SIR ISRAEL GOLLANCZ MEMORIAL LECTURE

'Pite for to here — pite for to se': Some Scenes of Pathos in Late Medieval English Literature

DOUGLAS GRAY
Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford
Fellow of the Academy

MY CHOICE OF 'SCENES OF PATHOS' for a topic is decidedly unfashionable — and deliberately so. Indeed, it would be possible to read widely in the criticism and literary history of this period without realising that there were any scenes of pathos at all. What little discussion of pathos there has been is concerned largely with devotional literature and art and with Chaucer, though almost exclusively with his so-called 'religious tales'.[1] While it is undoubtedly the case that the characteristic patterns of medieval piety did exercise a great influence, scenes of pathos are by no means restricted to religious writing. I am inclined to think that this emphasis has been misleading and narrowing, with the result that justice has not been done to the diversity and the significance of the material.

[1] As surprising as the critical neglect is the ubiquity of 'scenes of pathos' both large and small. I have therefore had to be extremely selective in my examples, concentrating largely on extended narratives, and thus omitting a writer like Langland who produces thrilling moments of pathos that are genuinely sublime: '"*Consummatum est*," quod Crist, and comsede for to swoune, / Pitousliche and pale as a prison þat deieth; / The lord of lif and of light þo leide hise eighen togideres. / The day for drede withdrouȝ and derk bicam the sonne..' B XVIII 57–60D, ed. G. Kane and E. T. Donaldson (London, 1975). Nor have I touched on the much discussed question of 'medieval tragedy'. See the imaginative studies in P. Boitani, *The Tragic and the Sublime in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, 1989).

One reason for this neglect is that our twentieth-century literary preference for the ironic and the indirect has made us uneasy with the direct expression of human feeling and sentiment that was popular in earlier periods, and has led to an exaggerated fear of 'sentimentality', which is often simply an unthinking term of abuse.[2] There is a danger here, well expressed by Johnson: 'want of tenderness, he always alledged, was want of parts, and was no less a proof of stupidity than depravity'.[3]

However, much medieval literature depends on a direct emotional involvement in scenes of human suffering. Sometimes, in more sophisticated authors, this may co-exist with comedy or irony. A curiously negative view of irony, that it obliterates every other tone in the register, has had particularly unfortunate results in the case of Chaucer, who likes to hold different tones in balance. And in some cases, probably, as Flaubert said, irony can heighten pathos: 'l'ironie n'enlève rien au pathétique, elle l'outre au contraire'.[4] I think that in the end after all the ironies in the *Decameron*, the sententia which opens it — 'it is a human quality to have pity on those in distress' ['umana cosa è l'aver compassione agli afflitti'] — is proved true. I would not wish to drag us back entirely into the rather damp world and the weeping whiskers of Victorian emotions or of earlier sentimentalism, but I would argue that a more sympathetic attention to tearful scenes or stories might prove more illuminating than a rigid distrustfulness.

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[2] Even a critic who has written illuminatingly about pathos, Northrop Frye, refers to it as 'a queer ghoulish emotion' . . . 'highly articulate pathos is apt to become a factitious appeal to self-pity, or tear-jerking.' Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), p. 39. Perhaps also there is now an anxiety that studies of topics such as this imply a view of 'human nature' that is universal and unchanging. This lecture is primarily concerned with pathos in literature, but this clearly has some relationship with the expression of grief in historical societies. It is based on a commonsense view that while the pain or death of near kin or friends seems to arouse sorrow in most societies, the style and the intensity of its expression will be culturally conditioned and is likely to vary from one society to another, or from group to group within a society, and from period to period (see note 62 below, and cf. notes 46, 52). Charles Darwin (*The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London, 1872), ch. 6) thought that weeping was natural to humans (although 'the Indian elephant is known sometimes to weep'), but was also a 'habit' subject to social limitations. Sympathy 'is especially apt to excite the lachrymal glands' (p. 218). See A. Vincent-Buffault, *The History of Tears: Sensibility and Sentimentality in France* (*Histoire des larmes; xviii*e*–xix*e* siècles* (Paris, 1986); trans. T. Bridgeman (Basingstoke, 1991).

[3] Boswell, *Life of Johnson* ed. R. W. Chapman, corrected by J. D. Fleeman (Oxford, 1970), p. 440.

[4] *Correspondance* (Paris, 1926–33), III (1927), p. 43, quoted by A. Fairlie, *Flaubert: Madame Bovary* (London, 1969), p. 68.

My topic presents other difficulties. A scene of pathos is set in a particular context, and it is misleading to pluck it out for discussion. It often provides a focus or a climax in a narrative or dramatic context. And its success or failure will relate to the moral and imaginative skill of the author as well as to his technical skill. Extreme cases are fairly easy to judge. We might set the final meeting of Lear and Cordelia against the pathetic narrative of the old temperance song:

> My father is a drunkard;
> My mother she is dead,
> And I am just an orphan child,
> No place to lay my head . . .
>
> We all were once so happy,
> And had a happy home,
> Till dad he went to drinking rum,
> And then he gambled some.
> He left my darling mother;
> She died of a broken heart,
> And as I tell my story,
> I see your teardrops start.

or, from the same tradition, the *planctus* of the sorrowing child:

> Come home! Come home! Come home!
> Please, father, dear father, come home!
> Hear the sweet voice of the child
> Which the night winds repeat as they roam!
> Oh! who who could resist this most plaintive of prayers?
> "Please, father, dear father, come home!"[5]

where, to echo Oscar Wilde, one must have a heart of stone not to laugh. But the questions posed by the representation of suffering in fiction are not easy ones, nor is the question of when an attempt at pathos may justly and critically be called sentimentality. We may be right in preferring those passages which 'do not dwell on the pathetic details but achieve the effect by understatement and suggestion',[6] but if we talk of 'excess of emotion' or 'overindulgence' we need to remember that some medieval mystical and devotional writing prizes the expression of an excess of love, and that some authors like to indulge themselves and play on this dangerous borderland.

There are also problems with the words involved in this topic.

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[5] G. W. Ewing, *The Well-Tempered Lyre* (Dallas, 1977), pp. 3, 69.
[6] M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York, 1971), p. 129.

'Pathos' is not used in Middle English (the first recorded occurrence is in E. K.'s gloss to *The Shepheardes Calender* (May, 189), in the technical sense of 'a pathetic utterance'). In Middle English a scene of pathos might be often called 'a pitous cas', and the emotions of actors, bystanders, onlookers, or audience variously described as *sorow*, *routhe*, or especially as *pite*, often a very intense emotion.[7] Furthermore, the word pathos has changed meaning over the centuries. From the various senses of the Greek word *pathos* — 'that which happens to a person'; 'misfortune, calamity (often unmerited), suffering, feeling'; 'the passions' (contrasted by Aristotle with *ethos*, a person's overall disposition or character), the meaning has gradually narrowed to those familiar Modern English senses of pathos — 'that quality in speech, writing . . . which excites a feeling of pity or sadness; the power of stirring tender or melancholy emotion . . . ' Though I will limit my scenes to scenes of sorrow, I will occasionally try to recover some of the older senses of pathos.

Let us turn briefly to a famous *pitous cas* in the second book of the *Aeneid*, when the priest Laocoon (who had warned the Trojans of the wiles of the Greeks and thrown a spear at the side of the wooden horse), making sacrifice to Neptune, is suddenly attacked by two sea serpents. They envelop and cruelly destroy him and his two sons, and just as suddenly retreat and vanish beneath the statue of Minerva. This scene forms one of the book's 'narrative guidelines': 'this terrifying picture, as verbal echo and situation recall it to the memory . . . is seen in retrospect to contain all the violence of the sack of Troy'.[8] (The snakes are deliberately recalled in the simile later used of Pyrrhus, the slayer of Priam.) It is also a masterly demonstration of the art of constructing a scene of pathos.[9] The narrative is gripping and vivid. It is a first-person eyewitness account, emphasised by exclamation (*ecce* — 'behold'[10]) and

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[7] See D. Gray 'Chaucer and "Pite"' in *J. R. R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam* ed. M. Salu and R. T. Farrell (Ithaca, N. Y, 1979). W. B. Stanford, *Greek Tragedy and the Emotions* (London, 1983), a study which has some excellent remarks on pathetic passages, p. 23, notes that the usual translation of the Greek words *eleos* and *oiktos* as 'pity' 'is often inadequate to express the visceral intensity of the Greek terms.'

[8] B. M. W. Knox, 'The Serpent and the Flame: The Imagery of the Second Book of the *Aeneid*', *American Journal of Philology* 71 (1950), 379–400; repr. in S. Commager, *Virgil: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), p. 128.

[9] On this passage see the valuable notes in R. G. Austin, ed., *Aeneid II* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 94 ff.

[10] 'Cum ex improviso vult aliquid ostendere,' says Servius (*Servianorum in Vergilii Carmina Commentariorum*, Editio Harvardiana II (1946), p. 378.

by the explicit emotional involvement of the narrator (*horresco referens*), and by precise visual detail — the blazing eyes of the snakes, the 'little limbs' of the two innocent sons, the frantic writhing of Laocoon and his shrieks which fill the sky, like those of a wounded bull which has escaped from an altar and has shaken the axe from its neck.[11] The whole scene is strongly visual[12]: not only is it 'pite for to here', it is 'pite for to se'.

The rediscovery in 1506 of the ancient marble group representing Laocoon and his sons with the snakes twined around them was the cause of much excitement and became an influential artistic model.[13] It could be seen as an 'exemplum doloris', a stoic example of silent and noble suffering. In the eighteenth century it was used by Lessing in his discussion of the relative possibilities of the verbal and the visual arts — why, for instance, it was legitimate for Virgil to describe the terrible screams of the priest, whereas the sculptor only allowed him a sigh or a groan.[14] And it was later a source of inspiration for the work of the cultural historian, Aby Warburg, [15] much of which is suggestive for our topic. He took the scene as an example of what he called *Pathos-formeln*, the images which expressed agony or ecstasy (as against those of logical and rational thought), which he related to the Dionysian element in ancient civilisation as against the Apollonian. He came to see these two not as mutually exclusive, but as interpenetrating. And he began the study of the ways in which these images, charged with

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[11] In a discussion of Virgil's similes, G. Williams, *Technique and Ideas in the Aeneid* (New Haven, London, 1983), pp. 165–6, aptly cites Quintilian (8. 3. 74): 'the more remote the field of the simile [from that of the context] the more novelty it confers and the greater is its unexpectedness.'

[12] The pictorial quality of Virgil's narrative was praised by his first translator into English, Gavin Douglas, and this has often been echoed. On the tradition of Virgil illustrations see P. and J. Courcelle, *Lecteurs paiens et lecteurs chrétiens de l'Enéide* (Paris, 1984); on medieval Troybooks, H. Buchtal, *Historia Troiana: Studies in the History of Medieval Secular Illustration* (London, 1971); on Laocoon, R. Förster, 'Laokoon im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance', *Jahrb. der königlich. Preuszischen Kunstsammlungen* 3 (1906), 1–30.

