DERIVED WORDS IN CHAUCER’S
BOECE: THE TRANSLATOR AS WORDSMITH

by Morton Donner

The language of Chaucer’s Boece poses what Ralph Elliott, in a re-
cent book about Chaucer’s English, calls “an interesting critical
question.”1 Boece contains a great many nonce words, many of them
new formations derived within English or new adoptions from
French or Latin, suggesting that, as Elliott puts it, “Chaucer was
seriously experimenting with the new words for their own sake.”2
There is indeed an interesting question here, especially if directed at
demonstrable practices within the circumstances of translation
rather than at conjectural motives beyond them. A question more to
the point would ask how, when, for what purpose, and to what effect
Chaucer either chose new adoptions or used contemporary patterns
of word formation to meet the demands of translating Latin into
English. Answering this question addresses what strikes me as really
the most important issue—understanding how Chaucer’s role as a
translator affected his language.

Boece is an ideal place to address this issue. Not only does its bulk
offer a representative corpus of Chaucer’s language, but the versions
of his French and Latin sources available show that he was attempt-
ing a faithful, literal rendering of the original, so that the relation-
ship between his vocabulary and theirs is easy to see. Moreover, the
new words in Boece, which look like a direct consequence of the
translation process, make up a significant portion of his vocabulary,
better than one-eighth of the whole. Out of about 2,700 different
words that appear in Boece, some 200 are new adoptions from
French or Latin and more than 150 are new derivations formed on
contemporary English patterns.3 They may be new, of course, only
in the sense that their first recorded appearance in English occurs in
Boece, but given the circumstance of translation, as well as the char-
acter of the words themselves, I think there are reasonable grounds
for considering most of them innovative.
The two groups of innovations make an interesting contrast, reflecting Chaucer's judgements about the fitness of various Romance forms to serve as English words. Although both groups represent Latin or French forms for which he could manage no current English equivalent, the adoptions as a rule are words from the original that seemed usable to him as English, while the new formations replaced words that seemed to demand some effort at translation. The contrast reflects his linguistic ingenuity too, because while the new adoptions may often be simply a matter of convenience for Chaucer, as Jefferson suggested, the new formations show him working with the derivational resources of English to come up with materials for translation. In effect, he gives up convenience to construct words that render meaning more clearly. The process is neatly illustrated by his handling of the Latin term felicitas, a word used frequently throughout the Consolatio. Chaucer is uncertain whether to adopt the Romance form or to derive a new formation the first time he comes to the idea, actually expressing it both ways, "felicite, that I clepe welefulness" (I, pr. 3, 31–32); but after this he always translates felicitas just by welefulness or by another new formation, blissfulness, both of them completely English derivations that produce an unmistakable meaning.

Chaucer can be seen dealing with this problem all along the way in Boece, demonstrating a clear sense of the opportunities that the derivational patterns of English offered him as a translator. What is most obvious is his sense of the gerund as pretty much a universal formative for deriving nouns from verbs, because in looking for ways to express nominal ideas, he forms close to fifty new gerunds, even though they usually take him on a somewhat circuitous route of translation. About two-thirds of them represent nouns in the original, so that what Chaucer has done is to focus on the idea of action implicit in the noun, find a verb that conveys the idea, and then derive a noun from the verb by forming a gerund—often rejecting a straightforward adoption of a Latin or French noun as he goes this route. He derives the gerund overthrowing (II, m. 4, 17), for example, to translate Latin ruina, a word that he does anglicize in the House of Fame as well as in some later poems. Similarly, he derives mowing (IV, pr. 2, 254) for possibilitas, even though the French version has possibilité, another word that he uses as English in his later poetry. Probably the most illuminating insight into his practices comes from his struggles with the Latin term ratioctatio. The first time he has to translate it, seeing that the French translation parole offers no help, he produces the gerund skilling (IV, pr. 6, 240), the only citation for this word in the Oxford English Dictionary; but the
next time, when the French version has raison, he makes use of the French but still insists on expressing the idea by a gerund, deriving the form reasoning (V, pr. 5, 44) despite the fact that the word reason appears frequently in his writings as a noun, over a hundred times in Boece alone, though never as a verb. And as a gerund rooted on a familiar French form, reasoning illustrates even more clearly Chaucer's penchant for translating nouns circuitously. The gerunds derived from English roots do represent a complete act of translation, a change in both root and suffix, but those from French roots, about twice as many, often translate mainly by means of suffixation alone. Despoille, for example, becomes spoiling (IV, m. 7, 30), contraingurance becomes constraining (V, pr. 4, 98), while movement, rendered as moving (II, pr. 5, 45), is just one of a half-dozen French nouns ending in -ment that come out pretty much unchanged except for the suffix. Of course these gerunds also represent complete translations in a way, since, except for reason, every one of the verbs from which they derive had been adopted before the mid-fourteenth century. But still, almost all the French nouns themselves would, and did, fit into English easily enough, so that at first glance Chaucer's procedure may look a bit odd.

