of scepters quite doth perish,
 If it begin religious thoughts to cherish. . . (39-43)

Agrippina uses the wind-tree imagery frequently associated with Fortune to speak of tyranny as a kind of gymnastic exerciser of virtue:

'Tis princely when a tyrant doth oppose,
 And is a fortune sent to exercise
 Your virtue, as the wind doth try strong trees,
 Who by vexation grow more sound and firm. (IV, i, 67-70)

The action in the final scene of Sejanus prompts Lepidus and Arruntius to remark upon Fortune:

Lep. O violent change,
 And whirl of men's affections!

Arr. Like as both
 Their bulks and souls were bound on Fortune's wheel,
 And must act only on her motion. (V, x, 266-269)

Lep. Fortune, thou hadst no deity, if men
 Had wisdom; we have placed thee so high
 By fond belief in thy felicity. (298-300)

Jonson's play concludes with a three-part moral chorus on Fortune by Lepidus, Arruntius and Terentius:

Lep. How Fortune plies her sports, when she begins
 To practice hem! Pursues, continues, adds,
 Confounds with varying her impassioned moods!

Arr. Dost thou hope, Fortune, to redeem thy crimes,
 To make amends for thy ill-placed favors
 With these strange punishments? Forbear, you things
 That stand upon the pinnacles of state,
 To boast your slippery height: when you do fall,
 You push yourselves to pieces, ne'er to rise;
 And he that lends you pity is not wise.

Ter. Let this example move th' insolent man
 Not to grow proud and careless of the gods.
 It is an odious wisdom to blaspheme,
 Much more to slighten or deny their powers;
 For whom the morning saw so great and high,
 Thus low and little, fore the even doth lie. (453-468)

The dramatic view of history seen through Jonson's use of Fortune is a considerable distance from that of Marlowe. Marlowe offers no general historical pattern in his plays, because he failed to see in history the elaboration of any comprehensive scheme extending over many decades. Marlowe saw history as the disconnected actions of individual men whose success or failure is due to their own ability to cope with events.²⁹ Thus at the end of Edward II, the coming reign of Edward III offers an optimistic note to the conclusion of a play that dwells on the fall of Edward II and of Mortimer. But the arrival of Macro on the Roman scene of Sejanus does nothing to brighten the end of Jonson's play, for

. . . this new fellow, Macro, will become
 A greater prodigy in Rome than he
 That now is fall'n. (V,x, 316-318)

The almost total absence of Chapman's kind of Fortune imagery from Jonson's plays may indicate that Jonson's vision is not so pessimistic as that of Chapman. I do not believe that Jonson's use of Fortune imagery supplies an adequate premise for this proposition, however, because the author of Sejanus is a sternly moral writer who makes sparing use of imagery. The fact that Jonson uses the theme of Fortune to educate his audience in classical morality may reflect more hope for the salvation of the individual than Chapman shows, but the morally good people of Jonsonian drama are totally incapable of controlling the environment that constitutes their moral gymnasium.

PART V: JOHN WEBSTER

References to Fortune in Webster's The White Devil are sporadic, and do not reflect atmosphere and plot development nearly so accurately as such references in The Duchess of Malfi mirror tone and plot movement. The Duchess of Malfi is de casibus-revenge tragedy that depicts the rise and fall of Antonio, the decline of the Duchess, and, in Bosola's words,

Revenge for the Duchess of Malfi, murdered
 By th' Aragonian brethren; for Antonio
 Slain by this hand; for lustful Julia
 Poisoned by this man [i. e., the Cardinal]; and lastly
 for myself . . . (V, v, 86-88)

The fetid climate of this play is established in the opening scene, which is followed by the charming scene that presents the "courtship" and marriage of the Duchess and her steward, Antonio. At the close of this scene, the Duchess asks her new husband what the church could enforce, regarding marriage, more than complete marital union (424), and Antonio replies:

That fortune may not know an accident,
 Either of joy or sorrow, to divide
 Our fixed wishes! (425-427)

Antonio then playfully feigns blindness and tells the Duchess, "I would have you lead your fortune by the hand / Unto your marriage bed," (431-432) but the lack of divine sanction leaves the marital union of the Duchess and her steward open to the ravages of Fortune. Thus Webster masterfully creates a mood of mingled innocent delight and pathetic irony from the material of Fortune by his sensitive integration of the transitory present happiness of the lovers with their impending tragic doom.