[13] See Austin pp. 96–9; L. D. Ettlinger, '*Exemplum Doloris*. Reflections on the Laocoon Group', in *Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky* ed. M. Meiss (*De artibus opuscula* 40, New York, 1961), pp. 121–6.

[14] Lessing begins with Winckelmann's famous remarks on the 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur' of Greek art: the sculptor's Laocoon 'utters no horrible scream' but the opening of his mouth 'is rather a subdued groan of anguish, as Sadoleto describes it' (*Laokoon, oder über die Grenzen der Mahlerey und Poesie*, 1766, trans. R. Phillimore (London, 1874), p. 6). For the humanist Sadoleto's poem *de Laocoontis statua*, see Austin, pp. 293–4.

[15] See E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg. An Intellectual Biography* (London, 1970), D. Wuttke, *Aby M. Warburgs Methode als Anregung und Aufgabe* (Göttingen, 1978), and (concisely and clearly) J. B. Trapp, *Lotte Labowsky 1905–91. In Memoriam*, pp. 2–4.

contradictory power, lived on, to be reused or adapted (as by Christian artists), or simply as empty gestures. The Laocoon group was the most tragic symbol of the idea of the snake as a destroying power from the netherworld: 'the death of the father with his two sons becomes a symbol of the antique Passion; death as revenge wrought by demons without justice and without hope. This is the tragic pessimism of antiquity.' And he went on to observe examples of snakes associated with benevolence and transfigured beauty, in the staff of Asclepius, the Old Testament serpent lifted up in the wilderness, transformed into a Christian figure of the Crucifixion, or modern healing snake-rituals.[16]

The Laocoon episode, since it does not find its way into the Troy books of Dares and Dictys,[17] is not in medieval vernacular literature as popular a 'pitous' scene as some of the many others provided by Virgil's 'epic of grief', notably the deaths of Priam and of Dido. Medieval writers also found *Pathosformeln* in other ancient writers. Ovid especially gave them memorable examples of the 'pathos of love'[18]—stories which were constantly retold and refashioned, and models for the emotional portrayal of scenes of passion or horror. Later, even more self-consciously rhetorical, poets also served as sources: Seneca,[19] with his rhetorical speeches like great arias, revealing inner torment, or *exempla* of suffering; Lucan, 'Mittler der antiken Pathos' as Fraenkel described him,[20] 'fiery and passionate and remarkable for his sententiae',[21] using all the devices of rhetoric in the narration of pitous events — exclamation, apostrophe, condemnatory outbursts; Statius,[22] the 'historian' of Thebes, both sententious and

[16] A. Warburg, 'A Lecture on Serpent Ritual', *JWCI* 2 (1939), 277–92.

[17] Förster (p. 2) notes a case in the ON *Trojumanna saga* (ch. 34) where the death of the priest, though he is not named, is recorded (ed. F. Jónsson in *Hauksbók*, 1892–6, p. 224; J. Louis-Jensen, Copenhagen, 1963, pp. 226–7).

[18] See Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge, 1966).

[19] On the transmission and availability of Seneca's tragedies, and of Nicholas Trivet's commentary, see L. D. Reynolds, P. K. Marshall, and R. A. B. Mynors, *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics* (Oxford, 1983, 1986), R. H. Rouse, 'The A Text of Seneca's Tragedies in the Thirteenth Century', *Revue d'histoire des textes* 1 (1971), 93–121, C. Herold, 'Chaucer's Tragic Muse: The Paganization of Christian Tragedy', Ph.D. dissertation (University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1994).

[20] E. Fraenkel, *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg 1924–5* (Leipzig, Berlin, 1927), 229–57.

[21] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10. 1. 90 — who adds a cautious proviso, 'suitable for imitation more by orators than by poets.' See S. H. Braund, trans. *Lucan. Civil War* (Oxford, 1992), Introduction. Lucan appears regularly in medieval lists of the 'poets.'

[22] Like Lucan (listed by Conrad of Hirsau and Eberhard) a school text. See D. Vessey, *Statius and the Thebaid* (Cambridge, 1973).

pictorial, whose bleak view of the world provided some of the most impressive *Pathosformeln* — the blind Oedipus, the innocent child of Lycurgus destroyed by the huge serpent, or another doomed priest in Amphiaraus, who as Chaucer says, 'fil through the ground to helle'.[23]

Although throughout the Middle Ages the matter of Troy and Thebes remained a major source for scenes of pathos,[24] the vast range of stories which the later writers inherited included material which was only marginally or not at all connected with classical antiquity — scenes like Guðrun sitting by the dead Sigurðr (in *Guðrunarkviða*), or the dying Beowulf beside the slain dragon. The dragon (whether or not it represents Tolkien's *draconitas* ('a personification of malice, greed, destruction . . . and of the undiscriminating cruelty of fortune')[25] continues in later legend, usually to be slain by heroes of romance or by saints, or, above all, by Christ himself — sometimes imaged as a lover-knight — when he destroyed the ancient Leviathan of the under-world — *draco, ille magnus, serpens antiquus*[26] — and harrowed hell. 'Done is a battell on the dragon blak,' says Dunbar triumphally, 'dungin is the deidly dragon Lucifer, / The crewell serpent with the mortall stang.'[27] Sometimes *draconitas* is subsumed in the inner demons which drive cruel men (like the slayers of Sigurðr) or tyrants. In other stories the suffering is occasioned by the uncertainty of Fortune. One favourite group which deals with the separation of families or lovers, supposed deaths, recognition scenes and tearful reunions, is similar to the ancient romance (with which the tale of Apollonius of Tyre seems to provide a link),[28] and often makes central the suffering of women.

[23] *Troilus and Criseyde* 2. 105 (all quotations from Chaucer are taken from the Riverside edn. of L. D. Benson (Cambridge, Mass., 1987; Oxford, 1988)).

[24] Thus, Joseph of Exeter opens his Trojan epic: 'My lament is the tears of the Trojan women and Troy given up to its fates'. (*Werke und Briefe* ed. L. Gompf (Mittellateinische Studien und Texte 4; Leiden, Cologne, 1970), p. 77). On Middle English versions see C. David Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature* (Woodbridge, 1980).

[25] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Beowulf. The Monsters and the Critics' (Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, 1936), *PBA* 22, p. 17.

[26] Apoc. 12: 9 (cf. 20: 2–3).

[27] *The Poems of William Dunbar* ed. J. Kinsley (Oxford, 1979), No. 4. See P. Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar* (Oxford, 1992), p. 178.

[28] The Apollonius story survives in many versions in Latin and the vernaculars. In English it is found from Old English to Shakespeare's *Pericles*. See J. B. Severs, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English* 1 (1967), pp. 145, 498–9; E. Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations* (Woodbridge, 1991). On tales with 'supposed deaths' see H. Hauvette, *La 'morte vivante'* (Paris, 1933), F. Lyons, 'La fausse morte dans le *Cligès* de Chrétien de Troyes', in *Mélanges . . . offerts à Mario Roques* (Paris, 1950), pp. 167–7.

This variety is matched by a variety of narrative techniques. Now a scene of pathos will be carefully prepared for by prophecies, proleptic allusions, now it will come suddenly and unexpectedly, like the *prodigium* of Laocoon's death. A narrator will sometimes directly address his characters (or pray for them); sometimes he will adopt an apparently more detached or neutral position; sometimes he will be a participant in the scene (as when Dante falls as if dead because of his *pietade* for Paolo and Francesca). Middle English writers are fond of giving their audience a general 'signal' of the tone of a scene, using such phrases as 'pite was to here', etc.

Rhetorical skills are necessary for the construction of these scenes, and these could be learnt directly from literary models or from school or school-texts. Roland's farewell address to his sword Durendal is exactly equivalent to the ninth of Cicero's sixteen topics for arousing pity — 'a discourse addressed to mute and inanimate objects'[29] — but I rather doubt that the author took it from him. Some, however, did make use of the extensive advice given in the rhetorical books on how to arouse pathos or pity. One constantly reiterated counsel there is to strive for vividness: Quintilian speaks at length of the quality of *enargia*, which 'makes us seem not so much to narrate [*dicere*] as to show [*ostendere*], for exciting pity.'[30] In the more widely known *Ad Herennium* and later works, this is almost proverbial — *demonstratio* 'sets forth the whole incident and virtually brings it before our eyes'.[31] Interestingly, this becomes a standard topic in early art criticism, where we read of 'faces that live', 'statues that want only a voice', etc.[32] The rhetoricians

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[29] *De inventione* 1. 106–9. They include the use of commonplaces, such as the power of Fortune. The *Ad Herennium* gives nine topics.

[30] *Institutio oratoria* 6. 2. 32 (see also 6. 2. 29).

[31] *Ad. C. Herennium* 4. 55. 69: 'statuit enim rem totam et prope ponit ante oculos'. Cf. Geoffrey of Vinsauf, 'res ita se demonstrat aperte, / ut quasi sit praesens oculis' (1272–3).

[32] See M. Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators* (Oxford, 1971). 'Seeing' and 'hearing' were not so radically opposed in pre-modern periods as they are now. See the comparison made by Millard Meiss (*Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death: The Arts, Religion and Society in the mid-fourteenth Century* (Princeton, 1951), p. 130) of Italian visual depictions of the road to Calvary with a versified form of the *Meditations*, which could be read in manuscript but also 'recited or sung, along with similar *cantari*, by the confraternities.' It also became part of 'the repertoire of the *cantastorie*, story-tellers or rather story-singers, who recited religious and secular rhymes in the vernacular to social gatherings, to fraternities, and crowds assembled in the squares or before the churches. Certain forms of "literature" — in which we may include the sermon and the mystery play — thus had a very wide audience, and at the same time also a collective one. In this respect its rhetorical conditions, the conditions of communication, were similar to those of painting, for the majority of paintings, too, were made for public places, and addressed primarily to

discuss various techniques which may be used to achieve this ideal — *ekphrasis*[33] (detailed description) or *ethopoeia* (character portrayal, 'putting oneself in the place of another, so as to understand that person's feelings more vividly'), and others. We can often see medieval writers using these and related techniques, wherever they found them. Thus the equivalent of Virgil's *ecce!* in *Roland* is *as vus*, see! ('See Roland now fainting on his horse!')[34] We find them elaborating a scene with detailed 'circumstances', such as significant or symbolic gestures or physical reactions — weeping, or traditional gestures of sorrow or despair like the wringing of hands or tearing of hair. Many of these are shared with the visual arts, and illustrate Diderot's opinion that 'le geste' may sometimes be as sublime as the word.[35]

Of the more 'aural' techniques, Middle English works (many of which were designed for performance, and almost all of which could be performed) are especially fond of the formal lament or *planctus*. Over its long history this had taken many forms — laments of lovers, laments of the Virgin Mary, laments for the dead (with a celebrated virtuoso example produced by Geoffrey of Vinsauf for Richard the Lionheart),

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collective audiences.' There seems to have also been a strongly histrionic element in ancient oratory: 'we turn to the audience' says Cicero (*de Inventione*) 'and ask them when they look at us to think of their children or parents', and, when arguing that the orator has to feel the emotions he wishes to excite (*de Oratore* 2. 185–215), he recalls how he was moved by an actor who 'seemed to speak weeping and lamenting'. Cf. the description of a modern traditional Irish story-teller, who, 'obviously much affected by his narrative . . . uses a great deal of gesticulation, and by the movements of his body, hands, and head, tries to convey hate and anger, fear and humour, like an actor in a play' (quoted by K. Jackson, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff, 1961), p. 55). One suspects that some medieval narratives and sermons could have been given equally dramatic performances.