On closer examination, though, it makes a good deal of sense, showing that his decisions are based on a discriminating perception of semantic values. Gerunds are unequivocally action nouns, denoting the actual performance of an activity, in contrast to other categories of deverbal nouns denoting state, condition, result, and the like. Those nouns which Chaucer translates as gerunds are given that form because he reads them as action nouns; he rejects straightforward adoption because in this form the fact of performing an action might not be clear. With ratiocinatio, for example, since the word signifies not simply the idea of reason but rather the process of using it, he declines to translate it by reason, which he has used all along to render ratio, but keeps hunting for a gerund that will express the meaning adequately. His rejection of ruina shows a similar, probably more subtle perception of semantic properties, since the Latin noun could signify either an action or a condition or result. Boethius clearly uses it as an action noun, "Quamis tonet ruinis / Miscens aequora uentus" (II, m. 4, 17–18), and Chaucer translates it as a gerund to make that meaning clear in English.

He exercises this sort of discrimination throughout Boece, providing what amounts to a systematic demonstration of his principles in the contrasts between his two substantial sets of innovative translations for deverbal nouns, the thirty or so gerunds under discussion and forty or so new adoptions. More than half the adoptions are
from words ending in the equivalent of -tion, a suffix that denotes state, condition, or result, but none of the gerunds is formed to translate such a word. Words ending in the equivalent of -ance, usually denoting condition, also come over as adoptions rather than gerunds, except for the one instance already cited where Chaucer translates contraingnance gerundially. But the context in this instance requires an action noun, as he indicates by inserting a gloss right after the gerund, “that is to seyn, by constreynyng of our eyen or of our sighte" (V, pr. 4, 98–100).

These patterns are reversed, however, for words ending in the equivalent of -ment, a suffix mainly used to denote action. Chaucer forms gerunds to represent nearly a dozen such words, the majority of them, as mentioned above, simply by changing the suffix. And on the two occasions when he adopts them instead, they are patently not meant as action nouns. He takes government from the French version in its plural form (I, pr. 4, 36), even though the word is in the singular there, because the actual form being translated from the Latin is “gubernacula,” the plural of gubernaculum, a word which, when used in the plural, signifies the idea of government as an organization. The other adoption of this type, movement, goes further in revealing his sensitivity to nuances of form and meaning, because it is a word that he usually turns into a gerund. Actually, before coming to adopt it, he renders it as moving ten times in all, utilizing the French form as a base for translating the Latin originals, motus or motio. Each time, the context in both Latin and French, when not plainly indicating that the word must be taken as an action noun, can easily be read in that sense, so that Chaucer has reason to stay with the gerund. But when he reaches a passage where in both the Latin and French versions the word clearly refers to the idea of motion in the abstract, “Ambulandi . . . motum secundum naturam esse hominibus” and “li mouvement de aler . . . soit donné aus hommez selonc nature,” then he adopts the French word to translate these lines as “the moevement of goyne . . . ys in men by kinde” (IV, pr. 2, 98–99).

He changes his mind this way, adopting a noun that he has previously translated by forming a gerund, at one other point where he confronts this sort of shift in meaning, demonstrating just how precisely he can discriminate categories of meaning in choosing categories of form. In two passages where durableté renders diuturnitas, he derives the gerund lasting to fit the first context, “de nominis tui diuturnitate” and “de la longue durableté de ton nom,” but adopts the French noun for the second, “mortalium rerum . . . diuturnitas” and “la loingtiengne durableté des chosiez mortiex,” thus making the
subtle distinction between the “long lastynge of thi name” (II, pr. 7, 96) as an event dependent on action and the “longe durablete of mortel things” (III, pr. 11, 174–75) as a condition resulting from circumstances. None of the other gerunds that Chaucer forms in translating nouns may have required quite this degree of precision in his reasoning, but all of them do come from his thinking in this fashion.

