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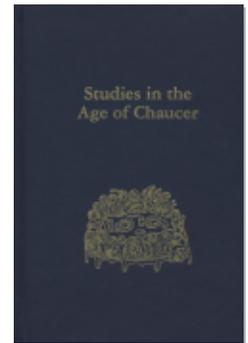
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Lydgate's Literary History:

Chaucer, Gower, and Canacee

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THE *FALL OF PRINCES* has traditionally been seen as Lydgate's least inspired work, a monotonous translation of Laurent de Premier-fait's translation of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*, undertaken during his long retirement at the behest of Humphrey of Gloucester and showing signs that even he found the endeavor tiresome. Indeed, it is long (36,000 lines), repetitious, sprawling, and disorderly. Unlike another famous compilation, the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Fall of Princes* does not contain "God's plenty" (in Dryden's felicitous phrase) but rather limits itself to the ceaseless reenactment of a single basic narrative: the fall of a great man. It is true that there are many lengthy sections of the poem in which nothing much happens, in which the eye of the critic—trained to seek out the oddity, the poetic swerve, the contradictory or inexplicable detail—slides helplessly over the smooth and impenetrable surface of the text. But as I will show, Lydgate used the poem to grapple with the most serious literary and aesthetic questions known to him, questions with which he engaged many times over the course of his career and which came to fruition in his last work. In particular, he was concerned to explore the vexed relations among the classical and vernacular models of writing history that he had inherited from such figures as Ovid, Boethius, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Gower, and put to the test in a variety of genres and historical contexts, from the early days of the Lancastrian era, through its zenith during the reign of Henry V, and culminating in the "laureate" years of Henry VI's mi-

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nority.¹ These include the Boethian understanding of Fortune, an Ovidian model of complaint or elegy found in *The Legend of Good Women*, and the clerkly practice of moralization, exemplified for Lydgate by the *Confessio Amantis*.

The only way to cope with the immense size of the *Fall of Princes* is to narrow one's focus and examine it in parts; I will concentrate here on Book One, itself a substantial poetic intervention in the literary tradition inaugurated by Chaucer and Gower. In it, I will argue, Lydgate remakes as he translates the text he inherited from Laurent de Premierfait and Boccaccio, mining an essential ambiguity—its uncertainty regarding worldly causality—by exaggerating available understandings of Fortune and stressing their ultimate incompatibility. On the one hand, as several critics have noted, Lydgate makes the explicit claim, over and over, that sin, not chance, causes the falls of great men, a claim latent in Boccaccio's *De casibus*, and articulated more fully in Laurent's version of the text but most forcefully asserted here.² However, as I will show, he also makes room for a notion of Fortune as radical contingency, as a force that operates in the world without regard for right and wrong, morality and immorality. This latter vision of Fortune is hardly dominant. But it does surface at critical moments in the *Fall of Princes*, posing a serious challenge to the moralism that otherwise pervades the text, and demanding from readers a far more nuanced reading than the poem typically receives. Indeed, I will argue that Fortune functions as a kind of "vernacular philosophy" in the *Fall of Princes*, a mode of engagement with history and with the aesthetic that emerges from the sheer intensity of Lydgate's relationship to his predecessors—especially, of course, his connection to Chaucer, but also his little-noticed (but crucial) use of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. These relationships become critical in the exemplum that concludes book one, the story of Canacee, and it is on that story that I will focus here.

¹The tag "laureate" is Derek Pearsall's; see his *John Lydgate* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 161–91. I discuss the years of the minority in my book *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture*, forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.

²Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, pp. 241–42 (though Pearsall also notes that there are other ideas about Fortune at work in the text overall, including a "fatalistic" notion in which Fortune is "fickle and arbitrary" and Lydgate's "half-articulate admiration for Roman attitudes [about admirable deaths]"; see also Lois Ebin, *John Lydgate* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), pp. 66–68. As Paul Strohm has argued, "Rather than follow their predecessors in recommending caution in the face of erratic Fortune, Premierfait and Lydgate recommend precautionary action" (*"Politique": Language and Statecraft from Chaucer to Shakespeare* [Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005], p. 96).

Like the *Fall of Princes* more generally, book one is structured along Boccaccian lines, beginning with Adam and Eve, moving through the major foundational narratives of Thebes and Troy, and culminating with an excursus on the malice of women, complete with examples. Although he substantially expanded Boccaccio's text, and added relevant French stories, Laurent hewed very closely to this general order.³ Not so Lydgate. Most of book one dutifully replicates Boccaccio and Laurent's works, but he makes several critical changes to the text, including the expansion of a major exemplum to conclude the book, the story of the incestuous love of Canacee and Machaire. This episode is of course familiar to all readers of late medieval poetry as a notorious point of imaginary contention between Chaucer and Gower; the Man of Law's famous assertion about Chaucer, that "No word ne writeth he / Of thilke wikke ensample of Canacee," coupled with Gower's thorough retelling of the story in the *Confessio Amantis*, has firmly linked incest ("wikke" sexuality) to poetry and poetic competition in the eyes of readers and critics.⁴ Lydgate is clearly familiar with both Chaucer and Gower's representations of Canacee, and his choice of the story to conclude book one brings to the fore his relationship to the English vernacular tradition, demanding that readers engage not only with the overtly moral reading of the exemplum but also with a notion of literary history produced by the intersection of his source texts. The easiest way of accounting for this choice is simply to assert that, like Gower, he so thoroughly believes in the sheer power of moralization to adapt any story, no matter how "wikke," to a didactic end that he uses the incest tale to flex his poetic muscles and demonstrate his skill. No doubt there is an element of the anxiety of influence here. But reducing both Lydgate and Gower to unreflective moralists does neither of them justice—and as I will show, Lydgate's evocation of Canacee is part of a far more complex poetic strategy, one he employs throughout book one.

Gower's Canacee

The idea of adding the story of Canacee to Boccaccio's text was not original to Lydgate. Laurent before him had included the exemplum,

³See Patricia May Gathercole's discussion of Laurent's alterations to Boccaccio, in her edition of Book 1 of his text, *Laurent de Premierfait's "Des Cas Des Nobles Hommes et Femmes, Book 1, Translated from Boccaccio: A Critical Edition Based on Six Manuscripts"* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 17–33.

⁴See, for example, Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 88–112, and Elizabeth Scala, "Canacee and the Chaucer Canon: Incest and Other Unnarratables," *ChauR* 30 (1995): 15–39.

but his version was very short, describing only the bare outlines of the narrative and emphasizing the sinfulness of the main characters, their “horrible pecchie.”⁵ But as an English writer, Lydgate would already have known the story of Canacee well and recognized it as a contested and controversial narrative; no reader of Chaucer and Gower could fail to note the significance of the Man of Law’s critique of the “wikke ensauple” or ignore Genius’s description of Canacee’s defeat by “kinde” and Eolus’s wrathful and excessive response.

Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* is a lurking presence throughout book one of the *Fall of Princes*, particularly in its Ovidian narratives, and the Canacee story provides a signal example of Lydgate’s assimilation and modification of Gower’s particular brand of moralism. There can be no doubt that Gower was the primary source for the Canacee episode; Lydgate follows the text of the *Confessio Amantis* very closely, incorporating elements unique to Gower even as he expands and abbreviates the text. When Gower revised the story from Ovid’s *Heroides*, he added vivid details and images that accentuated the pathos of Canacee’s plight, a practice that Lydgate continued, and indeed amplified. Two examples will suffice to demonstrate the close link between the two Middle English texts. First, when Gower’s Canacee writes to her brother, she tells him that she writes with “ink and tears”: “Now at this time, as thou shalt wite, / With teres and with enke write / This lettre I have in cares colde: / In my riht hond my Penne I hold, / And in my left the swerd I kepe, / And in my barm ther lith to wepe / Thi child and myn which sobbeth faste.”⁶ In the *Heroides*, Canacee’s epistle opens by describing her holding a pen in her right hand, a blade in her left, and the letter itself in her lap, “dextra tenet calamum, strictum tenet altera ferrum, et

⁵The passage from Laurent reads: “Cestui Machareus filz du roy Eolus ama deshonestement sa suer Canaces. Ceste suer conceut de son frere et enfanta un filz. Comme Machareus par une nourrice envoyast l’enfant pour estre nourry hors de l’ostel royal, l’enfant comme maleureux brahy et cria si hault que le roy Eolus l’entendi, et en courroucié pour le desloyal fait commenda que l’enfant feust donné aux chiens pour estre devouré. Le roy aussi par un varlet envoya une espee a sa fille Canaces, afin que elle feist de soy ce que elle avoit desservi. Mais les histoires taisent se elle se occit. Toutevoies Machareus sentant son horrible pecchie et le courroux de son pere s’enfouy, et comme dict est devint prestre ou temple de Appollo en la cité Delphos” (Gathercole, *Laurent de Premierfait’s “Des Cas Des Nobles Hommes et Femmes,”* p. 220)

⁶*Confessio Amantis*, book 3, lines 297–303, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899–1902), 2:234. Subsequent references are given in the text by book and line number.

iacet in gremio charta soluta meo.”⁷ Gower’s addition of the infant to the scene exaggerates the pitiful quality of Canacee’s situation by turning the reader’s attention to her innocent son⁸—and when Lydgate retells the story, he retains both this *mise en scène* and the striking image of ink mingled with tears:

The salt[e] teris from hir eyen cleere,
 With pitous sobbyng, fet from hir hertis brynke,
 Distillyng down to tempre with hir ynke.⁹

Wrytyng hir lettir, awappid al in dreede,
 In hir riht hand hir penne gan to quake;
 And a sharp suerd to make hir herte bleede
 In his lefft hand, hir fader hath hir take.
 And most hir sorwe was for hir childes sake,
 Vpon whos face in hir barm slepyng
 Ful many a teer she wept in compleynyng.