[33] See Baxandall, p. 85: 'it is visible, so to speak, and brings before the eyes that which is to be shown . . . The special virtues of ekphrasis are clarity and visibility; the style must contrive to bring about seeing through hearing.'

[34] Cf. Chaucer's use of the 'ther saugh I' formula in *The Knight's Tale* (see Riverside edn. I. 1995 note).

[35] See M. Barasch, *Gestures of Despair in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art* (New York, 1976); J.-C. Schmitt, ed., *Gestures* (*History and Anthropology* 1, London, 1984) and *La raison des gestes dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1990); W. Habicht, *Die Gebärde in englischen Dichtungen des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1959); R. G. Benson, *Medieval Body Language: A Study of the Use of Gesture in Chaucer's Poetry*; B. Windeatt, 'Gesture in Chaucer', *M & H* 9 (1979); E. Lommatzsch, 'Darstellung von Trauer und Schmerz in der altfranzösischen Literatur', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 43 (1923) pp. 20–67; G. Zappert, *Uber den Ausdruck des geistigen Schmerzes im Mittelalter*, Denkschriften der Kais. Akad. der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse, 5 (Vienna, 1854).

etc.[36] Middle English romancers are fond of using these[37] — often formulaic and stylised, usually beginning with 'alas!', and containing exclamations, rhetorical questions, appeals for sympathy, balanced phrases — sometimes to create a pause or an emotional climax in the action, sometimes 'marking' them ('and this he said with sik ane pitious cheir / It was ane paine him for to se or heir'),[38] sometimes making them into full-scale scenes of lamentation.[39] The danger here, as with all the rhetorical devices, is that of emptiness or excess. The rhetoricians themselves were aware of this, and never tire of quoting the adage (attributed to Apollonius), 'nothing dries more quickly than a tear.'[40] Appeals to pity should be brief, for as Quintilian revealingly says, 'if we spend too much time over such portrayal our hearer grows weary of his tears . . . and returns from passion to reason'.[41]

That opposition of *impetus* and *ratio* leads back to the balance (or lack of it) between pathos and ethos, the contrast (often remarked on) between the strange and profound pleasure we find in the observation of a scene of pathos and, at the same time as our pity is aroused, our constant desire to make sense of it, to contain it within some scheme of justice or to establish some kind of rational 'detachment'.[42] Here the coming of Christianity (with its possibility of redemption through a death which was an image both of terrible suffering and of glorious victory) offered some quite new patterns. This is well illustrated by the (fifteenth-century?) alliterative poem, *Death and Liffe*, which Sir Israel

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[36] Laments for the dead are of course very ancient. See M. Alexiou and P. Dronke, 'The Lament of Jephtha's Daughter', *Studi Medievali* 3a. serie, 12.2 (1971), pp. 819–63; M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (London, 1974). On the variety of rhetorical treatment, see E. Faral, *Les arts poétiques du xiie et du xiiie siècle* (Paris, 1971), p. 72. On later vernacular rhetorical 'déplorations' for great men see Bawcutt, *Dunbar*, pp. 84–5, and refs. Medieval English laments for the dead are excellently treated by Renate Haas, *Die mittelenglische Totenklage* (Frankfurt, 1980).

[37] See V. B. Richmond, *Laments for the Dead in Medieval Narrative* (Pittsburgh, 1966).

[38] *Clariodus* ed. D. Irving (Edinburgh, 1830), 1569–70.

[39] Two excellent elaborate examples are to be found in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* (Arthur's lament for Gawain, 3956–4008, and over all his knights, 4275–90). The same patterns and formulae are sometimes found in briefer examples in chronicles: thus in Froissart, when Sir John Chandos is mortally wounded, his knights 'lamentably compleyned, and sayd, "A, Sir Johan Chandos, the floure of all chivalry, unhapely was that glayve forged that thus hath wounded you, and brought you in parell of dethe!" They wept piteously that were about him . . . '

[40] Cicero, *De inv.* 1. 109; *Ad Herennium* 2. 31. 50.

[41] *Inst. orat.* 6. 1. 28.

[42] Discussed *in extenso* by Thomas Gould, *The Ancient Quarrel between Poetry and Philosophy* (Princeton, 1991).

Gollancz edited.[43] Life ('merry in her lookes', 'euer laughing for loue') intervenes when Death (hideous to look upon, with hollow eyes, lean lips, a mouth full of long tushes, the neb of her nose hanging down to her navel, her face like lead, etc) ruthlessly slays 'merry maydens on the mold' and 'younge children in their craddle'. In the ensuing debate Death boasts of all her conquests, but overreaches when she claims to have killed Christ. Life was present at that 'jousting in Jerusalem', Death fled at that moment and Christ harrowed hell. The living need not fear Death, she says, and when she makes the sign of the cross over the dead they arise, twice as beautiful as before.[44]

Christianity brought new ways of consolation and new remedies against suffering.[45] To the ancient patterns of stoic fortitude (Laocoon as 'exemplum doloris'), the constancy of the philosopher, or the acceptance of suffering as part of the lot imposed on mortals by the gods who

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[43] A posthumous edition (with many radical emendations of the text, which survives only in the seventeenth-century Percy Folio MS), London, 1930. The poem is now ed. J. M. P. Donatelli (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

[44] On medieval attempts to resolve the disharmony of death, see P. Tristram, *Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature* (London, 1976); D. Gray, 'Death in Late Medieval Literature', *AULLA Proceedings and Papers* (Palmerston North, 1982). The unique *passio* of Christ also eventually affected the meaning of the L. word *passio* and its vernacular derivatives, according to E. Auerbach ('Gloria Passionis' in *Literary Language and its Public* (trans. R. Manheim, London, New York, 1965) (see also his 'Passio als Leidenschaft', *PMLA* 56 (1941), 1179–96). The pattern for Christian martyrs is not 'a passionless existence outside of the world, but counter-suffering, a passionate suffering in the world and hence also in opposition to it', a *gloriosa passio*, springing from an ardent love for God, whose own love had 'moved him to take upon himself the sufferings of men' and is itself 'a *motus animi* without measure or limit'. This provokes in his lovers a similarly measureless and ecstatic love, which, Auerbach argues, allows the notions of 'suffering' and 'ecstatic love' to converge. (The senses of ME *passioun* include 'suffering, pain'; 'ailment, affliction'; 'the suffering of Christ'; 'an emotion, desire', etc; 'the fact or condition of being acted on, passivity'. From the sense of an emotion 'by which the mind is powerfully affected' (*OED*) comes the meaning of 'passion' as 'extreme love', or specifically as 'amorous affection', which *OED* records first in Shakespeare. Already perhaps Chaucer is suggesting that it may be subsumed under 'extreme emotion' when he says of Criseyde surrounded by her friends comforting her because she must leave Troy that she 'al this mene while brende / Of other passioun than that they wende', *Tr* 4. 704–5.)

[45] The *Ars moriendi* is the best-known late medieval example of consolatory literature, but there is a large and varied tradition. See M. C. O'Connor, *The Art of Dying Well* (New York, 1942), the Introduction to *The Book of Tribulation*, ed. A. Barratt (Heidelberg, 1983); I. Bishop, *Pearl in its Setting* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 13–26; D. Gray, 'Books of Comfort', in *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of G. H. Russell*, ed. G. Kratzmann and J. Simpson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986). The background is well discussed in B. Vickers, 'Shakespearian Consolations', *PBA* 82 (1993), 219–84.

are without care, is added an ideal of patience[46] which follows the example of Christ. And, since Christ's passion combines action with suffering (*agere* and *pati*), patience is seen as a positive force. So she appears in personified form in the *Psychomachia* — and in the later *Castle of Perseverance* she uses very robust language to her enemy Wrath, whom she beats black and blue with her roses (2134–60). *Vincit qui patitur* is a favourite adage. However, especially if the idea of the imitation of Christ is removed or not emphasised, it is not always easy to distinguish this patience from stoic fortitude and heroic endurance.

And the Christian patterns of order and harmony may sometimes be found mingled with older or more secular ones. Thus in one of the finest death-sequences in medieval literature in the *Song of Roland*, which arouses great pathos and 'merveilleuse peur', the powerfully expressed Christian ideas are fused with heroic and feudal ones. And sometimes, very interestingly, there are cases where a Christian framework is entirely absent. This is the case with the great death-scene of Tristan and Iseult in Thomas's romance, where if we sense any inner harmony it seems to derive entirely from the artistry of the poet. Sometimes we are left with the stark contemplation of unjustified and innocent suffering, as if the arousal of pity is in itself entirely valid and sufficient.[47] This is sometimes the case when medieval 'humanist' poets make use of a revived poetic mythology or astrology, allowing the older menacing forces to live on in fiction, or where Fortune is not a simple personification but a malevolent goddess. But it is also, more surprisingly, found in religious literature and art. The dark power of the *Dies Irae*, the emotional force of *Stabat Mater* have their equivalents in devotional images (*Andachtsbilder*),[48] where though a narrative frame may be implied, the possibility of explanatory or consolatory or

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[46] See G. R. Crampton, *The Condition of Creatures: Suffering and Action in Chaucer and Spenser* (New Haven, 1974); G. F. Schiffhorst, ed. *The Triumph of Patience: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Orlando, 1978); Gray, 'Chaucer and Pite', pp. 200–2; R. Woolf on 'epic passion' in early saints' lives in *Continuations and Beginnings* ed. E. G. Stanley (London, 1966), pp. 41 ff. In *Melibee*, Senecan and biblical texts are found side by side (as in the discussion of moderation in weeping, VII. 985).

[47] Cf. Gould, *Ancient Quarrel*, pp. 89 ff.

[48] On the *Andachtsbild* see E. Panofsky, 'Imago Pietatis', *Festschrift für Max J. Friedländer* (Leipzig, 1927). As Meiss says (*Painting*, p. 145) these 'devotional images' 'embody in the most distinctive and novel way those tendencies apparent in all the art of this period to establish a direct, sympathetic, and intimate emotional relationship between the spectator and the sacred figures. They usually show only a few figures, who are outwardly quiet and inactive but involved in a very emotional — usually pathetic — relationship, such as that of the Virgin who holds an arm of her dead son.'

triumphal meaning is left unspoken. Images of extreme suffering like Christ as the Man of Sorrows or *Christus im Elend*[49] are similar to the older *pathos* — 'violence perceived by the audience with a strong sympathy for the victim'[50] — and represent the more 'Dionysian' aspect of medieval Christianity. A curious testimony to this is given by the old man at Cartmel in the seventeenth century who scandalised his Puritan vicar by not knowing about salvation by Christ, but just remembering that there was such a man in the Kendal Corpus Christi play, 'where there was a man on a tree, and blood ran down'.[51]

Images such as these represent the end-product of that affective devotion which had become widespread in the earlier Middle Ages, with its emphasis on the humanity of Christ and on the human aspects of all the sacred scenes, and its strongly emotional involvement and desire to be present, to see them in the mind's eye or in the shape of an image. In the work of the more intellectual masters of this type of devotion like Anselm or Bernard the ethos of theology is strongly present, and in many later literary works and devotional pictures a thoughtful restraint will be used to increase the pathos. But in the later Middle Ages, the yearning for the pathetic can express itself through unrestrained and passionate gestures and actions[52] (the Magdalene as 'Maenad under the Cross'[53] has her equivalent in the enthusiastic

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[49] On the Man of Sorrows, see Panofsky, 'Imago Pietatis', G. von der Osten, *Der Schmerzenmann, Forschungen zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte* 7 (1935); C. Dodgson, 'English Devotional Woodcuts of the late Fifteenth Century', Walpole Soc. 17 (1928–9). On *Christus im Elend*, the seated figure of Christ, see G. von der Osten, 'Christus im Elend', *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, and 'Job and Christ', *JWCI* 16 (1953), 153–8.