He does not have to be as careful when deriving gerunds to translate verbs, which account for all but one of the remaining formations, because the choice is simply whether to use a nominal or not, a matter to some extent determined by the form and function of the verb itself. Mainly, as might be expected, he forms his own gerunds either to match others or to substitute for infinitives, seven each. But there are also a few odds and ends: a participle modifying a noun, brought over with the functions transposed, “vere tepenti” becoming “in the first somer sesoun warmynge” (IV, m. 6, 31); an adjectival participle standing as an absolute with the noun head omitted, “de-tractantium iugum” becoming “yok of mysdrawynge” (III, pr. 12, 99); a finite clause serving as a direct object, “requist . . . que il li rendissent” becoming “requyred . . . of relessynge” (III, m. 12, 28–29); and even an adverb that Chaucer turns into a prepositional phrase with gerund object, “diuturnior” becoming “of lengere durynge” (IV, pr. 4, 166).

Gerund-for-gerund translation is clearly a mechanical convenience, but only to a degree. In three of Chaucer’s formations, only the suffix changes; in one, a different Romance root appears too; and in the other three, both root and suffix become English. The degree of change tends to vary inversely with both the familiarity and the semantic complexity of the Romance words. Nolendi and praenoscendi, for example, words unfamiliar in form but straightforward in meaning, are put wholly into English as nilling (V, pr. 2, 20) and foreknowing (V, pr. 6, 272), while imaginandi and moderandi present a semantic complexity that he resolves by just letting the one stand as imagining (V, pr. 5, 72) and by changing the other to at-tempering (V, pr. 4, 89), both of them based on forms that are recorded as verbs in English before the mid-fourteenth century.

This issue hardly comes up with the other group of gerunds, since all but one of them translate French infinitives simply by changing the suffix, while the exception goes no further than substituting one French root for another. These too are mainly based on forms that are recorded as verbs in English before the mid-fourteenth century. But even so, this group represents a less mechanical mode of derivation than the first one, because although gerunds can function only
as nominals, infinitives can also function as verbals instead. Appropriately enough, another seven infinitives show up among verbs that Chaucer translates by adoption, making a neat contrast with the seven gerunds here, an even split into separate categories of form to signify separate categories of meaning. The adoptions are from words expressing a verbal sense because they complement a predicate, serving either to specify an action for a modal construction or to continue the action for a non-modal one. For example, "possit exserere" becomes "mai exercen" (II, pr. 6, 43), and "li rois . . . appareilast a transporter . . . le blasme" becomes "the kyng . . . caste hym to transporten . . . the gilt" (I, pr. 4, 214–16). The gerunds are from words expressing a nominal sense because they supply an object, either for a true preposition or for a non-modal predicate whose action, in direct contrast to the adoptions, is disjoined from that of its object. For example, "sans corrompre" becomes "without corrumpynge" (III, pr. 12, 75), and "s'esjoissent chascunes chosez de retourner a leur nature" becomes "alle thynges rejoysen hem of hir retornynge ayen to hir nature" (III, m. 2, 40–42).

All in all, gerund formations make a handy instrument of translation for Chaucer, versatile enough to serve as a means for distinguishing a number of semantic categories as well as for accommodating a variety of structural ones in English. In a sense, though, the instrument is forced on him. The very act of taking on a text like the _Consolatio_, with its inevitable load of action nominals, commits him to a heavy reliance on gerunds, so that, as the examples demonstrate, he often feels compelled to derive them on his own. In effect, they serve to ease the pressure that translation puts on his linguistic resources. One measure of his need for them can be taken from the numerical relations, in terms of gerund formations, between _Boece_ and other works both by Chaucer and by some of his contemporaries as well. In round numbers, a total of 140 new gerunds appears in all of Chaucer's works together, fifty of them in _Boece_ and another twenty in the _Parson's Tale_, so that these two translations of Latin ideological texts account for half the total. Further, according to the _Middle English Dictionary_, among words beginning with the letters Α through Ν, some 1,150 gerunds had appeared in English writings by the end of the fourteenth century, about thirty-five of them first cited in _Boece_, ninety-five in the Scriptural and ecclesiastical translations of the Wyclif group, and 125 in Trevisa's two translations of encyclopedic treatises, so that better than one-fifth of the total comes from these writings alone. While the larger numbers from Trevisa and the Wycliffites are in keeping with longer texts, the citations in the _MED_ usually have them doing much the same thing as Chaucer,
converting Latin action nouns into English gerunds, often with little or nothing more than a change in suffix, and with rather less concern than his about using Romance roots already established as English verbs. For whatever it may be worth, evidence of this sort does go to show that the new gerunds in *Boece* are required by the work of translation.