Webster works a neat twist of ship-sea imagery in the first scene of Act II, where a painted whore asks Bosola, "Do you call this painting?"

and he responds, "No, no, but you call it careening of an old morphewed lady, to make her disembogue again. There's rough-cast phrase to your plastic" (45-49). In the last scene of this act, the traditional ship-sea imagery appears again in Ferdinand's comment on the fragility of women:

Foolish men,
That e'er will trust their honor in a bark
Made of so slight, weak bulrush as is woman,
Apt every minute to sink it! (II, v, 33-36)

Thus does Webster treat women in terms of the same Fortune-related imagery as Chayman and Jonson (Cf. above, pp. 19, 29). These three authors share a pessimistic view of women closely related to their concepts of the considerable role played by Fortune in human affairs, and thus frequently express their thoughts about women in terms of imagery closely related to the theme of Fortune.

At the beginning of the third act, Bosola reminds Ferdinand of the stars' inscrutability:

Bos. 'Tis rumored she [*i. e.*, the Duchess] hath had
three bastards, but
By whom we may go read i' th' stars.

Fer. Why, some
Hold opinion all things are written there.

Bos. Yes, if we could find spectacles to read them. (III, i, 58-62)

Webster resurrects an old Fortune image³¹ in the next scene when he has a pilgrim cry:

Alas, Antonio!
If that a man be thrust into a well,
No matter who sets hand to't, his own weight
Will bring him sooner to th' bottom. Come, let's hence.
Fortune makes this conclusion general,
"All things do help th' unhappy man to fall." (38-43)

The Duchess also observes the quickening pace of Fortune's wheel as it hurls her down: "When Fortune's wheel is over-charged with princes, / The weight makes it move swift" (III, v, 95-97). And when Bosola reminds her that

"things being at the worst begin to mend," she tartly answers:

Good comfortable fellow,
Persuade a wretch that's broke upon the wheel
To have all his bones new set; entreat him live
To be executed again! (IV, 1, 76; 78-81)

The following scene sees the nadir of the Duchess' fortunes expressed in terms of her relationship to an argosy:

I am acquainted with sad misery
As the tanned galley slave is with his oar.
Necessity makes me suffer constantly. . . (27-30)

The Duchess then shows her despair in a manner that echoes Antonio's play-acting at the end of the first act: ". . . Fortune seems only to have her eyesight / To behold my tragedy" (35-36). In the midst of the Duchess' sufferings, Bosola laments the futility of human life:

Of what is 't fools make such vain keeping?
Sin their conception, their birth weeping,
Their life a general mist of error,
Their death a hideous storm of terror. (201-204)

Fortune's wheel whirls inexorably faster as the fifth act progresses, and the characters react to the grinding pressure by multiplying references to her. The Cardinal tries to restore Bosola's shaken resolution to persevere in corruption and deceit by telling him that "there is / A fortune attends thee" (V, 14, 323-324). But Bosola asks, "Shall I go sue to Fortune any longer? / 'Tis the fool's pilgrimage" (325-326). At the close of this scene, Bosola warns himself that

. . . I must look to my footing;
In such slippery ice-pavements men had need
To be frost-nailed well--they may break their necks else.
(358-360)

He then beseeches a power whose operation will reverse that of Fortune:

O penitence, let me truly taste thy cup,
That throws men down only to raise them up! (373-374)

Just before Antonio goes to the Cardinal's residence, he tells his servant that

Necessity compels me.
 Make scrutiny throughout the passes
 Of your own life, you'll find it impossible
 To fly your fate. (V, iii, 35-38)

As Bosola rushes to his end, his realization of personal impotence and Fortune's suddenness quickens:

We are merely the stars' tennis balls, strook and banded
 Which way please them (V, iv, 58-59)
 O, my fate moves swift! (ibid)

And at last the man who mourned that life is "a general mist of error" appropriately closes his life, like The White Devil's Flaminio, "In a mist. . ." (V, v, 99).

It has been said that Webster "repeats his theme tirelessly, spinning innumerable variations with his figures of the magnificent outer show and the inner corruption, of life, of fortune, hopes that look so fair and delude us utterly, of the many bitter, twisted ironies of the difference between appearance and reality."³² Webster's handling of Fortune seems to represent but a single variation upon his many-sided theme. This variation appears to give a picture of life such like that of Chapman, but with two principal differences: (1) a note of intense confusion, portrayed largely through "mist" imagery, has entered Webster's vision, and (2) this chaos increases the desolation felt by Webster's dramatic characters.