[50] Cf. Gould, *Ancient Quarrel*, p. 256.

[51] I. D'Israeli, *Curiosities of Literature* 2nd Ser., 3 (London, 1823), p. 343.

[52] See Barasch. He notes that most gestures of fear and mourning can be traced back to antiquity, but that patristic and early medieval commentators (perhaps influenced by stoic ideals of moderation and by a distrust for mimes) are critical of violent gesticulation, which is frequently attributed to devils and sinners. Gestures of lamentation are often singled out — Chrysostom condemns shrill voices of lamentation, rending of garments, tearing of hair and beard, clawing at the face and breast and the embracing and kissing of the dead (an interesting indication of popular practices). These 'Klagefiguren' (Habicht, p. 134) live on, making 'a show of their mourning and lamentation, baring their arms, tearing their hair, making scratches down their cheeks'. In the later Middle Ages unrestrained gestures are found in the central sacred scenes.

[53] See F. Antal, 'The Maenad under the Cross' *JWCI* 1 (1937–8), 79–3.

weepings of Margery Kempe[54]). Even the Virgin herself faints at the foot of the cross in the throes of her compassion.[55]

English devotional literature of the time, especially the lyrics and the plays, offers clear reflections of these tendencies. Beside meditative poems with a calmness of vision and an emotional restraint, we find others which are vivid speaking pictures or impassioned appeals, such as the laments of the Virgin holding the dead body of her son,[56] the equivalent of the pietà (or 'pite' as it is called in Middle English[57]). In one she repeats the pathetic refrain, 'who cannot wepe, come lerne at me', and reproves the poet for his hard-heartedness in not weeping: 'on me she caste hir ey, said, "see, man, thy

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[54] On Margery Kempe see, for instance, H. P. Weissman, 'Margery Kempe in Jerusalem: Hysterica Compassio in the Late Middle Ages', in *Acts of Interpretation . . . in Honor of E. Talbot Donaldson* ed. M. J. Carruthers and E. D. Kirk (Norman, Okl., 1982); J. C. Hirsch, *The Revelations of Margery Kempe* (Leiden, 1989); D. Gray, 'Popular Religion and Late Medieval Literature', in *Religion in the Poetry and Drama of the Late Middle Ages in England* ed. P. Boitani and A. Torti (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990). Her weeping and 'roaring' was sometimes accompanied by bodily movements which suggested to critical onlookers that she was suffering from some sickness: she 'fel down & wrestyd wyth hir body & mad wondyrful cher & contenawns wyth boystows sobbyngys & gret plente of terys, sumtyme seyng "Ihesu, mercy," sum-tyme "I dey"' (*The Book of Margery Kempe* ed. S. B. Meech and H. E. Allen, EETS 212, 1940, p. 40). Even more 'Dionysian' enthusiastic ecstasies are recorded in the extreme popular devotional movements of the flagellants and the 'dancers'.

[55] See G. Scheja, *Der Isenheimer Altar* (Cologne, 1969). He notes the description which the Virgin gives of the Crucifixion in the very influential *Revelations* of St Bridget. In the sixteenth century Molanus (*De picturis et imaginibus*, 1570 edn., ch. lxxvi, p. 140) says that some people follow St Bridget's revelations and depict the Virgin swooning but that most disapprove, because of the text in John 19: 25. The older standing Virgin ('I read that she stood, but not that she wept' says St Ambrose) is more like a stoic 'exemplum doloris'; the swooning Virgin supported by her companions is part of a choric scene of lamentation which reaches out to the onlookers.

[56] See G. R. Keiser, 'The Middle English *Planctus Mariae* and the Rhetoric of Pathos', in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England* ed. T. Heffernan (Knoxville, Tn., 1985); H. Thien, *Uber die englischen Marienklagen* (Kiel, 1906); G. C. Taylor, 'The English Planctus Mariae,' *MP* 4 (1907), 605–37; R. Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 255 ff.; D. Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London, 1972), pp. 136–9.

[57] See *MED* s.v. On the pietà see W. Pinder 'Die dichterische Wurzel der Pietà', *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 42 (1920), 145 ff.; E. Mâle, *L'art religieux de la fin du moyen âge en France* (Paris, 1908), pp. 126–32, *Lexikon der Marienkunde* ed. K. Algermissen et al. (Regensburg, 1957–   ), s.v. 'Beweinung Christi'. The link between image and word is clear in Lydgate. In 'The Fifteen Joys and Sorrows of Mary' (*Minor Poems* I ed. H. N. MacCracken, EETS ES 107, pp. 268) he sees an image of Mary in a book: 'lyke a pyte depeynt was the figure / With weepyng eyen, and cheer most lamentable'. 'On the Image of Pity' (MacCracken, pp. 297–9) tells the reader to 'remember all so this dolorous pytie, / How þat this blyssid ladye doth enbrace / Her dere son ded, lygyng vpon her kne.'

brothir!" / She kissed hym and said, "swete, am I not thy modir?" /
In sownyng she fill there . . . '[58] In the mystery cycles, which present
the pattern of redemption, the framework is very clear, and further
guidance is given by various figures of authority throughout. But
sometimes there is a strongly felt tension between the two, as in
some of the Abraham and Isaac plays, where within the action we
seem to see something which looks like being an ancient *pathos* — the
sacrifice of a child because of the inscrutable will of the gods.[59] In
one or two individual New Testament plays what the audience
actually sees is very similar to a gruesome *Andachtsbild* — as in the
York play where the innocent figure of Christ is nailed to the cross by
four soldiers. The plays of the Massacre of the Innocents sometimes
offer more extended examples: in Wakefield the mothers resist the
soldiers, their cries mingling with calls for vengeance — 'Out, alas,
and waloway! / my chyld that was me lefe! / My luf, my blood, my
play, / that neuer dyd man grefe! / Alas, alas, this day! / I wold my
hart shuld clefe / In sonder! / Veniaunce I cry and call / On Herode
and his knyghtys all . . . '[60] This terrible scene evokes an intense kind
of *pite* which seems to yearn not only for justice but for vengeance (in
this too it is perhaps similar to the *Prioress's Tale*). There may be a
chilling sense of actuality about the soldiers' bombastic remark 'we
haue mayde rydyng / Thrughoutt Iuré' — if we think of contemporary
military atrocities like the Black Prince's sack of Limoges as it is
described by Froissart:

> It was great pytie to se the men, women, and chyldren, that kneled downe on
> their knees before the Prince for mercy; but he was so enflamed with yre that
> he toke no hede to theym, so that none was herde, but all putte to dethe
> withal, and suche as were nothyng culpable: there was no pyte taken of the
> poore people who wrought never no maner of treason . . . There was nat so
> harde a hert within the cytie of Lymoges, and yf he had any remembraunce

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[58] *A Selection of Religious Lyrics* ed. D. Gray (Oxford, 1975), No. 24. These poems also
sometimes refer to the visual image of the 'pite' seen in a church.

[59] The innocent victim could be presented as a 'figure' of Christ and Abraham an example of
obedience (St Augustine says, 'not for a moment could Abraham believe that God took
delight in human sacrifices, although he knew that, once God's command rang out, it was his
not to reason why, but to obey'). But sometimes, before the moment when the angel stays
Abraham's sword, there is a deliberate development of the pathos — in the Brome play, for
instance, in the contrast between the father's tormented asides and the boy's childish
innocence ('Wy bere ye youre sword drawyn so? / Off youre countenaunce I have mych
wonder').

[60] *The Towneley Plays* ed. M. Stevens and A. C. Cawley 2 vols EETS SS 13, 14 (1994), play
16. 523 ff.

of God, but that wepte pyteously for the great mischefe that they sawe before their eyen: for mo than thre thousande men, women, and chyldren were slayne and beheeded that day: God have mercy on their soules, for I trowe thay were martyrs.[61]

(One wonders if, just as the playwright may be thinking of a real 'riding', the terrible pathos of the scene of the Massacre may have been in Froissart's mind as he wrote.) It is significant that it is not just the ranting Herod who was remembered in later times: Shakespeare's Henry V threatens Harfleur in words which directly allude to this terrible scene — you will see, he says,

> your naked infants spitted upon pikes,
> Whiles the mad mothers with their hands confus'd
> Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry
> At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen. (3. 3. 38–41)

There is no doubt that devotional images of pathos were sometimes in the minds of the writers of secular narratives, or that the emotional power of affective devotion probably increased the intensity with which a word like *pite* was invested (especially when contrasted with pride or tyrannical hard-heartedness).[62] But I would shrink from the claim (or

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[61] Froissart, trans. Lord Berners, *The Chronicle of Froissart* intro. W. P. Ker (London, 1901), 2, pp. 355–6. We need to remember of course that the scene would have a decidedly contemporary appearance on the medieval stage.

[62] See Gray, 'Chaucer and Pite'. The 'terys of pyte and compassyon' which the sight of a crucifix provokes in Margery Kempe (*Book*, p. 111) can be related to an earlier tradition of penitential tears especially in monastic devotion (cf. the Rule of St Benedict, chapters 20, 49) (S. McEntire, 'The Doctrine of Compunction from Bede to Margery Kempe', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* ed. M. Glasscoe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987)), but the enthusiasm and the intensity are characteristically late medieval. The association of *pite* with the gentle figures of Mary and Christ was widespread and influential. Possibly the influence of the devotional tradition may be seen in the notion of *pite* as a positive spiritual power. Thus Dante (*Convivio* 2) speaks of 'pity (*pietade*) which makes every other good quality resplendent with its light.' 'So Virgil,' he continues, 'in speaking of Aeneas, calls him piteous (*pietoso*) by way of highest praise. And pity is not what uncultured people think it to be (that is, feeling sorry for the misfortunes of others), for this is a particular effect of pity which is called mercy and is an emotion. But pity is not an emotion: it is, rather, a noble disposition of mind, ready to register love, mercy, and other charitable emotions' (trans. D. Wallace in A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott (eds.), *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100–c. 1375* (Oxford, 1988), p. 407). In OF, *pitie* is found as an equivalent to the rhetorical *commiseratio* ('pitiez est uns diz qui a la fin aquiert la misericorde des oianz'). But it is essentially a human emotion, a natural affection (which 'runs' especially in the hearts of women), and a generous, outgoing emotion. (On 'hard-heartedness', to which it is frequently opposed, see J. D. Burnley, *Chaucer's Language and the Philosophers' Tradition* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), pp. 99 ff.). That tears come easily to the person of 'pitous' heart in late medieval literary works probably suggests a

the implicit assumption) that such devotion was the sole source for the taste for 'pitous tales' which becomes so noticeable from the twelfth century on. Scenes of pathos are found earlier. And secular tears had been falling steadily in much earlier literature — Gilgamesh weeps over Enkidu; there are tears in abundance in the *Odyssey*; Beowulf weeps when he leaves Hroðgar; one hundred thousand Franks feel grief for Roland.