(1.7022–28)

In taking these images from Gower, Lydgate divides and expands them, producing an even more pathetic portrait of Canacee and her son—and as we shall see, drawing the reader further into the emotional ambit of the story. The second (though by no means the last) detail that Lydgate appropriates from Gower is the famous image of Canacee’s son bathing in her blood:

The child lay bathende in hir blod
 Out rolled fro the moder barm,
 And for the blod was hot and warm,
 He basketh him aboute thrinne.

(*Confessio Amantis*, 3.312–15)

⁷ Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), epistle 11, lines 3–4. Subsequent references are given in the text by epistle and line number.

⁸ A. C. Spearing notes this substitution as well, arguing that Gower “has chosen to exclude from his poem, at least on any explicit level, the problematic of female authorship into which Ovid plunged at the outset”; see his “Canace and Machaire,” *Mediaevalia* 16 (1993): 211–21 (p. 219).

⁹ *Lydgate’s Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, 4 vols., EETS e.s. 121–24 (London: Oxford University Press, 1924–27), book one, lines 6879–81; subsequent references are given in the text by book and line number.

Lydgate's version is similarly vivid, designed to arouse the reader's pity for the helpless child: "Hir child fill down, which myht[e] nat asterte, / Hauyng non helpe to socoure hym nor saue, / But in hir blood the silff began to bathe" (1.7033–35). It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Canacee story in the *Fall of Princes* reads as if it had been written with the *Confessio Amantis* immediately to hand, and, as such, the changes that Lydgate makes to Gower's version assume an even greater significance. The two versions of the story are approximately the same length; Gower narrates it in 217 lines, Lydgate in 237. But Lydgate dramatically alters the emphasis of his source text by compressing the plot—which takes up 127 lines in the *Confessio Amantis*—into a mere 48 lines in *Fall of Princes*, and by expanding Canacee's letter to Machaire from 27 lines to 139. These changes, coupled with Lydgate's excision of Gower's asides concerning "kynde," incest, and wrath, turn our attention away from the philosophical and moral focus of Gower's version and toward (as we shall see) the relationship between love and Fortune, between amatory complaint and Boethian Stoicism.

In the Canacee story, Gower focuses his moralizing energies on the dominant male character, King Eolus, rather than on the notorious female figure at the center of the exemplum. His version of the exemplum works as an illustration of the destructiveness of wrath, the sin with which Book Three of the *Confessio Amantis* is especially concerned, and a good deal of critical ink has been spilled on the question of his perspective on the sexual sin of incest.¹⁰ What Gower's amatory narrator, Ge-

¹⁰The most comprehensive discussion of medieval incest can be found in Elizabeth Archibald's *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001); for her comments on Gower, see pp. 25–26 and 80–84. C. David Benson, "Incest and Moral Poetry in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *ChauR* 19 (1984): 100–109, argues that "incest . . . is the extreme example of the dangers of sexual passion and is therefore neither honest nor truly human" (105). Larry Scanlon, "The Riddle of Incest," in *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. Robert Yeager (Asheville, N.C.: Pegasus Press, 1998), pp. 93–127, suggests that, for Gower, sexuality was an "autonomous force that must be governed from within history" and that incest became "a nearly intractable problem implicating the mechanisms of social order in their most basic operations" (pp. 111, 127). Alastair Minnis points out that in describing Canacee and Machaire's love as natural, but *illicitus*, Gower was entirely consistent with medieval commentators on *Heroides* 11, who did not condemn the lovers as unnatural; see his "John Gower: Sapiens in Ethics and Politics," in *Gower's "Confessio Amantis": A Critical Anthology*, ed. Peter Nicholson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), pp. 158–80, esp. 165–66. Georgiana Donavin, *Incest Narratives and the Structure of Gower's "Confessio Amantis"* (Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 1993), sees the story of Canacee as ironic, revealing "the incompleteness of Genius's moral development" by presenting incestuous love as natural; see pp. 33–39. Thomas Hatton similarly argues that Genius's articulation of natural law is not Gower's own, noting

nius, says on the subject is perfectly clear; he argues that Canacee and Machaire could not help themselves because they were subject to the law of "kinde":

Whan kinde assaileth the corage
 With love and doth him forto bowe,
 That he no reson can allowe,
 Bot halt the lawes of nature:
 For whom that love hath under cure,
 As he is blind himself, riht so
 He makth his client blind also.

And so it fell hem ate laste,
 That this Machaire with Canace
 Whan thei were in a prive place,
 Cupide bad hem ferst to kesse,
 And after sche which is Maistresse
 In kinde and techeth every lif
 Withoute lawe positif,
 Of which sche takth nomaner charge,
 Bot kepth hire lawes al at large,
 Nature, tok hem into lore
 And tawht hem so, that overmore
 Sche hath hem in such wise daunted,
 That thei were, as who seith, enchanted.

(3.154–60, 166–78)

Here, Gower takes up the Ovidian account of Canacee's desire—in which she describes herself as helplessly subject to the invading force of love ("ipsa quoque incalui, qualemque audire solebam, nescio quem sensi corde tepente deum" [epistle XI, lines 25–26])—and embeds it within a broader consideration of the relationship between "kinde," de-

that in the *Mirour de L'Omme*, Gower strongly condemns incest; see "John Gower's Use of Ovid in Book III of the *Confessio Amantis*," *Mediaevalia* 13 (1987): 257–74, 261. María Bullón Fernández, in contrast, argues that Gower's primary attitude toward Canacee is one of sympathy for her subjection to a tyrannical father; see her *Fathers and Daughters in Gower's "Confessio Amantis"* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 158–72. For discussions of the Canacee story in relation to the Man of Law, see Winthrop Wetherbee, "Constance and the World in Chaucer and Gower," in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), pp. 65–93, and Elizabeth Allen, "Chaucer Answers Gower: Constance and the Trouble with Reading," *ELH* 64 (1997): 627–55.

sire, and positive law. These were by no means settled relationships in medieval theology or poetry; as Elizabeth Archibald has shown, both Augustine and Aquinas confronted the problem of incest among the patriarchs in the Old Testament and “acknowledged that the supposedly natural and universal law prohibiting incest was in fact socially constructed, and thus open to interpretation and alteration by Church authorities.”¹¹ Gower, too, begins Book Eight of the *Confessio Amantis* with a long discussion of the laws of marriage that describes how in the First Age sibling incest was accepted as a means of populating the earth—and though it is clear that Canacee and Machaire do not fall under this exception, it is also the case that Gower recognizes the naturalness of their lust.¹²

The lesson that Lydgate learns from Gower’s account, however, is less theological or moral, and more formal: he appropriates the Ovidian affectivity of the story and makes it the centerpiece of his own version. In fact, Lydgate’s description of Canacee and Machaire’s incest directly contradicts Gower’s in moral terms:

Afftir this Pirrus cam Canace the faire,
 With teres distillyng from hir eyen tweyne,
 And hir brother, that callid was Machaire;
 And bothe thei gan ful pitousli compleyne,
 That Fortune gan at hem so disdeyne,
 Hyndryng ther fate be woful auenture
 Touchyng ther loue, which was ageyn nature.

He was hir brother and hir loue also,
 As the story pleynli doth declare;
 And in a bed thei lay eek bothe too,
 Resoun was non whi thei sholde spare:
 But loue that causith wo and eek weelfare,
 Gan *ageyn kynde* so straungeli deuse,
 That he hir wombe made sodenli tarise.

(1.6833–46; emphasis added)

¹¹ Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, p. 26.

¹² Archibald notes that “[Gower] does not share Augustine’s optimistic view that there is natural respect for the incest taboo” (p. 25); she bases this statement on Genius’s assertion that many ignore incest laws, which of course suggests that it cannot unequivocally be attributed to Gower himself. However, my point is simply that Gower was interested in the story of Canacee and Machaire as part of a very complex set of philosophical and theological questions—an interest that Lydgate shared in a very different way.

Love here works "ageyn kynde" to produce Canacee's pregnancy, which is rendered as a "straunge" and "soden" occurrence rather than as the natural effect of a natural act. Indeed, Canacee herself begs Machaire not to let "kynde" make him forget her and her son:

"I holde hym streihtli atwen myn armys tweyne,
 Thou and nature leide on me this charge;
 He gilt[e]les with me mut suffre peyne.
 And sithe thou art at fredam and at large,
 Lat kynd[e]nesse our loue nat so discharge,
 But haue a mynde, where-euer that thou be,
 Onys a day vpon my child and me.