Numerical evidence also points to another construction, identical in form but different in function, that seems to come with the job, participial adjectives which serve as pre-nominal modifiers. This construction, as it happens, is not much used by Chaucer anywhere else. In exact numbers, there are fifty-four different words serving this function in *Boece*, but only twenty-two more in the rest of his writings together, with an even greater disparity in terms of new formations, thirty-five as against seven. This pattern strikes me as giving participial adjectives special value in judging how Chaucer practices word formation when translating, even though, strictly speaking, they may not be derivations. Still, as Chaucer uses them, they might as well be. For one thing, the main argument against classifying this kind of construction as an actual derivation is that it differs from true adjectives in not being subject to adverbial modification, yet three of his new formations include an adverb with the participle as part of the very process of translation: "patentes...plaga" becomes "the brode schewynge contrees" (II, m. 7, 3–4), "reduci...igne" becomes "by ayen ledynge fyer" (III, m. 9, 18), and "permanant presence de dieu" becomes "the ai duellynge presence of God" (V, pr. 6, 85). The construction tends to be classified instead as simply a secondary function of the participle, yet in *Boece* it is primary, since nearly two-thirds of the new participles are formed solely to serve as adjectives. In any case, as words that Chaucer forms from verbs to function as adjectives, they fit right in with the unquestioned derivations to show how new formations work for him.

The participles work in much the same way as the gerunds, both in distinguishing semantic categories and in accommodating structural ones. Half of them translate adjectives, a circuitous procedure that, as with the gerunds, reflects a discriminating perception of semantic values. In contrast to other categories of deverbal adjectives that signify state, condition, passive action, and either active or passive action, participial adjectives in -ing carry an exclusively active meaning signifying only an action performed by, not done to or characteristic of, the noun modified. Chaucer demonstrates his sense of these semantic properties in two contrasting sets of innovative translations for deverbal adjectives, about twenty-five adoptions, all
of which convey a passive meaning, as against the nearly twenty participles which he forms expressly for their active meaning. The contrast shows up best in his handling of French adjectives in -able, because in French, some words with this suffix were active in meaning, some passive, and some could be used in either sense. These participles account for sixteen of his adoptions, many of them clearly passive in describing an action done to something, as in “thilke devyne substaunce tornith . . . the moevable cercle of thinges” (III, pr. 12, 194–96), while others indicate a state, as in “clothes . . . of per-durable mater” (I, pr. 1, 20–21), a condition, as in “ymaginacioun cometh to remuable bestis” (V, pr. 5, 32–33), or a characteristic, as in “troubable ire, that aryst in hem the floodes of trowblynges” (V, m. 2, 10–12). Another one of these participles, moreover, offers a direct look at Chaucer choosing between the two methods of translation, because it pairs up with one of his participles formed on the same root. On one occasion, when the adjective in “alterna commutatione” has a passive sense rendered in French as “par entrechauj-able mutacioun,” he adopts the French form to produce “by entre-chaungable mutacioun” (IV, pr. 6, 148–49). But when the Latin adjective is later used with active force in “alterni . . . unda vadi,” rendered in French as “eulz ce que li uns et li autres fleuves,” he produces “of the entrechaunging flood” (V, m. 1, 10–11), returning to the French adjective to express the root meaning but changing it into participial form to convey the active sense.

On this same principle, in some other passages where the French version serves as his basis for expression, he derives participles in place of a few more adjectives in -able that look active to him. For a couple, he takes this sense from the specific context, translating “tournoies le ciel par estourbillons ravissables” as “turnest the heven with a ravysschynge sweigh” (I, m. 5, 3–4), and “la pensee de cestui, plungiie en trebuchichable parfondece” as “the thought of man, dreyn in overthrowynge deppesse” (I, m. 2, 1–2). But for another pair, the active sense reflects his understanding of the Consolatio as a whole. Taking the Boethian concept of fortune as an active force, he translates “fortune fuiable” as “flyttynge Fortune” (II, pr. 1, 81), and “fortunes muables des hommes” as “the tumblynge fortunes of men” (II, m. 3, 19–20); but in a later passage where muable applies to the idea of nature, he simply adopts it, translating “touz li avene-mens des muablez naturez . . . prent ses causes . . . de l’establet de la divine pensee” as “alle the progressiouns of muable nature . . . taketh his causes . . . of the stableness of the devyne thought” (IV, pr. 6, 43–47). As Boethius shifts from the notion of fortune as a free agent to the idea of nature as divinely controlled, Chaucer shifts his
reading of *mutable* from active to passive, his method of translation from participle formation to adoption.