After Marie de France's brilliant excursions into the 'literature of tears',[63] writers of English romances begin to follow, from *Floris and Blauncheflur* (c. 1250)[64] to the stories associated with the Constance legend, such as *Emaré*.[65] Even 'epic' romances like *Kyng Alisaunder* adapt the French 'regrez' and have scenes of lamentation.[66] The English romances, using simple and often formulaic language, build up expressive scenes, with stylised laments both individual and choric (from 'young and old'). *Sir Orfeo* (in the early fourteenth-century Auchinleck MS)[67] demonstrates how well these simple techniques can be used. Here the scenes of pathos are done with restraint as well as with emotion. The sudden *pathos* of the incursion of the mysterious power of the fairies causes extreme and frightening physical reactions in

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tolerance of emotional display in the society of the time, at least in certain contexts. The chronicles record some very emotional scenes, though sometimes they may be heightened in conformity with literary models. But their descriptions of extreme public lamentation at funerals are supported by parallels in the visual arts (such as Sluter's mourners on the tomb of Philip the Bold) and by recorded dramatic or theatrical gestures of grief (like the Eleanor crosses or Richard II's destruction of Sheen). In Edmund Clere's account (to John Paston I) of the recovery of Henry VI from madness the lords 'wept for joye'.

[63] In, for instance, *Laustic, Eliduc, Le Fraisne*.

[64] Ed. F. C. de Vries (Groningen, 1966). On this, and similar stories see M. Lot-Borodine *Le roman idyllique au moyen age* (Paris, 1913); D. Gray, 'An Early English *Entführung*: A Note on *Floris and Blauncheflur*', in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English. Studies presented to E. G. Stanley* ed. M. Godden, D. Gray and T. Hoad (Oxford, 1994). There are a number of 'pitous scenes', and tears flow freely — Floris is an interesting forerunner of what Mann has called the 'feminised hero' (J. Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (London, 1991), ch. 5).

[65] Ed. E. Rickert, EETS ES 99 (1906). The scene in which Emare is set adrift with her son (637 ff.) in particular is well done. Similar romances include *Sir Torrent of Portyngale, Octavian, Sir Eglamour, Sir Triamour*, and *Lai le Freine*.

[66] Ed. G. V. Smithers, EETS 227, 237 (1952, 1957). The dying hero laments ('"Allas!" he seide, "Ich am neiʒ ded!"'); the formulaic 'marker' ('Þere men miʒtten reuþe ysen') introduces a full scale scene of lamentation, with heightened rhetoric and gestures of mourning ('many baroun his her to-teen, / Many fyst to-wrunge and hand, / Many riche robe to-rent'), and epic hyperbole ('Vpe Alisaunder name was / Ycried many loude "allas!" / Riche and pouer, lesse and more, / Wrongen hondes and wepen sore. / Two mylen abouten men miʒtten here / Of gentyl-men þat reuli bere').

[67] Ed. A. J. Bliss (Oxford, 2nd edn., 1960).

Heurodis: she 'crid', 'lothli bere gan make', rubbed her hands and feet, scratched her face till it bled, tore her robe, and 'was reueyd out of hir witt' — in mortal terms, she has gone mad. Orfeo speaks to her with 'gret pité' in a formal speech ('O lef liif what is te . . . ?'). In his lament her changed appearance is emphasised — 'Allas! þi rode, þat was so red, / Is al wan, as þou were dede', and it mentions particularly her 'louesom' eyes that now 'lokeþ so man doþ on his fo.' These eyes — so important in love-poetry — indicate that she is now lost to him, and with his pathetic phrase 'ich biseche merci', he perhaps sounds as much like a suppliant lover as a grieving husband. Although her abduction has been prophesied, the event comes with terrible suddenness. It is emphasised by both private and public lamentation — after the 'choric' 'þo was þer criing, wepe and wo' the king retreats to his chamber (an almost symbolic action which we find several times in such scenes) 'and oft swoned opn þe ston'. When at last after 'ten years and more' — apparently by chance — he sees her in the wilderness there is a touching recognition scene, in which they look eagerly at each other, but 'noiþer to oþer a word no speke', and she weeps at the signs of his distress. Another enforced separation brings another lament from Orfeo, but this quickly turns to action and the recovery of his wife. That scene is nicely 'pointed' by a significant gesture: the king of *fairi* allows her to leave, with the words 'seþþen it is so / Take her bi þe hond and go . . .' and Orfeo 'kneled adoun & þonked him swiþe / His wiif he tok bi þe hond . . .' Here the gesture says more than words can.

Even in more self-consciously literary authors we find some of these patterns and techniques, and variations on them. But there we are dealing with much greater variety of topics and stories and with a more complex attitude towards them. When Gower in the *Confessio Amantis*,[68] for instance, finds a potential scene of pathos in one of his ancient stories, he will usually not elaborate it but will delicately and economically emphasise it without destroying the flow of his narrative. Sometimes he will focus on a single moment — Phillis looking across the sea for Demophon (4.804 ff.) or linger briefly on it (like the details of Alcyone's dream, 4.3057 ff.). Sometimes he will infuse the whole tale with pathos. He does this when he simplifies Ovid's tale of Pyramus and Thisbe[69]

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[68] *The English Works of John Gower* ed. G. C. Macaulay, EETS ES 81, 82 (1900, 1901).
[69] Well discussed by B. Harbert, 'Ovid and John Gower' in C. Martindale, ed., *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from The Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1988).

(3.1331 ff.), emphasising their human feelings and the way they are threatened by greater forces. When Pyramus finds the bloody wimple, Gower uses the traditional devices to express his sorrow and fear: 'with many a wofull compleignynge / Began his handes forto wringe, / As he which demeth sikerly / That sche be ded . . . ' And the description of his suicide is made more poignant by a couple of details which stand out against the bare background of the simple style: 'the pomel of his swerd to grounde / He sette, and thurgh his herte a wounde / He made up to the bare hilte . . . ' In his version Thisbe is given a powerful lament to the gods:

> O thou which cleped art Venus,
> Goddesse of love, and thou, Cupide,
> Which loves cause hast forto guide,
> I wot now wel that ye be blinde . . . [70]
> . . . This Piramus, which here I se
> Blendende, what hath he deserved?

He is sometimes more elaborate in his versions of Ovid's violent stories of pathos. The 'woful cas' which befell Canacee (3.142 ff.) because of her love for her brother and the hard-heartedness of her father is the occasion of passionate pleas — 'Ha! mercy! fader, thenk I am / Thi child, and of thi blod I cam . . . ' — and an eloquent letter to her brother ('O thou my sorwe and my gladnesse . . . '), a sustained monologue with anaphora and balanced oppositions. And the narrator exclaims with horror at the scene of the baby bathing in the mother's blood ('Ha! Who herde evere singe or rede / Of such a thing as that was do'). In the story of Tereus's violent rape of Philomela (5.5551 ff.) Gower stresses the terrible lust of Tereus, as Ovid had done,[71] but by simpler techniques, and gives the victim a single helpless outcry: 'O fader, o mi moder diere, / Nou help!' He is equally at ease with less extreme or gentler kinds of pathos.[72] In his unusually lengthy version of the tale of Apollonius (8.271–2008) he underlines the moments of *pite* — the storm in which the young wife bears her child and is thought to have died, which occasions a passionate speech from Apollonius:

[70] An interesting premonition of the accusation made by Cresseid in Henryson's *Testament*. For other examples see *The Poems of Robert Henryson* ed. D. Fox (Oxford, 1981), p. 348, l.135n.
[71] See the discussion in Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, pp. 209 ff.
[72] As in his stories of Constance (2. 587 ff.) or of Constantine and Sylvester (2. 3187 ff.).

> Why schal I live, and thou schalt dye?
> Ha, thou fortune, I thee deffie,
> Nou hast thou do to me thi werste.
> Ha, herte, why ne wolt thou berste . . . ?

And when, later, she is restored to life, it is a magical moment (note the masterly way in which detail and gesture are used):

> And ferste hire yhen up sche caste,
> And whan sche more of strengthe cawhte,
> Hield up hiere hond and pitously
> Sche spak and seide, 'Ha, wher am I?
> Where is my lord? What world is this?'

and we move to a final recognition scene and the quietness and stillness of the conclusion when 'alle olde sorwes ben foryete.'

    Chaucer's skills are more flamboyantly displayed and his treatment of pathos is sometimes much bolder and more experimental.[73] The 'pitous tale' certainly attracted him and is treated with considerable artistry. His version of the Constance story is given much more elaborate treatment than its source in Trivet, and is set in a more elaborate ideological framework than is usual (Gower tells it as a tale directed against Envy and as an example of suffering motherhood).[74] This has been very interestingly discussed by Professor Mann,[75] and I would simply note that after the astrological passage at the beginning which suggests a threatening and a hostile cosmos we seem to move into the providential pattern of a saint's life (history according to St Augustine, as Pickering calls it)[76] with the possibilities of spiritual

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[73] See *Chaucer's Religious Tales*, ed. C. David Benson and E. Robertson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), especially the Introduction and R. W. Frank, 'Pathos in Chaucer's Religious Tales'; Gray, 'Chaucer and Pite'; D. Guerin, 'Chaucer's Pathos: Three Variations', *Chaucer Review* 20 (1985), 90–112; J. Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer*; C. Muscatine in *Chaucer and Chaucerians* ed. D. S. Brewer (London, 1966), pp. 106–8; M. Stugrin, 'Ricardian Poetics and Late Medieval Pluriformity: the Significance of Pathos in the *Canterbury Tales*', *Chaucer Review* 15 (1980), esp. 156–67; H. P. Weissman, 'Late Gothic pathos in *The Man of Law's Tale*, *Jnl. of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 9 (1979), pp. 133–53.

[74] Gower emphasises this, e.g. by a simile (2. 1047–8): the bystanders' sorrow is as great as if they saw their own mother burnt in a fire before their eyes. Later (1068 ff.), he draws attention to Constance's concern for 'moderhed' and makes her suckling of the child, as she weeps and sings, into an emotional climax — and into an image which may recall that of Caritas as a mother with children (and thus diametrically opposed to Invidia).

[75] Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, chapter 4.