(1.6917–23)

It would seem that, though Nature has produced Canacee's child, "kyndenesse" works against incestuous love and promises to erase Machaire's feelings for his son and sister—precisely the opposite understanding of "kynde" that we find in Gower's version of the story.¹³

In thus wedding Gower to Chaucer, Lydgate not only tackles the problem of the Man of Law's moralizing judgment of the *Confessio Amantis*—a crucial subtext for his use of Ovid here—but he also sets in opposition the two formal poetic modes of didactic exemplarity and amatory complaint. He does so by appropriating a Gowerian (and Dantean, for that matter) poetic trick, by which the reader's emotion (pity, sorrow) is solicited by an inappropriate object of identification—in this case, Canacee. What Lydgate eliminates from Gower's account is not the moralization—he follows Gower in condemning Eolus's wrath—but rather the infrastructure of the world that Gower has imagined, a world in which events occur as the result of human action and agency, driven by human characteristics like "kynde." For Gower, even the love of Canacee and Machaire is the particular and inevitable result of a specific human act: the siblings were housed in the same room throughout their childhood—"Whil thei be yonge, of comun wone / In chambre thei togedre wone, / And as thei scholden pleide hem ofte, / Til thei be growen up alofte / Into the youth of lusti age" (3.149–53)—a detail he adds to Ovid's version.¹⁴ Lydgate removes this explanation for Canacee

¹³ Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, p. 84, notes this difference as well.

¹⁴ Judith Shaw, "The Role of the Shared Bed in John Gower's *Tales of Incest*," *ELN* 26 (1989): 4–8, notes this addition, as well as Gower's similar revision of his source in his

and Machaire's sin, merely stating that, "in a bed thei lay eek bothe too" (1.6842), and replaces Gower's discourse of causality with his extended version of Canacee's complaint. In other words, Lydgate is more interested in Gower's Ovidianism, his tendency to invoke the subjective language of the *Heroides*, than in his philosophical meditations, and he alters the story accordingly. As we will see, Canacee becomes in Lydgate's hands an Ovidian heroine in Chaucerian style; most of the additions he makes to Gower's text are Chaucerian interpolations that recall various pitiful heroines from the *Canterbury Tales*, *The Legend of Good Women*, and the *House of Fame*. But while the reader of the *Confessio Amantis* is gradually being led through a complex process of education, in which he or she is asked to ponder some very fine points of moral theology (the role of "kynde," for example), the reader of the *Fall of Princes* is merely stymied by the apparent contradiction between the logic of virtue that guides the enterprise as a whole (sin causes falls) and the affective principle of pity that the story of Canacee so insistently enforces. As a closer examination of the exemplum will show, this latter principle is taken directly from Chaucer and deployed in such a way that the poetic questions raised by the Man of Law—what constitutes moral poetry? How should Chaucer's poetic career be defined?—are reanimated and made to signify in a new context. At issue of course is the problem of literary authority. The Canacee story stands at the intersection of several competing authorities in Lydgate's poetic world: Ovid, Laurent, Gower, Chaucer, and inevitably, Humphrey of Gloucester, a figure who looms over the *Fall of Princes* in a decidedly material and embodied way.¹⁵ It is Humphrey who dictates the moral logic of the text as a whole; as Lydgate tells us in the Prologue to Book Two, his

account of Antiochus's rape of his daughter in book 8 of the *Confessio*; in that case, while the Latin *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* merely states that King Antiochus invades his daughter's chamber, Gower's version has him allowing her to sleep in *his* chamber, which leads to his incestuous lust. Again, we see the implication that incestuous desire is natural, albeit sinful and wrong.

¹⁵ Throughout the text, Lydgate refers to Humphrey's influence, not only his editorial control over the text (Lydgate describes himself "Undir the wyngis off his correccion" [1.436]) but also his response to Lydgate's pleas for money. See *Fall of Princes*, book three, lines 64–91, where Lydgate describes the approach of Poverty and the relief that Humphrey's "bounteuous largesse" provides; book three, lines 3837–71, where Lydgate complains again of his poverty and describes the dependence of poets such as "Daunt," "Virgile," Petrak," and "prudent Chaucer" on patronage; and book nine, lines 3303–86, the envoy to the poem as a whole, in which Lydgate self-deprecatingly describes his own "rudnesse" and pleads for his lord's favor. For discussion of these passages, see Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, pp. 227–30.

patron demands that he add envoys to each exemplum that will explain how princes can learn to resist Fortune, so that “Bi othres fallyng [thei myht] themsilff correcte” (2.154)—a vision of human agency that the Canacee story distinctly undermines.¹⁶ Lydgate’s articulation of the contradictory demands of such authorities demonstrates—in a way he may not have predicted—that power does not derive only from patrons and *auctors* but also, and more forcefully, from poetic modes, genres, and discourses themselves: in short, from form.

Canacee’s Complaint

A close look at Lydgate’s version of the Canacee story reveals this formal complexity at work. It begins with an evocation of Fortune:

Afftir this Pirrus cam Canace the faire,
 With teres distillyng from hir eyen tweyne,
 And hir brother, that callid was Machaire;
 And bothe thei gan ful pitousli compleyne,
 That Fortune gan at hem so disdeyne,
 Hyndryng ther fate be woful auenture
 Touchyng ther loue, which was ageyn nature.
 (1.6833–39)

Here we see the two sinners failing to recognize their own responsibility for their fall, tearfully blaming Fortune for “hyndryng ther fate,” and fitting nicely into the moral paradigm demanded by Humphrey; according to its logic, their lack of self-awareness merely opens a space for the moralizing work of the text and the education of the princely reader. But as Lydgate follows Gower’s account, we quickly find this moralizing energy fragmenting, carrying the story in almost the opposite direction and exerting a powerful pull on the reader’s imagination rather than her conscience. Lest we think that the pity aroused by Canacee’s plight is merely an authorial ploy designed to demonstrate the moral inadequacy of our emotional response to the story—a potential reading, perhaps, of Canacee’s letter, which is self-interested and thus unreliable—Lydgate

¹⁶See book two, lines 1–126; as Lydgate explains, “It is nat she [Fortune] that pryncis gaff the fall, / But vicious lyuyng, pleynli to endite” (lines 45–46). This vision of Fortune underlies Humphrey’s demand for a “remedie” for each exemplum, an envoy that will show how to avoid falls.

both interjects his own response to the story and compares his heroine to two well-known Chaucerian figures:

But, o alas! his suster muste abide,
 Merciles, for ther hatful trespace
 Suffre deth; ther was non other grace.

First hir fader a sharp suerd to hir sente
 In tokne off deth for a remembraunce,
 And whan she wiste pleyntli what he mente
 And conceyued his rigerous ordenaunce,
 With hool purpos tobeien his plesaunce,
 She gruchchith nat, but lowli of entente
 Lich a meek douhter to his desir assente.

But or she died she caste for to write
 A litil lettre to hir brother deere,
 A dedli compleynt compleyne & endite
 With pale face and a mortal cheere,
 The salt[e] teris from hir eyen cleere,
 With pitous sobbyng, fet from hir hertis brynke,
 Distillyng doun to tempere with hir ynke.

(1.6865–81)

Unlike Gower or Chaucer, Lydgate has no mediating narrator, no Genius or Man of Law whose subjectivity can be presumed to intrude into the tale-telling; his “o alas!” instead points to his *own* empathic involvement with the story. This effect is further enhanced by two details of his description of Canacee’s behavior, “she gruchchith nat” and “with a pale face,” both drawn from Chaucer’s depictions of the pitiful and saintly Griselda and Custance. “Gruchchith,” in fact, is a loaded word in the *Canterbury Tales*; it appears in a secular register in *The Knight’s Tale* and *The Clerk’s Tale*, and in the religious discourse of *The Parson’s Tale*, and always refers to the relationship of an individual to adverse worldly circumstances.¹⁷ When Walter describes to Griselda the nature of their

¹⁷ Thus, Theseus consoles the Athenians for Arcite’s death by telling them that “whoso grucheth ought, he dooth folye” (I.3045) in light of the providential actions of the First Mover. In *The Parson’s Tale*, “gruchchyng” is a species of Envy, and it “spryngeth of inpacience agayns God, and somtyme agayns man” (X.498); as the Parson explains, “gruchching” entails complaining about almost any worldly circumstance: “Agayn God it is whan a man grucheth agayn the peyne of helle, or agayns poverte, or los of catel, or agayn reyn or tempest; or elles grucheth that shrewes han prosperitee, or elles for that goode men han adversitee./ And alle these thynges sholde man suffre

marriage contract, he requires not only obedience but *uncomplaining* obedience (IV. 351–56; emphasis added):

I seye this: be ye redy with good herte
 To al my lust, and that I frely may,
 As me best thynketh, do yow laughe or smerte,
 And nevere ye to *grucche* it, nyght ne day?
 And eek whan I sey “ye,” ne sey nat “nay,”
 Neither by word ne frownyng contenance?