Chaucer's concern to use participles as translations of adjectives with active meaning does not, by the way, make his work any easier. Besides *ravishing*, there is only one other example of outright suffix substitution, “oisaus janglierres” becoming “janglynge brid” (III, m. 2, 21). *Interchanging*, of course, represents a sort of second-hand version of the process, and there are two instances where he adapts a Latin root somewhat: “blanda . . . carmina,” French “douces chançons,” becomes “blaundysshynge songes” (III, m. 12, 20), and “purgatoria clementia,” French “par espuriable debonaireté,” becomes “by a purgyng mekenesse” (IV, pr. 4, 152). But in almost every other instance he goes to an English root, a move that points up another feature of his working habits. In general, he forms his derivations on what would seem to be reasonably familiar roots. Of the more than thirty Romance roots from which he derives gerunds, for example, all but three show up in English words, though not always verbs, by the mid-fourteenth century, most of them earlier. This also holds true for all the participles derived on Romance roots. As translations of adjectives, though, these make up only about a third of the whole, in contrast to the gerund translations of nouns, where the proportions are reversed. What happened is that the actual source of translation for the gerunds is mainly in the French version, nouns with roots likely to be familiar in English, while for the participles, many of the French forms either are pretty much like the Latin or else seem inadequate to Chaucer for one reason or another. Since the actual source of translation is mainly Latin adjectives, many of them with less familiar roots, he works more often with English verbs. As examples where the Latin and French stay together, sending him to an English root, “pugna fugax” and “la fuitive bataile” become “the fleinge bataile” (V, m. 1, 3), and “felix a uero bono deuios . . . trahit” and “la beneuree les atrait . . . et les fait desvoier de souverain bien” become “Fortune . . . draweth myswan-drynge men from the sovereyne good” (II, pr. 3, 28–29). Although the French versions here do not supply him with an actual participle root, he does follow their interpretation of the Latin, but in some other places he finds it misleading and again turns to an English verb in order to augment or change it. For example, “uernis floribus,” used in a context of nature burgeoning, appears in French as “les fleurs en prin temps,” but Chaucer, evidently alert to the etymological force of the Latin adjective, adds a sense of activity to the French version with “spryngyne floures of the first somer sesoun” (II, pr. 5, 66–67). And to translate “lacerae . . . Camenae,” he simply
does not accept "desordenees Muses," so that, ironically enough, he mistranslates it as "rendyng Muses" (I, m. 1, 4). Given Boethius's statement that the Muses "dictant scribenda" to him, then despite the explicitly passive form in the French, the poet in Chaucer, servant to Muses invariably pictured as ruling powers, takes over the translation to picture them as active here.

Chaucer works in line with these principles whenever else he sees reason to derive participles, chiefly in translating words that are themselves in the form of present participles. Since the form itself establishes their active sense, making his formations essentially a matter of convenience, his choice comes down mainly to keeping familiar roots or replacing unfamiliar ones. And since these are verb rather than adjective roots, with a better chance for the French ones to be familiar in English, the actual source of translation shifts back once more toward the French words, once again reversing the balance between Romance and English roots in his formations. Out of fourteen participles, nine are on Romance roots (eight French, one Latin) that appear in English words before the mid-fourteenth century; eight of them change only the suffix, while one substitutes for a variant less familiar in English, "folie . . . nuisant" becoming "anoyinge folye" (I, pr. 3, 79). The participles on English roots tend to be translations of words unfamiliar in form but straightforward in meaning, "corage ouvrant," for example, becoming "wirkynge corage" (V. pr. 5, 8), except for two of the instances of adverbial modification mentioned earlier, *aye-dwelling* and *broad-showing* for *permanans* and *patens*, where his formations fit into a method for distinguishing the components of a semantically complex word. A method of this sort also accounts for one of the two participles formed in translating nouns, "contumeliiis" becoming "with stryvynge wordes" (II, pr. 7, 124), while the other one serves as a means of achieving syntactic compression, "sens esmouvement de floz" becoming "without moeyynge fodes" (II, m. 3, 15). And there is still one more participle that belongs in none of these categories because he forms it completely on his own, to provide an emphasis not in his sources, "ratione" and "par raison" becoming "by wenynge resoun" (III, pr. 10, 84).