[76] F. P. Pickering, *Literature and Art in the Middle Ages* (London, 1970), pp. 173, and *Augustinus oder Boethius?* (Berlin, 1967). Cf. the narrator's prayer for the heroine: 'He that is lord of Fortune be thy steere!' (II. 448).

grace and assistance, though the tale's 'happy ending' is qualified with a reminder of the brevity of human joy and life. Also, negative and positive powers are more sharply differentiated — the wicked agents of Satan, one described as a 'serpent under femynyitee, / Lik to the serpent depe in helle ybounde', the other as a 'feendlych spirit', 'ful of tirannye', are set against the humans inspired by *pite* (the constable and his wife who have 'so gret pitee' that they 'wepen for routhe'; Alla who shows compassion 'as gentil herte is fulfild of pitee / That from his eyen ran the water down'). The central figure, Custance (a name which is, perhaps, more familiar and less allegorical than Constance) is an exemplum of Patience with both its passive and active aspects. A series of 'pitous' events are elaborated differently. In one, the sorrow of the bystanders is compared to ancient examples — in Troy 'whan Pirrus brak the wal', etc.; in others the narrator exclaims and prays for his heroine; in one he introduces a telling similitude from everyday medieval life: 'have ye nat seyn somtyme a pale face, / Among a prees, of hym that hath be lad / Toward his deeth . . . ?'[77] Custance herself prays — and here we feel the power of devotional images — to the cross 'reed of the lambes blood ful of pitee', and to the Virgin Mary. The final scene of exclusion and isolation (806 ff.) in which Custance and her child are to be (unjustly) exposed in a ship (by this time in the development of the story an established *Pathosformel*) is especially elaborate. There is choric lamentation — 'wepen bothe yonge and olde' — and a solemn procession to the ship, in which Custance 'with deedly pale face' kneels and prays. To 'hir litel child . . . wepyng in hir arm' she 'pitously' says 'Pees, litel sone, I wol do thee noon harm'; she covers his face and lulls him in her arms. Looking up to heaven, she prays to the Virgin, recalling her suffering and compassion — 'Thow sawe thy child yslayn bifore thyne yen . . . Rewe on my child' — and addresses her child — 'O litel child, allas! What is thy gilt / . . . Why wil thyn harde fader han thee spilt?' — and looks backward to the land, saying 'Farewel housbonde routhelees!' This superb detail is profoundly human — martyrs do not look back. The narrator prays for her, and 'in the see she dryveth forth hir weye.' I can see that some might call this 'operatic'. It is, and it is a beautifully constructed narrative and dramatic scene, a fine example of *enargia* —

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[77] Cf. Langland's lines on Christ quoted above n. 1. The idea of Christ as a solitary victim isolated in a hostile crowd is found in the drama and sometimes in lyrics (e.g. No. 40 in Gray, *Selection*, 11. 16–17).

'pite for to se.' The double recognition scene at the end of the tale is
similarly exquisitely done.

Of the other 'pitous tales' (which have generally proved even more
'problematic' for modern readers) I will simply say that they show a
variety of treatment. The *Clerk's Tale*, more austere in style, seems to
me to present in Griselda almost a stoic 'exemplum doloris'. No
spiritual or mortal power intervenes to help Griselda during her
'passion', and in the procession which leads her back to her father's
house she is the only one who is not weeping: 'The folk hire folwe,
wepynge in hir weye, / And Fortune ay they cursen as they goon; / But
she fro wepyng kepte hire eyen dreye / Ne in this tyme word ne spak she
noon.' Her almost superhuman control breaks down only in the 'pitous
joy' of the final reunion.[78] Perhaps one of our difficulties with the
Prioress's Tale and with the Physician's tale of Virginia is that we
are directly confronted with violent and unjust *pathe* and with the
extreme demands of popular religion and of absolute ideals of hon-
our. Ought we perhaps to wonder if the reactions of the pilgrims —
'every man as sobre was that wonder was to se' and 'Allas, so pitously
as she was slayn!'— might perhaps be more honest than some of the
attempts of modern critics to explain away or 'contain' these disturbing
stories?

The Monk's Tale — again often despised and rejected — presents
different patterns of pathos. The problem, it seems to me, is not so
much that the quality of the writing is bad, but that it is possible to
string together almost indefinitely stories or scenes of the fall of the
great. However, it should be said, that not only do we find a curious
pleasure in the fictional representation of suffering and disaster, but
we take a particular pleasure in the fall of great men (which we see at
a low level in our own tabloids, or at a higher one in our interest in
the fall of tyrants like, most recently, the late Ceausescu). Chaucer,
significantly, added some more or less contemporary figures, a prac-
tice which continued through to *The Mirror for Magistrates*. I think
this may be a reason for the great popularity of the *De Casibus* kind:
it is one which easily blurs the distinction between fiction and real
life — and perhaps this is why one can detect its influence in early
chroniclers' accounts of the fall of the great (e.g. Cavendish on

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[78] Finely put by Mann (p. 157), 'this ecstatic moment' when suffering 'is obliterated by joy.'

Wolsey).[79] The Monk's individual tragedies vary, but some are impressive, his version of Dante's Ugolino in particular.[80] Scenes of horror (the fate of Nero) alternate with those of more human *pite* (Cenobia). Here Fortune is all powerful, a malicious and destructive force.[81]

Other moments of pathos occur throughout the *Canterbury Tales* (usually ignored by critics). One of them, the lament of the falcon to Canacee (V. 409 ff.), is an example of the pathos of love, an area in which Chaucer excelled.[82] Here he had learnt much from Ovid's 'subjective style' and his juxtaposition of different poetic textures. In *The Legend of Good Women*[83] we find some very impressive scenes — Ariadne waking on her lonely island and crying out, while 'the holwe rokkes answede hire ageyn / No man she saw, and yit shyned the mone . . . ' or the excellent *ethopeia* of Hypermnestra, fearfully clasping her knife — 'as cold as any frost now waxeth she; / For pite by the herte hire streyneth so.' But we can see this demonstrated with great subtlety and at length in *Troilus and Criseyde*. At the beginning of Book IV (which is introduced by an image of Fortune as violent and 'disastrous' as in the *Monk's Tale* and by an invocation to the Furies) the peripeteia

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[79] *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey* ed. R. S. Sylvester and D. P. Harding in *Two Early Tudor Lives* (New Haven, London, 1962) ends with an exclamation concerning the uncertainty of Fortune. The 'fall' is done in high 'pitous' manner — Wolsey could not speak to his servants: 'for tenderness of his heart, the flood of tears that distilled from his eyes caused the fountains of water to gush out of their faithful hearts down their cheeks in such abundance as it would cause a cruel heart to lament' (p. 110). There are choric laments, and other 'pitous' scenes, with Catherine ('a perfect Griseld', pp, 38, 83) and Cavendish himself (p. 162). Cf. Gould's remarks (pp. 286 ff.) on the similarity between *pathe* in literature and *pathe* in the news.

[80] See P. Boitani, *The Tragic and the Sublime*, pp. 20–55, J. Mann, 'Parents and Children in the *Canterbury Tales*', in P. Boitani and A. Torti, eds., in *Literature in Fourteenth-Century England* (Tübingen, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983).

[81] See VII. 1995–6, 2136–42, 2241–6, 2445–6, 2549–50, 2661–2, 2268–70, 2763–6. The reactions at the end of the Tale vary interestingly: the Knight is upset by the ceaseless catalogue of the falls of those in high estate; the Host takes a matter-of-fact view — no remedy is to be found in lamenting what is done; and later, perhaps, the Nun's Priest has some fun at the expense of the Monk's bleak determinism.

[82] Another neglected example is *Anelida and Arcite*, which Lydgate calls 'a compleynt, doolful and pitous'.

[83] This work has suffered particularly from desperate attempts either to demonstrate Chaucer's 'boredom' or to dissolve any pathos into irony, and from a neglect of its Ovidian qualities. Distinguished critical exceptions are R. W. Frank, *Chaucer and The Legend of Good Women* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972); Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, pp. 31–47; H. Cooper, 'Chaucer and Ovid', in Martindale, *Ovid Renewed*.

occurs suddenly in the parliament scene, and the action moves steadily and implacably downwards through a series of scenes of taut emotion and despair. The pattern, whether consciously or not, seems a Senecan one. In the first we are shown the anguish of Troilus after he retreats to his chamber, shutting the door and all the windows and delivering a great *planctus* against the injustice of Fortune ('What have I don? What have I agylt? . . . '). Criseyde's grief is shown in a separate scene (665 ff.) which uses the traditional techniques: she rends her hair, and wrings her hands ('hire fyngeres longe and smale / she wrong ful ofte') and 'sobbyng in hire compleynte' speaks a lament. Her grief is 'pointed' with a sadly lyrical simile ('therwith the teris from hire yen two / Down fille, as shour in Aperil ful swithe') and by visual detail ('hire white brest she bet' and, later, she has a purple ring around her eyes). In the long final scene of the book the lovers are brought together in an almost ecstatic scene of sorrow (in which Chaucer heightens the pathos: Criseyde speaks 'with broken vois, al hoors forshright') which moves through a 'supposed death' and a 'recognition' scene when Criseyde recovers, to their final parting — 'out of the chaumbre he went'.

The book is densely allusive;[84] echoes of classical scenes of pathos are merged with echoes of Dante (especially of the *Inferno*). Troilus in black despair compares himself to Oedipus ('But end I wol, as Edippe, in derknesse / My sorwful lif, and dyen in distresse'). Later Criseyde compares Troilus and herself to Orpheus and Eurydice — although they are separated on earth they will be together 'in the field of pite, out of peyne, / That hight Elisos . . . ' There are a significant number of allusions to the underworld. One of these is carefully placed by Chaucer in the scene where Troilus returns from the parliament just before he shuts the doors and windows of his 'chaumbre' — 'as in wynter leves ben biraft / Ech after other, til the tre be bare' so Troilus is bereft 'of ech welfare'. This (Chaucer's own addition) echoes the famous underworld image of Dante and of Virgil ('thick as the leaves of the forest that fall from the first frosts of autumn'). Just after this Troilus's 'heped wo' bursts out frighteningly in 'woodnesse':

> Right as the wylde bole bygynneth sprynge,
> Now her, now ther, idarted to the herte,

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[84] See Gray, 'Chaucer and Allusion', in *Saggi sul Rinascimento* ed. S. Rossi (Milan, 1985).

> And of his deth roreth in compleynynge,
> Right so gan he aboute the chaumbre sterte
> Smytyng his brest ay with his fistes smerte
> His hed to the wal, his body to the grounde
> Ful ofte he swapte, hymselven to confounde.

This is taken from Boccaccio, who took it from Dante (*Inf.* 12. 22–4) who had used it of the furious Minotaur; he took it of course from the simile Virgil used of Laocoon. Did Chaucer recognise it, and did he recall the context of that earlier peripeteia? I would note that he gives us not only the physical agonies of a man in torment, but a lament for injustice, and, a few stanzas before, an apostrophe on the blindness of people and their inability to discern what is best. I would like to think that he did.