And Griselda resolutely does not “grucche” until Walter has revealed the nature of his tyrannical plan, and even then she does not directly accuse him. But Canacee, also a female figure subject to a tyrannical ruler, does in fact “grucche” in her letter to Machaire, a behavior in which she is preceded by yet another Chaucerian heroine, Custance. Like Custance, Canacee is described as having a “pale face”; the Man of Law asks his readers rhetorically, “Have ye nat seyn somtyme a pale face, / Among a prees, of hym that hath be lad / Toward his deeth” (II.645–47), as Custance is led before Alla’s court to face the accusation of murder. Canacee of course *does* face certain death, and her choice of affective complaint in answer to her plight is first and foremost an Ovidian response to adversity. Like the other epistolary heroines of the *Heroides*, she turns to the highly subjective discursive mode of first-person narrative. But her “pale face” reminds us as well that pagan heroines are not the only “pleynyng” women to be found in Chaucer; Custance famously laments her plight at several junctures in *The Man of Law’s Tale*, both at the very beginning, when she complains that “Allas, unto the Barbre nacioun / I moste anoon” (II.281–82), and after she has been cast out to sea by Donegild, when she prays to the Virgin Mary about her son:

O litel child, allas! What is thy gilt,
 That nevere wroghtest synne as yet, pardee?
 Why wil thyn harde fader han thee spilt?
 (II.855–57)

patiently, for they comen by the rightful juggement and ordinaunce of God” (X.499–500). And it should be noted that one of the demands Walter makes of his subjects is that they should not “grucche” against his choice of a wife (IV.170), suggesting further the link between tyranny and “grucching”; see my discussion of Canacee and Eolus above.

All quotations from Chaucer are drawn from *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); subsequent references are given in the text by tale and line number.

This latter prayer is echoed by Canacee, who exclaims:

O thou, my fader, to cruel is thi wreche,
 Hardere off herte than tigre or leoun,
 To slen a child that lith withoute speche,
 Void off al mercy and remissioun.
 And on his mooder hast no compassioun,
 His youthe considred, with lippis softe as silk,
 Which at my brest lith still & souketh mylk.
 (1.6938–44)

Here we see that Lydgate has imagined Canacee imagining herself as a saintly, Chaucerian, Custance-like figure, the victim of tyranny, with a legitimate right to “grucche” or “pleyne.” In part, of course, this is a literary joke: Lydgate describes the very figure anathematized by the Man of Law in the terms that the tale-teller uses for his own virtuous heroine, modeling himself as a narrator after Chaucer’s Sergeant, an effect enhanced by such interjections as “o alas!” which recall the lawyer’s frequent apostrophes and bits of commentary on Custance’s fate. Lydgate is most certainly playing the game of literary one-upmanship here, presenting himself in the *Prologue* with the same air of humility as the Man of Law, and then proceeding to repeat the “wikke ensauple” that so distressed that upright pilgrim—and he does so in the very poetic style for which the Man of Law is renowned. It is a poetic gesture, moreover, that triangulates the competition between “maistere” and acolyte by inserting Gower as the missing third term in what is too often imagined as a one-to-one equation between Lydgate and Chaucer. But Canacee stands at the nexus of a far more complex set of influences than anxiety of influence can explain. First, the implicit comparison of Griselda and Custance contrasts two markedly different modes of relation to the world, the former a Boethian Stoicism characterized by silence, and the latter an affective piety that constructs a space for, and imagines the efficacy of, complaint. As Jill Mann has argued, Griselda’s plight resembles nothing so much as that of the victim of Fortune described in Chaucer’s *Boece*, in a passage in which Fortune herself explicitly questions the value of “pleynnyng”:¹⁸ “Now it liketh me to withdrawe myn hand.

¹⁸ Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), p. 120. Mann’s readings of Griselda and Custance are linked, in that she sees both as figures through whom “the human subjection to God’s ‘purveiaunce’ is focussed and explored”; Lydgate

Thow has had grace as he that hath used of foreyne goodes; thow hast no ryght to pleyne the, as though thou haddest outrely forlorn alle thy thynges. Why pleynestow thanne? I have doon the no wrong" (bk. II, pr. 2, lines 23–28). The proper response to Fortune, in this model, is quiet acceptance, *contemptus mundi*, a rejection of the world and worldly things. Here we see the image of Fortune (as an arbitrary and relentless force in the world) that Humphrey's envoys specifically reject, with their emphasis on virtue and reward, sin and punishment. This tension between a Stoic philosophy that counsels passive acceptance and an opposing ideology of active virtue is mirrored in the contrast between the Chaucerian heroines to whom Lydgate alludes, with Griselda standing as an oppositional figure for Humphrey's philosophy of action and agency in relation to the world.¹⁹ Lydgate's canny pairing of Griselda and Custance, then, enforces a reading of Custance that emphasizes precisely her ability to act—a quality rarely associated with the Man of Law's heroine, usually seen as a passive and helpless figure.²⁰ Further, by linking Canacee's complaint with Custance's prayer, Lydgate exposes the formal similarity between Ovidian "pleynyng" and affective piety, both modes that imply a certain performativity of discourse; the former seeking to arouse pity in the reader, the latter pleading for the intervention of the divine.

He also, however, uses Griselda and Custance to set in opposition the two understandings of Fortune that have riven Book One of the *Fall of Princes* from the beginning, an idea of radical contingency and arbitrariness, and a notion of linear causes and effects, virtues and rewards. In Chaucer's Christian tales, that opposition is hidden by the presence of a

would have agreed. Another possible intertext for Lydgate's use of Chaucer's complaining women is, of course, as Frank Grady reminds me, *The Physician's Tale*, in which Virginia asks for "a litel space" "for to compleyne" (VI.239); significantly, Harry Bailly understands her story to be a tragedy of Fortune ("Wherfore I seye al day that men may see / That yiftes of Fortune and of Nature / Been cause of deeth to many a creature" [VI.294–96]).

¹⁹This "philosophy of action" is described by Paul Strohm in "*Politique*": *Languages of Statecraft*. My reading differs slightly from his in emphasis, in that I see Lydgate as sustaining a tension between this philosophy and a notion of unpredictable contingency—of Fortune—that threatens human agency.

²⁰Custance's passivity is of course the dominant reading of the text; Chaucer's own revisions of his sources reveal him to have eliminated many active characteristics of the heroine and to have emphasized her helplessness. The classic discussion of Chaucer's use of Trivet remains Edward A. Block's "Originality, Controlling Purpose, and Craftsmanship in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*," *PMLA* 68 (1953): 572–616. Lydgate, in contrast, suggests an alternative way of seeing Custance in relation to Griselda.

providential God, embodied in the narrative effect of the happy ending, “joye after wo,” as the Man of Law would say. But Lydgate’s Ovidian tragedy wears this opposition on its sleeve, relentlessly exposing the contradictions at work in Humphrey’s vision of remediable Fortune and his ideology of virtue. Two further examples from the Canacee story illustrate this process at work. First, when Canacee ventriloquizes Custance’s Marian prayer, she simultaneously alludes to yet another Chaucerian image of victimized innocence, the Prioress’s “litel clergeoun”:

Our yonge child in his pur innocence
 Shal ageyn riht suffre dethis violence,
 Tendre of lymes, God wot, ful gilt[e]les,
 The goodli faire that lith heere specheles.

A mouth he hath, but woordis hath he noone,
 Cannat compleyne, alas, for non outrage,
 Nor gruchith nat, but lith heer al a-loone,
 Stille as a lamb, most meek off his visage.
 What herte off steel coude doon to hym damage,
 Or suffre hym deie, beholdyng the maneer
 And look benygne off his tweyne eyen cleer?

(1.6927–37)

Not only do we recall the “clergeoun”—another male child subjected to irrational violence—but we also, and more vividly, remember the Prioress’s own poetic self-authorization:

My konnyng is so wayk, O blisful Queene,
 For to declare thy grete worthynesse
 That I ne may the weighte nat susteene;
 But as a child of twelf month oold, or lesse,
 That kan unnethes any word expresse,
 Right so fare I, and therefore I yow preye,
 Gydeth my song that I shal of yow seye.

(lines 481–87)

And we remember as well her description of praising God, “by the mouth of children thy bountee / Parfourned is, for on the brest soukyng / Somtyme shewen they thyn heriyng” (lines 457–59). In both cases, innocence is associated with speechlessness, with a prelapsarian image of pure communication, the miraculous *Alma Redemptoris*

Mater. The “litel clergeoun,” of course, is distinguished precisely by his capacity to speak even after his tormenters have attempted to silence him by cutting his throat; just as the Prioress claims to be speechless but continues to tell her story, so too the young victim miraculously continues to praise the Blessed Virgin until the “greyn” is removed from his mouth. Canacee’s baby, in contrast, represents the literalization of the Prioress’s claim to be like “a childe of twelf month oold, or lesse,” the material embodiment of her analogy; he cannot “grucche” or “pleyne,” and no divine intervention comes to his aid. As such, Canacee’s baby presents the ultimate stumbling block to Humphrey’s logic of Fortune: *men* may make their own fates, but babies do not. If *The Prioress’s Tale* had imagined a world in which the miraculous interference of the divine could transform an act of aggression into an occasion for poetic praise (*Alma Redemptoris Mater*), if *The Man of Law’s Tale* had similarly understood outraged innocence as an incitement to prayer and lament, to action of a sort for its usually passive heroine—and if, in both cases, speech had proven entirely efficacious in producing a happy ending—the story of Canacee and her baby represents the futility of complaint in a world of tyranny. Whether she speaks or not, whether he is guilty or not, her son *will* be rent and devoured by dogs. The baby thus signals the blind spot inherent in the causal logic of the *Fall of Princes* as a whole. He is neither susceptible to the essentially comic sensibility of Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*, *Clerk’s Tale*, and *Prioress’s Tale*, nor can he be assimilated by the generic form of the tragedy as Lydgate has defined it here: the downfall of a great but sinful man. He is, in a sense, the perfect Boethian Stoic, better even than Griselda at remaining silent in the face of injustice. As I will show, however, Lydgate not only uses the baby’s silence as a way of undermining his patron’s insistence on human agency in the world, but he also rejects the idea that such silence—such Stoicism—constitutes the proper response to adversity and tyranny.