Webster's use of Fortune imagery is more delicate and subtle than its use by Marlowe, Chapman and Jonson. Images which often appear in plays of the latter three dramatists receive more conscious solicitude at the hands of Webster, and this care transforms images common to Marlowe, Chapman and Jonson into conceits that those playwrights would never have imagined. Whereas Marlowe's Fortune images describe and demonstrate, Chapman's probe and examine, and Jonson's instruct and preach, those of Webster are content to drop the hint of paradox.³³

PART VI: SUMMARY

This paper has tried to demonstrate the existence of a union between the theme of Fortune and an entire complex of related thoughts in the drama of Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman, Ben Jonson and John Webster. It also has attempted to show some of the important characteristics of the bonds between Fortune and the dramatic vision of each playwright: the primary characteristic of this juncture in Marlowe is plot movement; in Chapman, it is dramatic dialogue and soliloquy; in Jonson, it is moral comment; and in Webster, it is imagery. This is not to deny the presence of all these elements in the link between each of these writers' use of Fortune and his dramatic thought; it is only to denote that feature which seems to be the distinguishing mark of this tie in each author.

This study has also tried to portray the community of ideas, images and attitudes grouped about the theme of Fortune in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The changing relationship between these ideas and images and the alteration of attitude toward Fortune between the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods signify a mutation in the basic meaning of the Fortune symbol during the interval covered by the major dramatic productions of Marlowe, Chapman, Jonson and Webster. The mutability and disorder that Fortune symbolised for Marlowe have shaded into corruption for Chapman, Jonson and Webster. The Jacobean dramatists instinctively oppose definitive concepts of moral virtue to the vicissitudes of Fortune, while Marlowe seems to be combating her influence with only a general Elizabethan antipathy to disorder. Marlowe's world of change and flux has become for Chapman, Jonson and Webster a realm of infirmity and depravity.³⁴ Human nature, too, is less

stable for the Jacobean writers than it ever became for Marlowe; Chapman, Jonson and Webster saw that

Man never standeth, but like waving tyde,
 That comes and goes, now calme, then full of ire:
 Now sings he sweete, all sorrows layd aside,
 Then groweth grieffe, welcome to no desire,
 Heav'd up, hurl'd down, dismay'd, or in aspire:
 Crac'd now, then in disdain, now in the sunne
 Of sweetest favour: then eclips'd, undonne.³⁵

But although Marlowe, Chapman, Jonson and Webster disagree with one another as to the precise nature of man and his world and as to the most effective way of reacting to the element of chance in human affairs, they are fully united in seeking for man a haven "above / All motion," where one can rest "fix'd and quiet."

FOOTNOTES

¹George Philip Vernon Akrigg, The Anatomy of Websterian Tragedy, doctoral dissertation (California U., June 1944), p. 21. For a full examination of the theme of Fortune in the Middle Ages, see Howard Rollins Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature (Cambridge, Mass., 1927) and Willard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Berkeley, 1936).

²Akrigg, pp. 25-26.

³It is my opinion that such an assertion is invalid. Although it is probably true that medieval references to Fortune were more obviously related to a whole philosophy of life and thus probably provoked a more uniform response from the members of a writer's audience, it is just as true, it seems to me, that Elizabethan references to Fortune were often closely related to the concept of a transcendent, universal moral order which was an important element in the philosophy of life of most Elizabethans.

⁴Citations in my text to the first part of Tamburlaine the Great, to The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus and to Edward the Second are from Elizabethan and Stuart Plays, ed. Charles R. Baskerville, Virgil B. Heltsel and Arthur H. Nethercott (New York, 1934).

⁵Cf. Erasmus' The Praise of Folly (Ann Arbor, 1961), where Folly speaks of gambling (pp. 65-66):

And then for gamblers, I am a little doubtful whether they are to be admitted into our college; and yet 'tis a foolish and ridiculous sight to see some addicted so to it that they can no sooner hear the rattling of the dice but their heart leaps and dances again. And then when time after time they are so far drawn on with the hopes of winning that they have made shipwreck of all, and having split their ship on that rock of dice, no less terrible than the bishop and his clerks, scarce got alive to shore, they choose rather to cheat any man of their just debts than not pay the money they lost, . . . (Italics mine.)

⁶Michael Quinn, "The Freedom of Tamburlaine," Modern Language Quarterly, XXI:4 (Dec. 1960), 316.

⁷Irvin Ribner, The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare (Princeton, 1957), p. 64.

⁸Citations in my text to the second part of Tamburlaine the Great are from The Works of Christopher Marlowe, ed. C. F. Tucker Brooke (Oxford, 1910).

⁹Johnstone Parr, "Tamburlaine's Melody," PMLA, LIX:3 (Sept. 1944), 703.

¹⁰Paul H. Kocher, "The Development of Marlowe's Character," Philological Quarterly, XVII:4 (Oct. 1938), 331.