The treatment of these scenes is entirely 'pitous', but the climactic scene of pathos in *The Knight's Tale* is boldly experimental. The death of the lover Arcite is immediately caused by a 'furie' that is made to 'sterte' out of hell by malevolent planetary gods (again a sudden incursion of the sinister demonic world). But his lingering death is the occasion for a long and elaborate scene, marked by sudden alterations of speed and tone — grim physiological details placed in juxtaposition with ironies ('fallyng nys but an aventure') and joking remarks ('farewel physik! Go bere the man to chirche!'). It is a bravura performance which turns to deep solemnity when Arcite bids farewell to his beloved and his rival. His final *planctus* is full of an infinite sadness:

> Allas, the deeth! allas, myn Emelye!
> Allas, departynge of oure compaignye!
> Allas, myn hertes queene! allas my wyf!
> Myn hertes lady, endere of my lif!
> What is this world? What asketh men to have?
> Now with his love, now in his colde grave
> Allone, withouten any compaignye.

In this period Chaucer is undoubtedly the master of the various modes of pathetic writing, but some of the writers who followed him in the next century produced some excellent and individual examples. From this period come, of course, a number of the religious lyrics and plays that I mentioned earlier. There is surprising variety. The secular courtly lyrics often indulge an elegant melancholy; at the other extreme Hary's *Wallace* produces a fine scene of heroic restraint (worthy of

Guðrun) when the news of the murder of his wife is brought to him.[85]
Three writers deserve special mention, however brief.

I need only remind you of Malory's mesmeric scene of Arthur's last
battle and departure.[86] In this he makes use of his predecessors in
romance-writing to produce his own individual version, suggesting
the end of an era — 'the noble felyship of the Rounde Table is brokyn
for ever' — and the gradual isolation of the king as he bids farewell to
Lucan and then Bedivere — '"Comforte thyself," seyde the kynge,
"and do as well as thou mayste, for in me ys no truste for to truste
in . . ."' — a note almost of the tragic pessimism of antiquity in a
book where religious tones have become increasingly felt. This scene
of pathos has been prepared for by prophecy and dream (of Fortune
with a hideous deep black water beneath and 'therein was all maner of
serpentis and wormes and wylde bestis fowle and orryble'), and is
provoked by the accident of the adder. An elegiac strand becomes
dominant here which has been long felt in the work, where beside the
splendour and heroism of chivalry we have had scenes of death and
sorrow, from the horror and pathos of the death of Balin and Balan[87]
to those of Gawain and, finally, Lancelot. The threnody of Sir Ector is
the final scene of pathos in the book, and is probably the best and the
best-known of all the laments over the dead in Middle English.[88] It is
worth pointing out how some of its power comes from the way it is
fitted into its context, with a careful use of traditional techniques. It is
introduced by a pathetic action when Ector hears the news — 'than Sir

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[85] Hary's *Wallace* ed. M. P. McDiarmid, STS 4th ser. 4, 5 (1968, 1969), 6.191 ff. (this book
opens with a fine rhetorical introduction of thirteen verses in *Monk's Tale* stanzas). The grim,
restrained tone of the narrator (e.g. 191–6) matches that of Wallace — even though 'the
paynfull wo socht till his hart full sone'. His followers lament (Sir John Graham 'bath wys,
gentyll and fre, / Gret murnynge maid that pete was to se, / And als the laiff that was
assemblit thar / For pur sorou wepyt with hart full sar'), but Wallace 'fenʒeit him for to
comfort thaim all' ('This is a butlas payne. / We can nocht chewys hyr lyff agayne'). Finally,
'the bailful teris bryst braithly fra his eyne', and, 'sichand', he vows revenge. There are other
fine (and varied) 'pitous' moments in the work: for instance, the emotional reunion of
Wallace with his uncle Schir Ranald (2. 423 ff.), or the news of his uncle's death (7. 275 ff.).
[86] *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* ed. E. Vinaver, revised by P. J. C. Field, 3 vols. (Oxford,
1990), pp. 1236–41.
[87] This famous scene of pathos has been carefully prepared for through a doom-laden series
of strange and violent deaths; an eerie elegiac atmosphere is heightened by the constant
recording of tombs and epitaphs. Here the choric lamentation — 'and so alle the ladyes and
gentylwymen wepte for pyté' — is echoed by the king: '"Alas," seyde kynge Arthure, "thys
ys the grettist pité that ever I harde telle off two knyghtes"' (pp. 91–2).
[88] Malory's own, probably suggested by the lines on Gawain in the alliterative *Morte
Arthure*. See F. Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory* (Brill, 1987), pp. 163–5.

Ector threwe hys schelde, swerde, and helme from hym, and when he beheld syr Launcelottes vysage he fyl down in a swoun. And when he had waked it were harde ony tonge to telle the doleful compleyntes that he made for his brother. "A, Launcelot," he sayd, "thou were hede of al Crysten knyghtes! . . ."' And it is closed with choric lamentation: 'then there was weeping and dolour out of mesure' (excess here has become grandeur).[89]

More directly in the tradition of Chaucer stand the earlier poet Lydgate and the Scottish poet Henryson. It is still unfortunately fashionable to deride Lydgate, but whatever his faults he had a genuine gift for pathos, and especially for eloquent, plangent speeches. In *The Siege of Thebes* the death of the son of Lycurgus causes Ipsiphyle to lament — she weeps, sighs, wrings her hands, 'dedly of look' . . . 'ofte sith she gan to seyn, "Allas! / O wooful wrech / vnhappy in this cas / What shal I don / or whider may I tourne?"' — and this becomes a larger scene of sorrow when the messenger comes to the king and queen with the news that the child killed by the serpent lies 'with his wounde / newe, fressh and grene / . . . that pite is to sene.'[90] The king is overwhelmed with sorrow and the distraught queen 'stille as ston / she lyggeth in a traunce.'

In *The Fall of Princes*[91] he often achieves what Thomas Gray called 'a stiller kind of majesty' (as in the sombre envoy on Rome in Book II)

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[89]Malory's scene of pathos are not limited to the deaths of heroes: his version of the end of the Maid of Astolat (pp. 1092–7) proved as memorable and as influential as that of Arthur.

[90] *The Siege of Thebes* ed. A. Erdmann and E. Ekwall, EETS ES 108, 125 (1911, 1920), 11. 3224 ff. That Lydgate did not use these formulaic expressions simply as fillers is shown by the later passage where Polynices is slain: a 'cry aros' and the people 'gan to shoute / that pite was to *here*' (4299–303).

[91] *The Fall of Princes*, ed. H. Bergen EETS ES 121–4 (1918–19). One obvious problem for the modern reader is its great length. Perhaps contemporary readers read it in shorter sections — in which they would have been helped by rubrics, envoys (which sometimes summarise what has gone before) and in many cases a sequence of illustrations (which in toto presents a veritable visual anthology of violent death). The constant 'cataloguing' (as in the *Monk's Tale*) is another. Lydgate, following Boccaccio and Premierfait, tries hard to bring some variety to it. Thus, some characters 'present themselves' to 'Bochas' and tell their stories or demand that he do so. These introductions (which continue into *The Mirror for Magistrates*) are often vivid — e.g. of Hercules, or Pompey. Fortune presents Marius: 'Blak his weede and his habite also, / His hed unkempt, his lokkis hor and gray / His look doun cast in tokne of sorwe and wo, / On his cheekis the salt teris lay, / Which bar record off his dedli affray.' Thyestes' story is countered by Atreus; Brunhild reproves Bochas for not telling her story, and does so in a way which provokes an argument. An interesting visual adaptation of some of the 'Falls' is found in the 'Falls of Seven Princes' (ed. E. P. Hammond, *Englische Studien* 43, 1910–11, pp. 10–26) which is evidently designed to be an 'illustrated poem' for display in some form.

and produces some individual moments of considerable passion. Canace and Machaire appear 'with teres distillyng from hir eyen tweyne' and Lydgate, following Ovid and Gower, expands a mere hint in his French original into a genuinely pathetic scene. Canace's letter piteously begs Machaire to remember her and visit her tomb:

> Were blak that day, and mak a doolful cheer,
> And whan thou comest and shalt approche neer
> Mi sepulture, I pray the nat disdeyne
> Vpon my graue summe teris for to reyne.   (1. 7018–21)

Here, as often, Lydgate's sententious envoy is gravely impressive in the manner of a chorus: 'whan surquedrie oppressid hath pite / And meeknesse is with tirannie bor doun . . . ' After the cruel death of Alcibiades he makes an 'exclamacyon' almost in the manner of a Latin poet of the Silver Age:

> O fatal sustren, which span the lyues threede
> So shorte a terme . . .
> Ye wer to hasti to breken and ontwyne
> His web of knihtehod, that thoruh the world dide shyne
> And caste of noblesse his bemys outt most cleer;
> Alas, that euere he fill in your daungeer!
>
> O, out on Stix, and out on Attropos,
> That han of malis slayn so good a kniht!
> Out on you thre, that keepe your-silff so cloos,
> Douhtres icallid of the dirke niht!
>
> . . . Alicibiades is passed unto fate,
> Liht of knichthod lith clipsed in the shade.   (3. 3655–77)

And in a way sometimes reminscent of Lucan or Statius he can produce an eerie scene of horror — before the death of Pompey,

> Mong dede bonys that leyen in ther grauis
> Wer voises herd lik wood men in ther rages.
> Cry of goostis in cavernys & cauys,
> Herd in feeldis, paththis & passages;
> Laboureres fledde hom to ther villages
> Serpentis, adderes, scaled siluer briht,
> Wer ouer Roome seyn fleeyng al the niht.   (6. 2388–94)[92]

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[92] Among other good 'pitous' scenes may be mentioned that in which Arsinoe tries to shield Demetrius with her body (4.4039 ff.) or that in which the Roman senators 'gan wexe pale off compassyon' as Marcus Regulus heroically goes to his certain death among the Carthaginians, and there is a 'choric' expression of sorrow: 'princessis, ladies fill a-swowne doun / Childre wepte and cried for pite, / "Farewell upholdere, cheiff wal of our cite"' (5.715 ff.).

Henryson's art is fully displayed in what Thynne called 'the pytefull and dolorous Testament of fayre Creseyde'.[93] Since this has been so often discussed, I shall again only single out a few points relating to its pathos. That it is to be 'ane cairfull dyte' is announced at the beginning, and the brief and tragic action is punctuated with a series of *planctus*. As in *Troilus* there are patterns of imagery and echoes — images of cold, darkness, etc. The descriptions of the malevolent Saturn present a 'mirror' of Cresseid's physical transformation into one of his leprous children: 'His face fronsit, his lyre was lyke the leid.' Lead is his metal, and, as Lydgate says, 'lead, of philisophres, is callid gold leprous'[94] (perhaps at the end there is a symbolic transformation again, in the 'goldin letteris' which Troilus has inscribed on her tomb). As in *Troilus and Criseyde* the narrator acts sometimes as a 'presenter' or dramaturge, sometimes as a chorus, bursting out in laments, exclamations of sympathy. As in the *Knight's Tale* the planetary deities rule. There is no explicit suggestion of any larger Christian framework: these powerful, ambiguous and sometimes sinister forces seem conspicuously lacking in *pite*.[95] Their judgement is stern when Cresseid, isolated and overwhelmed by melancholy, in the 'secreit oratour' ('behind hir bak sho closit fast the dure') breaks out in an angry reproach to the gods, a moment of great but rash *démesure*. The cruelty is lamented by the narrator: 'O cruell Saturne, fraward and angrie / Hard is thy dome and to malitious!' Only a hard-hearted reader would not agree with him in feeling a sense of injustice or at the very least of an excessive punishment. Cresseid becomes perhaps an example of Northrop Frye's scapegoat figure, the *pharmakos* (he cites Billy Budd) neither innocent nor guilty; innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done should provoke.[96] After Cresseid's moment of physical self-recognition, familiar details increase the pathos — the child coming to tell her that supper is ready, her father's fellow-feeling ('wringand his handis

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[93] *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. D. Fox (Oxford, 1981). He provides another excellent scene of pathos in the separation of the lovers in his *Orpheus and Eurydice* (see Gray, *Robert Henryson* (Leiden, 1979), pp. 234–6).