Mute Innocence: “Pleynyng” and Poetic Function

If Lydgate’s opposition between Griselda and Custance signaled the division in the *Fall of Princes* between competing notions of Fortune, and if the parallel between Custance and Canacee highlighted the similarity between Ovidian complaint and Christian prayer, then Lydgate’s elaboration of the baby’s speechlessness marks the limit point of all forms of agency, and the relentless intrusion of the arbitrary and contingent into the world of causality demanded by Humphrey and the providential

universe sketched by Chaucer. The silence of the baby represents a point of negotiation between the conflicting poetic models (which we might call “innocent” and “guilty”) Lydgate found anatomized by the Man of Law. Because Canacee is an *Ovidian* heroine, she brings to the *Fall of Princes* the discursive potential of the private and subjective world of emotion and feeling as it is expressed in the first-person narratives of the *Heroides*. Ovid of course is content to let the guilt of his heroines stand. But when Chaucer takes up the Ovidian model, he insists upon the innocence of his heroines—an insistence that the Man of Law acknowledges and appreciates.²¹ This link between innocence and emotion—between saintliness and Ovidian “pleynyng”—is countered, in the Man of Law’s estimation, by Gower’s version of the Canacee story, in which sinners are allowed to speak. The brilliance of Lydgate’s response to these conflicting poetic models lies in his capacity to contain *both* Chaucer and Gower’s moral visions in the figure of mother and child. The sinner speaks; the innocent baby is silent—an effect made more powerful by the fact that it is Lydgate’s innovation. In Gower’s version of the story, the baby is crying (he “sobbeth faste”) as Canacee writes her letter.

But the key to understanding the baby’s silence is ultimately to be found in Ovid himself. Not only does Canacee’s son weep in the *Heroides*, but his weeping has potential *content*: “vagitur dedit ille miser—sensisse putares—quaque suum poterat voce rogabat avum” (“the hapless babe broke forth in wailings—you would have thought he understood—and with what utterance he could entreat his grandsire”) (XI, lines 85–86). In contrast, when Lydgate silences the baby, he not only invokes such Chaucerian children as Maurice and the “litel clergeoun,” but he rewrites their fates, turning from a world in which complaint *functions*—has real effects in that world—to a world in which “grucching” and “pleynyng” do no good whatsoever. This world is even bleaker than Griselda’s; we recall, for example, that Walter actually responded to the complaints of his people that he needed a wife. Griselda’s silence is a dignified Boethian *choice*, as Jill Mann astutely points out.²²

²¹ For a discussion of Chaucer’s relationship to Ovid, and specifically to the question of morality and Ovid, see Michael Calabrese, *Chaucer’s Ovidian Arts of Love* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1994), particularly his treatment of books three through five of *Troilus and Criseyde* (pp. 51–80), in which he argues that Chaucer sees Ovidian poetry as creating “moral dangers” (p. 79).

²² Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, p. 114. As Mann argues, “Griselda’s unquestioning obedience to her husband is not the simple result of her marriage vow, but something that she takes upon herself with the unique promise that is the special condition of her marriage.”

It would seem, then, that Lydgate sought to evoke the terrifying and cruel world of absolutism, a world in which princes like Eolus operate unchecked by morality and, driven by unlimited emotion (wrath), commit terrible crimes against the innocent. In this reading, the story functions as a cautionary tale about tyranny. But it is a tale whose logic simply does not fit any of the models we have seen operating so far. It does not work as a form of *contemptus mundi*, a retreat from the world and from history. It does not embody a forward-looking idea of human agency and action in the world. And it provides the single greatest challenge to Humphrey's moralism that can be articulated: innocence is no guarantee against the fall of this little prince.²³ If we see this challenge in the light of the inevitable parallel between Lydgate's commission to write the *Fall of Princes* and Chaucer's famous portrait in *The Legend of Good Women* of poet and patron—a comparison made more pressing by the fact that both the Canacee story and Chaucer's tales of good women are Ovidian texts—then it becomes possible to see this portrait of Eolus's unchecked absolutism as a form of resistance to the tyranny of Humphrey's ideology of culpability. In this sense, Lydgate would seem to align himself with the critique of tyrannical male authority we see in the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, a critique that James Simpson has recently argued represents a form of Ovidianism distinct to the late fourteenth century, to Chaucer and Gower.²⁴

²³Elsewhere, following Chaucer's *Boece* and *Monk's Tale*, Lydgate calls this view of Fortune the "unwar strook"—the bolt of lightning that descends randomly and suddenly to destroy the innocent and guilty alike. For Chaucer's use of the phrase, see *Boece*, book two, prose 2, line 78, and *The Monk's Tale*, VII.2764. For Lydgate's use of it, see *Serpent of Division*, 51, line 19, as well as *Fall of Princes*, book one, line 2019 (in which Lydgate uses the phrase to refer to the fate of Semele at the hands of Juno), and line 3792 (where it refers to death, specifically Jocasta's death), and book eight, line 1862 (where Lydgate is describing the falls of Maximus and Andragnian as the result of Fortune's "vnwar strok"). Another "little prince" described by Lydgate appears in *Siege of Thebes*, when the nurse Ipsiphyle fails to watch King Lycurgus's son and he is fatally bitten by a snake. As James Simpson points out, this inspires a speech of consolation by the Greek Adrastus, one that explicitly recalls Theseus's "Prime Mover" speech in *The Knight's Tale*, but one that fails to give the same comfort: "This is a very limited and unconvincing form of consolation—it is as if the optimistic Theseus had been transformed into the grim Egeus" ("'Dysemol daies and fatal houres': Lydgate's *Destruction of Thebes* and Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," in *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray*, ed. Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997], pp. 15–33 (p. 30)). The ultimately optimistic vision of Humphrey of agency in the world is, in this episode of the *Siege of Thebes*, thoroughly undermined.

²⁴See James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 171–75, in which he discusses the "tyrannical discursive environment governed by Cupid" (p. 175) in the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, linking it specifically to an "Ovidian dialectic of history and the self" (p. 161); I discuss the Ovidianism of *Fall of Princes*, and Simpson's reading of fourteenth-century Ovidianism,

But the story is by no means this simple. The innocence of the baby is of course paired with the guilt of his mother—a guilt, further, that Lydgate anatomizes in detail despite Chaucer’s explicit rejection of the “wikke ensaumple” of Canacee. In other words, the one-upsmanship I described earlier constitutes a parallel form of resistance to authority—this time, literary authority—to the challenge posed by Lydgate to Humphrey. The dyad of mother and son, guilt and innocence, allows Lydgate to engage in a double, and contradictory, oppositional game, in which each of his “maisteres,” Chaucer and Gloucester, undermines the other, the former by insisting on the unspeakability of certain stories, the latter by demanding that Lydgate speak. Lydgate negotiates this opposition by engaging in one of his favorite poetic practices: mixing and mingling source texts to create a new story that is nevertheless riven by old faultlines. Thus, for example, the “pleynyng” of Canacee’s baby echoes loudly from the *Confessio Amantis*, providing the inevitable counter to Lydgate’s shockingly brutal picture of the helpless, unnaturally mute child ripped apart at the behest of his grandfather. I suggested earlier that in Gower’s version of the story we saw a tension between didactic exemplarity and amatory complaint, in which the reader’s pity is aroused by the sinful figure of Canacee and a moment of extreme contradiction occurs. Faithful to the principles outlined in his own Prologue—in which he described the task of the translator as the “prolongation” of virtuous texts—Lydgate has “prolonged” this Gowerian moment to such an extent that he has created a *series* of incoherences and incompatibilities.²⁵

What, then, is the function, or purpose, of such prolongation? Let me suggest that the extreme polarities we find in the Canacee story come about as the result of a double poetic causality. On the surface, as I have shown, we see a picture of a poet stitching together a story from

in the companion piece to this essay, “‘Now wo, now gladnesse’: Ovidianism in the *Fall of Princes*,” *ELH* 71 (2004): 531–58.

²⁵ The passage reads:

And he [Laurent] seith eek, that his entencioun
 Is to a-menden, correcten and declare;
 Nat to condempne off no presumpcioun,
 But to supporte, pleynli, and to spare
 Thyng touchid shortly off the story bare,
 Vndir a stile breeff and compendious,
 Hem to *prolonge* whan thei be vertuuous.
 (*Prologue*, lines 85–91; emphasis added)

various disparate threads—Ovidian complaint, Gowerian moralism, Boethian Stoicism, Chaucerian pietism (itself a bit of a contradiction)—in such a way that the internal contradictions in each are thrown into relief. Less evident is the way in which those narrative threads also form parts of broader stories about the growth and change of a literary or philosophical tradition. Such stories always propose a relationship between the aesthetic and history in which each shapes and informs the other—a relationship we see dramatized, in a sense, by Lydgate's staging of the encounter of a real, embodied authority (Humphrey) with its textual counterparts (Ovid, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Gower) and its fictions (tyrants like Eolus). I have suggested that the nodal point for the Canacee story—the locus of all of the intersecting stories, genres, and narratives we have encountered thus far—is the silence of the baby, the interpretive stumbling block inassimilable by either moralism or complaint. It is tempting to read this silence metonymically, as the particular instance of a larger "uneasiness" within the very idea of poetic tradition as Lydgate understood it, an uneasiness produced by a desire to synthesize the extreme contradictions he found in his sources. But the very fact of contradiction itself points to a set of larger aesthetic questions at play in the *Fall of Princes*. It is crucial to recognize here that the aesthetic works as a mode of formal organization that is both specific and universalizing at the very same time. Thus, for example, Ovidianism means something distinct in the late fourteenth century, in the fifteenth century, and the sixteenth and beyond, all the way up to and including the translations of Ted Hughes. These are the historical meanings of aesthetic form. But all of those Ovidianisms *share* certain characteristics, and, indeed, each builds on its predecessors to create a variegated and layered discourse in which multiple histories are sedimented and occasionally, anachronistically, rise to the surface. This effect of "sedimentation"—the layering of a whole range of meanings within a single story—is not caused by "literary history," in an old-fashioned sense. Rather, it is a characteristic of textuality itself, one that, under the right circumstances, creates a distinctive aesthetic trajectory in which poetic forms and contexts can be traced over time and made to conform to a diachronic logic.