¹¹Clifford Leach, "Marlowe's 'Edward II': Power and Suffering" (The Ann Elizabeth Sheble Lecture, Bryn Mawr College, 17th November, 1958), Critical Quarterly, I (1959), 185.

¹²Quinn, p. 320.

¹³Ribner, p. 129.

¹⁴Ribner, p. 130.

¹⁵See Farnham, pp. 99-100.

¹⁶Citations in my text to Bussy D'Ambois are from Elizabethan and Stuart Plays, ed. Baskerville, et al.

¹⁷There is an interesting contrast between Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois and Shakespeare's Macbeth, for Bussy knows from the start of Chapman's play that

Man is a torch borne in the wind; a dream

But of a shadow, summed with all his substance; . . .

but Macbeth does not reveal such despair until the final act of Shakespeare's play: "Out, out, brief candle! / Life's but a walking shadow. . ." (V, v, 23-24).

¹⁸Elias Schwartz, "Seneca, Homer, and Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LVI (April 1957), 166-167.

¹⁹The French king's messenger employs the same imagery to describe Bussy's actions under Fortune's sway as that used by Shakespeare's Friar Laurence to warn Romeo:

These violent delights have violent ends

And in their triumphs die, like fire and powder

Which as they kiss consume. . . (R & J, II, vi, 9-11).

²⁰Cf. Webster's The Duchess of Malfi, where Ferdinand cites the proverb:

"Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust,

Like diamonds, we are cut by our own dust." (V, v, 77-78).

²¹Cf. Tamburlaine I, where Marlowe's hero speaks of the "heaven" for which he aspires:

Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world,
And measure every wand'ring planet's course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
And always moving as the restless spheres,
Wills us to wear ourselves and never rest
Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,
That perfect bliss and sole felicity,
The sweet fruition of an earthly crown. (II, vii, 21-29).

²²William G. McCollum, "The Tragic Hero and Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois," University of Toronto Quarterly, XVIII (1949), 230.

²³Citations in my text to The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, to The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron and to The Tragedy of Caesar and Pompey are from The Plays of George Chapman, ed. Thomas Marc Parrott (New York, 1961).

²⁴The contrast between the standard Elizabethan-Stuart doctrine of Bussy's ghost and the Jago-like heresy of Byron is most clearly reflected in their opposing statements on reason; Bussy's ghost maintains that the "observation" of "all the Christian world / And all her laws, . . . Stands upon faith, above the power of reason--" while Byron claims for his philosophy that "'Tis the faith / Of reason and of wisdom."

²⁵See Eugene M. Waith, The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden (New York and London, 1962), p. 111.

²⁶Joseph Allen Bryant, Jr., "Catiline and the Nature of Jonson's Tragic Fable," PMLA, LXIX (March 1954), 268.

²⁷Bryant, p. 276.

²⁸Citations in my text to Sejanus are from Elizabethan and Stuart Plays, ed. Baskerville, et al.

²⁹See Ribner, p. 131 and Leach, p. 196.

³⁰Citations in my text to The Duchess of Malfi are from Elizabethan and Stuart Plays, ed. Baskerville et al.

³¹Cf. The Knight's Tale, where Chaucer describes Arcite as being "Now up, now down, as boket in a welle." (L. 1533).

³²Hereward T. Price, "The Function of Imagery in Webster," PMLA, LXXII (Sept. 1955), 738.

³³See Alkrigg, p. 283.

³⁴See Roy W. Battenhouse, "Chapman and the Nature of Man," Journal of English Literary History, XII:2 (June 1945), 92.

³⁵John Norden, Vicissitudo Rerum, an Eleriacall Poeme of the interchangeable courses and variety of things in this world (1600), stanza 155, quoted from Katherine Koller, "Two Elisabethan Expressions of the Idea of Mutability," Studies in Philology, XXXV, (April 1938), 226.

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THE THEME OF FORTUNE IN THE PLAYS OF
MARLOWE, CHAPMAN, JONSON AND WEBSTER

by

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B. A. Rockhurst College, Kansas City, 1961

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1965

ABSTRACT

This paper tries to demonstrate the existence of a union between the theme of Fortune and the entire complex of related thoughts in the drama of Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman, Ben Jonson and John Webster. It also attempts to show different characteristics of the bonds between Fortune and the complete dramatic vision of each playwright: the primary characteristic of this juncture in Marlowe is plot movement; in Chapman, it is dramatic dialogue and soliloquy; in Jonson, it is moral comment; and in Webster, it is imagery. This is not to deny the presence of all these elements in the link between each of these writers' use of Fortune and his entire dramatic thought; it is only to denote that feature which seems to be the distinguishing mark of this tie in each author.

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