[94] *Fall of Princes* 8. 1223; in *The Assembly of Gods* ed. O. L. Triggs, EETS ES 69 (1896) Saturn has a crown of lead.

[95] On the gods, see J. Mann, 'The Planetary Gods in Chaucer and Henryson', in *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*, ed. R. Morse and B. Windeatt (Cambridge, 1990).

[96] '. . . guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society, or living in a world where such injustices are an inescapable part of existence', Frye, *Anatomy*, p. 41.

oftymes he said allace / That he had levit to se that wofull hour . . .
Thair was cair aneuch betwix thame twane'). *Pite* is a characteristi-
cally human quality — sympathy, 'the one poor word which includes
all our best insight and our best love' as George Eliot says.[97] Cresseid
finds it later only in the blunt consolation of the leper woman and in
Troilus. Her long central lament, an elaborate aria on the instability of
Fortune and the uncertainty of earthly life and beauty, leads on to the
strange 'recognition scene' in which neither can now recognise the
other, but which has a powerful inner effect.[98] We are left with her
final expression of remorse, and her terse epitaph is echoed by the
narrator — 'sen scho is deid, I speik of hir no moir.'

At the end of this century, some writers are beginning to follow the
ancient models more closely.[99] A fine example of the adaptation of the
old *Pathosformeln* to new surroundings is to be found in Douglas's
translation of the Aeneid (1513).[100] Here we find the fate of Laocoon
again, in vivid and picturesque style:

> Lo! twa gret lowpit edderis, with mony thraw
> Fast throu the flude towart the land can draw
> My spreit abhorris this mater to declare

(with a nice echo of Virgil's *horresco*). Douglas catches magnificently
the terror of the serpents' approach:

> Onto the grund thai glaid with glowand eyn
> Stuffit full of vennom, fyre and fellon teyn
> Wyth tongis quhisling in thar mowthis rede
> Thai lyk the twynkland stangis in thar heid . . .

(making full use of his traditional alliteration and emphatic piling up of
nouns). Douglas was especially responsive to the visual qualities for
which he praises Virgil ('as qha the mater beheld tofor thar e', *Prol.* 1.
14). This is a consistent feature of his style, but I wonder if it had been

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[97] *Adam Bede* ch. 50. Cf. Hightower in Faulkner's *Light in August* (ch. 16) brooding on the
imminent murder ('crucifixion') of Christmas: 'and they will do it gladly . . . Since to pity
him would be to admit selfdoubt and to hope for and need pity themselves. They will do it
gladly, gladly'.

[98] See Gray, *Henryson*, pp. 200–2. For other scenes where recognition is difficult, see S. F.
Barrow, *The Medieval Society Romances* (New York, 1924), pp. 27–8. Cf. *Sir Tryamoure*
1640 ff.

[99] Cf. e.g. *The Letter of Dydo to Eneas* printed in Pynson's edition (?1526) of *The House of
Fame*; it comes from *Heroides* 7 via the French translation of Saint-Gelais (c. 1494–5).

[100] *Virgil's* Aeneid *translated into Scottish Verse by Gavin Douglas* ed. D. F. C. Coldwell
STS 3rd Ser., 25, 27, 28, 30 (1950–7).

encouraged by a sight of the first illustrated edition of Virgil by Sebastian Brant (1502) where the fine woodcuts include the wooden horse, with Laocoon hurling the spear, being crushed by the 'lowpit edderis' and finally lying dead while the horse is rolled in — a sequence which corresponds to Douglas's chapter heading, 'How stranglit was the preist hecht Laocon, / And how the hors clame our the wallis of stone'). Douglas is also very responsive to Virgil's pathos, and regularly underlines the 'pitous' moments (e.g. *gemitu* (2. 323) is translated as 'gowling petuusly'). In his *Prologue* to Book II he introduces this 'dedly tragedy' in appropriately sombre style ('dolorous armony' 'the drery fait with terys lamentabill') — Saturn, the 'auld fader of malancoly' should guide his pen — and he leads into the book with the *sententia* 'all erdly glaidness fynysith with wo'. What is especially interesting from our point of view is that we can see him using the traditional vernacular techniques — set epithets, homely (and Scottish) words and details ('we fey pepill'; the children 'singand carellis and dansand in a ring' around the horse), repeated exclamations, and formulaic expressions: Andromache, reminded of Hector, 'walit so that pietie was to heir' (3. 5. 61), and (11. 17. 24) 'the wemen bet thar breistis, was reuth to se'.[101]

And the old patterns of the scenes of pathos continue through the sixteenth century in a variety of forms — reprints of medieval works (e.g., besides Chaucer and Gower, *The Fall of Princes* (1494, 1527, 1554)[102] or *The Statelie Tragedy of Guistard and Sismond* (1597),[103] the *Mirror for Magistrates*,[104] laments for the dead on the stage.[105] In his early plays Shakespeare will use a pathetic tableau ('enter a son that hath killed his father at one door; and a father that hath killed his son at another door' — 'O piteous spectacle! O bloody times!' says Henry VI) or perhaps echo the scene of the isolated innocent figure of Christ in a

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[101] See Priscilla Bawcutt, *Gavin Douglas* (Edinburgh, 1976), esp. pp. 115, 140 ff.

[102] The *De Casibus* pattern is also followed by Lindsay in *The Tragedie of the Cardinall* (1547). And some medieval works were copied in later MSS — like the poem *Death and Liffe* mentioned above.

[103] One of the fifteenth-century verse translations of Boccaccio (*Early English Versions of the Tales of Guiscardo and Ghismonda and Titus and Gisippus from the Decameron*, ed. H. G. Wright, EETS 205 (1937)), in which stories of the 'pathos of love' are treated in ways which sometimes recall Chaucer and Lydgate. See D. Gray, 'Bocase in Kent', in *Il passagiere italiano. Saggi sulle letterature di lingua inglese in onore di Sergio Rossi*, ed. R. Crivelli and L. Sampietro (Rome, 1994), 59–71.

[104] Ed. L. B. Campbell (Cambridge, 1938).

[105] Notably that of Videna in *Gorboduc* (probably by Sackville, author of the Induction to *The Mirror for Magistrates*); see Richmond, *Laments for the Dead*, pp. 124–5.

hostile crowd;[106] and in his later shows a fondness for the tales of separated families like *Apollonius of Tyre*. Even the first recorded use of 'pathos' in English, by E. K., refers to a very Chaucerian passage in the lament of the mother of the kid:

> My sonne (quoth she) (and with that gan weepe
> For carefull thoughts in her heart did creepe) . . . [107]

But, as Chaucer's Knight says, 'litel hevynesse / Is right ynough to muche folk, I gesse' — and, as we know, nothing dries more quickly than a tear. There is always a temptation (to which at this point I willingly yield) to end with comedy — sometimes because we need to recover from a confrontation with a scene of horror or pathos (as Arthur and Gawain laugh and grin after the Green Knight has picked up his head from the floor and left the hall), but more usually because a mismatch between situation and technique produces an irresistible desire to parody (as was the case with 'Father, dear father'). The hyperbolic extremes of pathetic rhetoric especially attract this, sometimes justly — 'O Sophonisba, Sophonisba O!' — sometimes because of changing fashions — 'O eyes, no eyes, but fountains filled with tears!' — or sometimes simply because the 'merriness' of Life will reassert itself. Earlier writers too sometimes indulged themselves in parody or the mock-heroic. The death of Jane Scrope's sparrow[108] (destroyed by a cat) provokes wringing of hands and an exclamation in high style, which you may recognise: 'I syghed and I sobbed / For that I was robbed / Of my sparowes lyfe. / O mayden, wydow and wyfe / Of what estate ye be / Of hye or lowe degre / Great sorowe than ye myght se / And lerne to wepe at me.' Henryson, expert in the formal *planctus*, has some nice examples in his animal fables.[109] But, as always, it is Chaucer who is the master. There is an elaborate example in the *Nun's Priest's Tale* (with echoes of the Monk's tearful tragedies) occasioned by the apparently imminent, but in fact supposed death of

[106] See E. Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1977), ch. 2.
[107] In his description of the dragon fight in Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* (which may well echo earlier English romances) Spenser also has the Laocoon episode in mind: when the dragon's tail enwraps Redcrosse there is an echo of Virgil in the word 'implyes' (i. 11. 23. 1–5).
[108] 'Phyllyp Sparowe' (John Skelton, *The Complete English Poems* ed. J. Scattergood, Harmondsworth, 1983), 50 ff. We are also told that Jane's sorrow surpasses that of Pyramus and Thisbe or Andromache, and is so extreme ('I fele my body quake') that she wishes she had Socrates to advise on how to take it 'moderately'.
[109] See his *Fables* 495 ff., 1530 ff., 2469 ff.

Chauntecleer at the hands of the fox. After an exclamation to Geoffrey of Vinsauf so skilled in the art of lamentation ('O Gaufred, deere maister soverayn!'), the narrator proceeds to elaborate the extreme wailings of the hens by comparison to the great scenes of pathos in antiquity, including of course Troy — 'swich cry ne lamentacion / Was nevere of ladyes maad when Ylion / Was wonne, and Pirrus with his streite swerd, / Whan he hadde hent kyng Priam by the berd, / And slayn hym, as seith us Eneydos, / As made alle the hennes in the clos . . .'[110] And there is perhaps another brief but intriguing example in the unexpected context of a fabliau, a literary kind which will generally keep feelings of *pite* at a safe distance,[111] in the notably unsentimental *Reeve's Tale*, when (with a delicate allusion to the courtly aubade) Malyn bids farewell to her clerkly lover of the night— ' ". . . and, goode lemman, God thee save and kepe!" / And with that word almost she gan to wepe.'[112] 'Almost' makes it deliciously ambiguous. Is it entirely ironic? Can this be a case (*pace* Flaubert) of pathos heightening irony, or is it a delicate and unresolvable balance? Since she has just revealed to her lover the deception practised on him by her father, perhaps there is some 'pite'. If so, we may say with Boccaccio that it is indeed a human quality to have pity on those in distress.

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[110] VII. 3338 ff. (cf. also 3228—9).

[111] Though Chaucer also teasingly uses a 'pitous' simile at that moment in *The Merchant's Tale* when old January sees his wife and Damian in the tree: 'and up he yaf a roryng and a cry / As dooth the mooder whan the child shal dye / "Out! Help! Allas! Harow!"' — but he receives some clever 'consolation' (IV. 2364 ff.).

[112] I. 4248.