In the case we are discussing here, the effect of "sedimentation" reveals itself particularly strongly in Lydgate's answer to the muteness of the baby he has so carefully inserted into the exemplum. Lydgate is a poet of dichotomies, who tends to structure heterogeneity by confining

it within binary oppositions, which themselves often multiply and escape his control. The oppositions between notions of Fortune—as chance or punishment—between genres (didacticism and complaint), between poets (Chaucer and Gower), between modes of “pleynynge” (amatory and Christian), and between forms of *auctoritee* (the patron versus the literary *auctor*) are cases in point. The baby’s muteness is no exception to this rule. As I will show, it is coupled with a notion of ventriloquized speaking that complements the subjective, feeling-laden Ovidian complaint and begins to lead us out of the quagmire of contradictions the story has churned up. As she “pleynes,” Canacee clearly understands herself to be speaking *for* her son, to be “grucching” because he cannot. She further understands her letter and her story to have a literary future. In a long passage that Lydgate adds to Gower, she articulates a series of relationships between Fortune and fame, Fortune and Cupid, and complaint and memorialization that begin to suggest how we might understand the Canacee episode in relation to broader aesthetic and historical questions raised by the *Fall of Princes*. In particular, as I will show, Lydgate turns away from the Chaucerian models he deploys at the beginning of the story—images of saintly women—and toward the more vexed figures of Dido and Criseyde, posing the problem of Fortune in a new and more pressing way. If Canacee had seemed early on to accept blame for her sin—“On the and me dependith the trespace / Touchyng our gilte and our gret offence” (1.6924–25)—she soon turns away from this penitential rhetoric and toward the discourse of secular love:

But love and Fortune ha[ue] turned up-so-doun
 Our grace, alas, our welfare & our fame,
 Hard to recure, so sclaudrid is our name.

Spot of diffamyng is hard to wasshe away,
 Whan noise and rumour abrod do folk manace;
 To hyndre a man ther may be no delay:
 For hatful fame fleeth ferr in ful short space.
 But off vs tweyne ther is non othir grace
 Sauff onli deth, and afftir deth, alas,
 Eternal sclaudre off vs; thus stant the cas.

Whom shal we blame, or whom shal we atwite
 Our gret offence, sithe we may it nat hide?

For our excus reportis to respite
 Mene is ther non, except the god Cupide.
 And thouh that he wolde for vs prouide,
 In this mateer to been our cheeff refuge,
 Poetis seyn he is blynd to been a iuge.

He is depeynt[e] lich a blynd archer,
 To marke ariht failyng discrecioun,
 Holdyng no meseur, noutherr ferr nor neer;
 But lik Fortunys disposicioun,
 Al upon happ, void off al resoun,
 As a blynd archer with arwes sharp[e] grounde
 Off auenture yeueth many a mortal wounde.

(1.6970–93)

We are reminded in these lines, of course, of a Chaucerian heroine similarly aware of her own literary future; as Criseyde complains (V.1058–64),

Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,
 Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
 No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
 O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!
 Thoroughout the world my belle shal be ronge!
 And wommen moost wol haten me of alle.
 Allas, that swich a cas me sholde falle!

Like Criseyde, Canacee blames Fortune for her woes *even as* she acknowledges her fault. As any reader of the *Troilus* knows, the link between the arbitrary God of Love and the turning of Fortune's wheel was explicitly articulated throughout the literature of love. Indeed, as Howard Patch showed long ago, Fortune and Venus are often indistinguishable in pictorial and literary representations.²⁶ The effect of this turn to the discourse of love is simultaneously to sharpen the contrast between the innocent child and his guilty amorous mother, and to dissolve further the distinction between the pious lament and the Ovidian complaint. Canacee's letter serves both purposes at once, ventriloquizing the legitimate "grucching" of her son while asserting her own self-justifying

²⁶Howard Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927), pp. 90–98.

logic. The notion of speaking for another, of soliciting readers on another's behalf, plays a critical role in understanding what so fascinated Lydgate about the Canacee story. As I have said, though the initial incitement to telling the tale may have come from poetic competitiveness—doing Chaucer one better, or prioritizing Gower over Chaucer—its significance, indicated by the sheer density of its allusions and its concluding position in Book One, is clearly linked to the broader questions undergirding Lydgate's poetic project as a whole, and cannot be limited to the narrow, judgmental logic of the Man of Law, who sees poetry simply as an opportunity for moralization and competition (recall his allusion to the "Pierides").²⁷ When Canacee begins to present herself as the *object* of stories ("sclaundrid" by fame), she articulates precisely the opposite moral question from that posed by the Man of Law. The issue is not, "is it right to recount a 'wikke ensauple' lest readers be led astray?" but rather "is it *ethical* to 'sclaundre' Canacee?" This shift in perspective, from Canacee as negative exemplar to Canacee as victim of Fame, is further enhanced as she continues her plaint:

At the and me he wrongli dede marke,
 Felli to hyndre our fatal auentures,
 As ferr as Phebus shynyth in his arke,
 To make us refus to alle creatures,
 Callid us tweyne onto the woful lures
 Off diffame, which will departe neuere,
 Be newe report the noise encresyng euere.

Odius fame with swifft wengis fleeth,
 But al good fame envie doth restreyne;
 Ech man off other the diffautis seeth,
 Yit on his owne no man will compleyne.
 But al the world out crieth on vs tweyne,
 Whos hatful ire bi us may nat be queemyd;
 For I mut deie, my fader hath so deemyd.

(1.6994–7007)

²⁷The Man of Law mistakenly refers to the "Muses that men clepe Pierides" (II.92), making an Ovidian slip; the "Pierides" are the daughters of King Pierus, known for contending with the Muses in a singing contest and being changed into magpies (see *Metamorphoses*, 5.293–678). His interest in the idea of a poetic contest is evident; immediately after this reference, he refers to himself humbly as coming after Chaucer with "hawe bake" and turning to prose as a result. Of course, he goes on to tell a story in verse.

These lines recall another Chaucerian figure and text, this time Dido in the *House of Fame*, who laments (345–52),

O wel-away that I was born!
 For thorgh yow is my name lorn,
 And alle my actes red and songe
 Over al thys lond, on every tonge.
 O wikke Fame!—for ther nys
 Nothing so swift, lo, as she is!
 O soth ys, every thing ys wyst,
 Though hit be kevered with the myst.

At one level, it would seem that we have been brought full circle, back to a relatively simple model of “pleynyng” that would suggest Canacee’s complaint be seen as the subjective utterance of yet another victim of love and passion. But Lydgate’s evocation of the *House of Fame* (and especially of Dido) necessarily turns our attention to the kind of meta-poetic questions that Chaucer persistently raises, not only in the *House of Fame*—where he poses the problem of poetry and reputation—but also in *The Legend of Good Women*, where his retelling of the Dido story forms part of a pseudo-ethical maneuver based on the fiction of poetic judgment outlined in the *Prologue*, where Cupid condemns Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*. If Canacee, like Criseyde and Dido, sees herself as the victim of fame, stained by a proleptic historical notoriety, then Lydgate’s retelling of her story—like the *Troilus*, in Cupid’s view—inevitably contributes to that “sclaundre,” both concretely (by impugning Canacee specifically) and in the abstract (by thus impugning women as a whole). This effect becomes even more pronounced in light of the long excursus on the “malis of wommen” that Lydgate translates from Laurent just prior to telling the Canacee story, in which he somewhat ineffectually disclaims responsibility for “Bochas” sentiments: “And treu[e]li it doth my witt appall / Off this mateer to make rehersaile; / It is no resoun tatwiten women all, / Thouh on or too whilom dede faile” (1.6644–47). By the time we have finished reading the exemplum of Canacee and Machaire, Boccaccio’s comments on women retrospectively appear, in light of *The Legend of Good Women*, as violations of the law of love. In other words, Lydgate animates a discourse of literary criticism from the *Legend* that counters the overwhelming moral logics of both his patron (Humphrey) and his source (Boccaccio/Laurent), each of

whom, in different but complementary ways, proposes a distinctive and powerful mode of poetic judgment that relies on a specifically Christian rhetoric of sin. What the shift in perspective—from Canacee as object of blame, to Canacee as subject of “sclaundre”—allows is the articulation of an alternative rhetoric, one that still relies on the *concept* of sin, but that redefines transgression according to the Ovidian logic of *The Legend of Good Women*.

It further links that logic to the work of conceptualizing the purpose of poetry itself. There would seem to be no doubt of course about Humphrey’s notion of the proper function of poetry: its job is to teach princes about the wages of sin and the rewards of virtue by way of negative examples. Nor does Chaucer’s Cupid allow for any confusion about *his* understanding of the purpose of tale-telling, to honor women as a means of furthering his own end of promoting a kind of ethical love. How then, does the Canacee story fit these models? Unsurprisingly, the answer is, not very well. It works neither as a warning about the dangers of incest (our identification with Canacee is too strong) nor, for obvious reasons, as a positive illustration of the virtues of women or love. In other words, it is not a good exemplar. And because the story fits neither Humphrey nor Cupid’s model, it exposes their essential similarity: both depend upon a notion of exemplarity in which narratives submit to abstraction and poetry’s function is to further the rule of law, be it the law of Christian morality or the law of love. But Canacee herself has a very different understanding of the purpose of writing. As she explains:

Now farweel, brother, to me it doth suffice
 To deie allone for our bothe sake.
 And in my moste feithful humble wise,
 Onto my dethward thouh I tremble & quake,
 Off the for euere now my leue I take.
 And onys a yeer, forget nat, but take heed,
 Mi fatal day this lettre for to reed.

So shaltow han on me sum remembraunce,
 Mi name enprentid in thi kalender,
 Bi rehersaile off my dedli greuauance;
 Were blak that day, & mak a doolful cheer.
 And whan thou comest & shalt approche neer
 Mi sepulture, I pray the nat disdeyne
 Vpon my graue summe teris for to reyne.

(1.7008–21)

Lydgate has taken his cue from Gower, whose Canacee asks that her son be buried with her “so schalt thou have / Upon ous bothe remembrance” (lines 294–95), but he has greatly extrapolated upon the idea of “remembrance” by making the letter itself a memorial object. Canacee asks that the letter be read and reread as a means of “enprenting” her memory on Machaire’s “kalender”—not as a warning to sinners (amatory or otherwise) but as an incitement to emotional display: “wer blak that day & mak a doolful cheer.” Here we find the counter to the exemplary notion of poetry underwritten by Humphrey and Cupid: poetry both arouses emotions and furthers remembrance. It memorializes the dead by inciting feeling, and that subjective emotion constitutes an end *in itself*.

One might object that such a reading relies all too heavily on the warped “pleynyng” of an outrageous sinner to have any validity within the broader logic of the *Fall of Princes* as a whole. It is certainly true that readers of the text are in no doubt as to the moral purpose of Lydgate’s poetry. But the fact remains that in his envoy—the feature of the poem designed explicitly for moralization—he refuses to make the obvious judgment about Canacee’s sin:

Whan surquedie oppressid hath pite,
 And meeknesse is with tirannie bor doun
 Ageyn al riht, & hasti cruelte
 To be vengable maketh no dilacioun,
 What folweth theroff?—be cleer inspeccioun,
 Seeth an exaample how Pirrus in his teene
 Off hatful ire slouh yonge Polliceene

King Eolus to rigerous was, parde,
 And to vengable in his entencioun
 Ageyn his childre Machaire & Canace,
 So inportable was his punycioun,
 Off haste procedyng to ther destruccioun;
 Wers in his ire, as it was weel seene,
 Than cruel Pirrus, which slouh Polliceene.

(1.7057–63)

The pairing of Pirrus, who kills an innocent girl, and Eolus, who is “to rigerous” to Canacee and Machaire, obliterates the difference between the two stories and enforces an explicitly political reading, in which

“meeknesse” is oppressed by “tirannie” and “surquedie” suppresses “pite.” In this reading, it would seem that “pleynyng” has a distinct efficacy in the world, that it “makes a difference” by soliciting the pity of princely readers and enjoining them to temper their justice with mercy. But the mathematical simplicity of this cause-and-effect logic (poetry makes something happen) belies the fundamental problematic at work in representing tyranny in a moralizing poem. Tyranny is tyranny *precisely because* it refuses moralization; it punishes the innocent along with the guilty. It is tyranny that creates the impossible conundrum of Canacee’s mute baby, the innocent who falls despite his sinlessness; it is tyranny itself that issues the most profound challenge to Humphrey’s (tyrannical) moralizing logic, and ultimately to the very idea that human agency can have material effects in this world. By making the implicit critique of tyranny staged by Chaucer in *The Legend of Good Women* explicit—by naming “tirannie” and confronting it directly—Lydgate ultimately produces a far bleaker picture of the world than his “maistere.” In the Canacee story, tyranny goes unchecked and unpunished; Eolus acts with impunity and without fetters—and though he is censured by Lydgate, he does not “fall” like the other sinners in the text. He stands as a pure example of absolutist power; like the innocent baby, his opposite number, he cannot be assimilated to the logic of moralization.

Lydgate is not satisfied, however, with this uncompromising narrative of tyrannical impunity. In what seems like a quixotic and futile gesture, he insists in the envoy that the story function as an efficacious narrative, one that can curb the tyrannical impulses of princes: “Noble Pryncis, prudent and attempre / Differrith vengauce, off hih discrecioun; / Til your ire sumwhat asuagid be / Doth neuer off doom non execucioun” (1.7063–67). The “pite” that readers feel, then, is supposed to prevent them from acting vengefully and induce them to behave mercifully; like Theseus in *The Knight’s Tale*, Lydgate’s ideal prince is moved by that noble emotion to eschew tyranny and act with kindness. But not only does the failure to punish Eolus lend the envoy an air of impotence, but the affective demand of the text—that readers feel “pite”—also contradicts the moralism of the *Fall of Princes* as a whole. Here we return to the central difficulty of the Canacee story: were Lydgate’s princes to feel “pite” upon reading the narrative, they would be being moved by the plight of a sinner—and not just any sinner, but a particularly egregious violator of the laws of God and Nature. It is this paradox upon

which the entire apparatus of *Fall of Princes* stumbles, a stumble, I will argue, that ultimately allows Lydgate to produce something new, a new way of thinking about poetry and a new means of approaching the problem of Fortune.

“Vernacular Philosophy” and the Aesthetic: Poetry and Fortune

I have traced, bit by bit, the series of contradictions and impasses that permeate the Canacee story as a way of showing how Lydgate's obsessive engagement with Chaucer and Gower leads him to construct a series of oppositions and tensions that cannot be resolved. Having now seen the care and sophistication with which Lydgate has created this story, with its allusions, cross references, contradictions, and competing demands on its readers, we can see further how this episode functions in relation to the *Fall of Princes* as a whole, both poetically and historically. It is intimately bound up with the question of Fortune, partly because it is Fortune that forms the major philosophical subject of *Fall of Princes*, and partly because Fortune was the most serious poetic question posed by Chaucer and Gower; indeed, one might even say that meditations on Fortune form a kind of “vernacular philosophy” in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Fortune becomes a poetic question not simply because the idea provides aristocrats with a secular notion through which they can justify their own mode of living (while poetry about Fortune provides them with affirmation), as Larry Scanlon has argued, but also because thinking about Fortune poses the problem of poetic *function*.²⁸ What, in a world governed by Fortune, is poetry *for*? Does it lament? “Grucche”? Instruct by moralizing? Give pleasure? Each of these possibilities proposes a different relationship of the aesthetic to history, of poetry to Fortune (which we might in some sense say is another way of describing the mass of unprocessed data that constitutes “history” in its rawest guise). If, for example, poetry is meant to moralize, then at root it is a way of *acting in the world*—a way of imposing order, on, and in, history. Even if the message of that moralization is simply that one should embrace virtue and let Fortune work as she

²⁸Larry Scanlon, “Sweet Persuasion: The Subject of Fortune in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” in *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde: “Subgit to alle Poesye,” Essays in Criticism*, ed. R. A. Shoaf (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), pp. 211–23; as Scanlon states, “In the figure of Fortune an aristocratic class can at once recognize the flux of historical existence, and affirm its own privilege as a locus of stability beyond such flux” (p. 217).

will, the implication of didactic poetry is that writing is fundamentally efficacious, with tangible results. This model of efficacy constitutes the explicit self-understanding of the *Fall of Princes*. But when Lydgate deploys other discourses, he also activates alternative notions of Fortune. “Pleynyng” or “grucching” is a case in point. At one level, “pleynyng” fits the moralizing model, in that it assists in the didactic mission of the text by arousing pity. But in another way, complaint is the quintessential genre of helplessness, a mode of discourse articulated by Fortune’s victims that is useless as a way of imposing human will upon the world. “Pleynyng,” as Boethius tells us, is what human beings do when afflicted with bad Fortune, and it is a fruitless and foolish indulgence, a paradigmatic example of wasted speech. Far better to model oneself on Griselda, the Boethian Stoic, than to “grucche” about the implacability of Fortune, which in this model is a principle of irresistible historical causation that is utterly exterior to the human subject. According to such logic, the aesthetic—of which “pleynyng” is a type—is stripped of agency and meaning, made not only impotent but surplus to requirements.

These two notions of Fortune (the idea of a remediable negative force and an efficacious poetry versus the fearsome thought of arbitrary contingency and the uselessness of speech) are the twin poles between which Lydgate suspends the Canacee story. Jumbled together in this episode we find precisely these opposing epistemologies, the former a model in which the world is saturated with a single meaning and the latter a paradigm that evacuates the human world of all significance and silences all speech. History is both subject to logic—available to hermeneutics—and utterly excessive and irrational at the same time. Lydgate knows this, in the sense that he knows that his sources fundamentally conflict—that Ovid, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Gower each propose a different solution to the basic problem of finding meaning in history. His instinctive response to these conflicts—a response utterly characteristic of him—is to seek some kind of synthesis. Ultimately, Canacee and her son represent ideal subjects for the kind of “vernacular philosophy” that permeates the *Fall of Princes*, precisely because they expose the structural contradictions at work in the historical models for human life in the world that Lydgate inherited from his predecessors. Neither Boethian Stoicism (Griselda) nor Christian complaint (Custance) functions in the universe of moral ambiguity described by the Canacee story, a world in which exemplars contain more than one kind of sin (incest, tyranny) and

solicit deeply ambivalent responses (pity, horror). In the end, Lydgate asks us to choose between a morally compromised aesthetic mode—"pleynyng"—and a pure, and purely doomed, form of human living: an impossible, mute innocence. But of course, the choice he offers is no choice at all. We are implicated in Canacee's "pleynyng" simply by virtue of having read it. Nor does Humphrey's moral vision of poetry provide a way out of the dilemma Lydgate articulates. Not only does the indictment of tyranny ultimately implicate Humphrey himself, but the very purposiveness of poetry he demands is countered by the "pleynyng" of guilty Canacee. Recall that Canacee herself understands her letter as a means to an end *in itself*, as a form of memorialization, nothing more. This vision of "pleynyng" obtrudes as a third term between Griselda's *contempus mundi* and Custance's belief in efficacious prayer—and it is a vision, in the end, of the aesthetic, of a pointless, functionless mode of discourse with no purpose external to itself.²⁹ Contra Boethius, in a world ruled by arbitrary Fortune, "pleynyng" saves us from both silence and moralism, from the despair of impotence and the impossible fantasy of agency.

Lydgate is not, however, presenting a kind of "middle way," a "solution" to the contradictions the Canacee story has exposed. He is rather making a very minor claim for the value of an aesthetic engagement with the world. It is not a value conferred by an ethos of salvation or moral improvement, but instead is a simple assertion that speaking (writing) is better than silence, even in the face of imminent destruction. Fortune, in this reading, constitutes a flexible way of imagining the world in which either contingency or causality, chance or sin, may be operating at any given moment; it is a "vernacular philosophy" with its own discursive mode: "pleynyng." And it is precisely because "pleynyng" lacks purpose ("Why pleynestow?" asks Fortune) that it becomes, for Lydgate, a model for the aesthetic.

²⁹Lee Patterson, in his "Writing Amorous Wrongs: Chaucer and the Order of Complaint," in *The Idea of Medieval Literature: New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honor of Donald R. Howard*, ed. James M. Dean and Christian Zacher (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), pp. 55–71, makes a similar point about the relationship between complaint as a genre and the problem of poetic function, arguing that in complaint "uselessness is programmatic"; "the claim it lays upon the world is virtually always self-cancelling" (p. 56). More broadly, he suggests that the lyric voice in Chaucer functions as a kind of radically ahistorical and unassimilable voice that calls into question that stability of authorized discourses (pp. 66–67). Lydgate certainly recognizes this capacity of the complaint to challenge and destabilize authority, as his resistance to Humphrey's causal model shows.

It might fairly be noted that in an argument that hinges on an idea about history—Fortune in all its variations—I have said almost nothing about “history” as it is usually understood, nothing about the 1430s, nothing about the Lancastrians, nothing about Lydgate’s own biography, and I have made only the briefest mention of Humphrey’s historical role. This is not because such matters are irrelevant; indeed, much work remains to be done on the *Fall of Princes* and its historical, political, and social contexts and resonances. Rather, I have focused so closely on textual matters because this particular text is determinedly anti-topical. Apart from its references to Humphrey of Gloucester, it includes only two references to recent English history, the first a bit of praise and memorialization for Henry V, and the second a revision of Boccaccio’s account of King John of France’s English imprisonment.³⁰ Of course, as has been amply demonstrated over the past fifteen years, historicity is not the same as topicality, and an analysis of the *Fall of Princes* as a poem of its moment (with regard to questions of governance and sovereignty, for example) has much to teach us about Lydgate and about the status of poetry and patronage during the reign of Henry VI. But the paradox of the *Fall of Princes* is that any attempt to locate it diachronically, as part of a broader literary or cultural history stretching from medieval to renaissance depends upon its *anti*-historical qualities, its tendency to assert its transhistorical relevance, its resistance to local temporality. Ultimately, it is the final poetic move we see in book one—the articulation of the extreme moral ambiguity of “pleynyng”—that constitutes the bedrock of historicity in the *Fall of Princes*. It is a special kind of historicity, however, one in which the past is rendered through the mingling of the forms, genres, and modes of articulation in which various histories are sedimented and layered, only to be transported from time to time, past to present to future, and reused and remade in strikingly new ways.

If it is true that the curious effect of retreat from history proper of the *Fall of Princes* (through the privileging of form, including exemplarity) is in the end a *return* to historicity—if, that is, the very fact that a mode of discourse like “pleynyng” resists local contextualization constitutes the ultimate historical meaning of the text—what are the implications

³⁰See *Fall of Princes*, book one, lines 5951–85; Lydgate is describing how Henry V commissioned the *Troy Book*. In book nine, Lydgate transforms Boccaccio’s story of the fall of King John of France into praise for the Black Prince (“Prince Edward”), noting Boccaccio’s partiality (“ful narwe he gan hym thinke, / Lefft spere and sheeld[e], fault with penne & inke” [lines 3167–68]); see lines 3134–203.

of this assertion for our understanding of Lydgate's place in literary history?³¹ It should be clear by now that the old assumption that he is a quintessentially "medieval" poet no longer works as a way of accounting for the complexity of Lydgate's engagement with the plethora of texts and stories available to him.³² That is, as Lydgate negotiates the contradictory and conflicting sources to which he has dedicated his loyalties, he is forced to make a series of editorial choices that lead inevitably to the birth of something new, if only because he delights so thoroughly in pitting one authority against another, Chaucer against Gower, Humphrey against Chaucer. This poetic habit leads Lydgate away from the historical—understood as the concatenation of local practices, politics, and events—and into the seemingly more rarefied world of the aesthetic, a fantasy world like Dante's Elysian fields, in which *auctors* communicate with other *auctors* and history rages on outside the text. But the aesthetic does not work in this way. The very opposition between an ahistorical realm of literary form and a secular realm of events is itself a phenomenon with a history; neither fully "medieval" (in which we would see a different kind of retreat from history) nor entirely "modern" (which would demand a level of secularization not possible for Lydgate), the aesthetic of "pleynnyng" that emerges in book one represents a small piece of a much larger historical development. For Lydgate to open the space for "pleynnyng" to emerge as a viable human behavior *in spite of* its seeming purposelessness constitutes an assertion, however unintentional, of the value of a certain form of the aesthetic.³³ And despite the

³¹The *Fall of Princes* stands at a critical juncture between the late fourteenth century and the sixteenth century, with its "humanist" revival of figures like Ovid and genres like tragedy. In discussions that lie outside the scope of this essay, both James Simpson and Paul Strohm, in different ways, have recently made arguments regarding the transition from "medieval" to "renaissance" in literary terms, Simpson (in part) in relation to Ovidianism, and Strohm in connection to tragedy through his comparison of *Fall of Princes* with *A Mirror For Magistrates*; see Simpson's *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (especially chapter 4—"The Elegiac"—and the "Envoi") and Strohm's "*Politique*": *Languages of Statecraft*.

³²The notion that Lydgate "medievalized" the texts with which he came in contact is expressed most thoroughly by Derek Pearsall in his *John Lydgate*; for example, he states that "every mask [Lydgate] puts on is a well-worn medieval one" (p. 2), and argues that Lydgate is "perfectly representative of the Middle Ages" (p. 14).

³³My thinking about "uselessness" has been influenced by a talk given by Aranye Fradenburg at Princeton University in 2003, a version of which has been published as her "Simply Marvelous," *SAC* 26 (2004): 1–27. She argues, among other things, that "all forms of creative activity and consumption, including economic ones, are directly functions of enjoyment, usefulness being a part of this field rather than its cause or foundation" (p. 10).

fact that this form seems imbued with a certain “modernity” (early or late), the *Fall of Princes* does not constitute a way station along a progressive road to the future; in fact, “pleynyng” is what Ovid’s heroines have been doing since long before Lydgate dreamed of writing poetry. The Canacee story, with its multiple sources and contradictory lessons, constitutes an idea of mingling and mixing—of sedimentation—that embodies the capacity of the aesthetic to be historical while steadfastly resisting the historicity of facts and lessons. This aesthetic asserts the stubborn persistence of the human (of “pleynyng”) in the face of both moralism and radical contingency—and, as we have come to understand in this post-human age, that persistence has its own troubled history. It is nevertheless worth preserving a place in our own rationalized world for “pleynyng,” for the fantasy of an escape from cause and effect—for uselessness.