Chaucer uses the participles with nearly the same versatility as the gerunds, and for exactly the same reason. Just as gerunds were the only means in English to form nouns signifying an act in progress, present participles were the only means to form adjectives with that function. As shown by the number totals presented earlier, their pattern of distribution throughout Chaucer's writings indicates that he can pretty much get along without them every place except in
Boece, because elsewhere, if not translating colorless works like the Tale of Melibee or the Parson's Tale, he is essentially master of his own expression, while here he is striving to be true to a vivid original. Boethius's meters, for example, though amounting to less than one-sixth of the text, account for more than half of Chaucer's new participles. Like the gerunds, but even more specifically, they are a measure of how translating a work like the Consolatio affected his language.

The distribution of the other class of participles in Chaucer's language provides a further measure, though in negative terms. Like present participles, past participles are used sparingly as pre-nominal modifiers in writings other than Boece, but, unlike them, are not much used for that purpose in Boece either. Out of fifty-four in all his writings together, thirteen, including seven new formations, appear in Boece, amounting to less than one-quarter the number of present participles, and of new formations among them, that function as pre-nominal modifiers there. This disparity is in keeping with the overall patterns of modification in Middle English. While the present participle was the only construction capable of conveying a specifically active sense, there were all sorts of adjective forms available, both native and adopted, to convey a passive one. Chaucer tends to reserve past participles mainly for use as adjectives of passive result, describing not only an action directed at an object but one that has specifically been completed. But in many contexts the distinction between result and condition or state simply does not matter, so that, as the numbers show, he ordinarily prefers adjectives. When he does derive new formations to express passive result in Boece, his practices reflect the same kind of thinking that guides him in deriving present participles, though applied with a different criterion of meaning in mind. Interchange turns up once more for alternus, for example, but this time in a context explicitly identifying it as the result produced in its object by the completion of a series of actions, so that "alternum . . . iter" becomes "entrechaunged wey" (V, m. 4, 35). But while his practices are the same, the markedly different patterns in which he applies them single out the present participles as a construction specifically required in translating the Consolatio.

The one remaining major category of new formations in Boece, words with the prefix un-, also handles a specific job for Chaucer, translating words with the equivalent Latin prefix in-. Though not actually required, since negative particles might do instead, this prefix is what he often chooses, usually as a match for the Latin one, in somehow negating the meaning of adjectives, nouns, and verbs, thirty-six new ones in all. Three-quarters of them are adjectives, parti-
cial adjectives included because the distinction does not matter here, all conveying a sense of contradiction and all but four representing Latin adjectives or participles prefixed by *in*-. As something other than matching forms, however, the exceptions do show Chaucer's skill in making use of the prefix, as a means of syntactic compression, for example, when "citra spem" and "hors de t'esperance" become "unhopid" (IV, pr. 6, 236). The matched forms are more than a simple mechanical convenience also, with just three instances where only the prefix changes, a few more where the roots reveal some likeness, while the rest are words whose only formal connection with their originals is in the prefix. Though some are wholly English, the majority are hybrids, using French words already in the language and indicating how freely Chaucer manages the prefix as a sign of negation, as, for example, in translating "inexpertus" and "ne . . . pas es-prouvé" as "unassayed" (II, pr. 4, 95). But while he is free with it, he is also careful, as demonstrated by the contrast between his new formations and the half-dozen adjectives and participles that he translates by adoption with the prefix unchanged. When the original contains a familiar word, "immobilis" rendered by "n'est pas mouvable," for example, he may change only the prefix, coming out with "unmovable" (IV, pr. 6, 158); but when the original seems neither familiar nor simple enough to translate in one word, he adopts it, carefully not changing the prefix, as when "inaestimable," rendered by "n'est mie prisablez," becomes "inestimable" (V, pr. 3, 195), though in this instance Chaucer, while evidently unwilling to form a word like *unpraisable*, does add a gloss, "so greet that it mai nat been ful ipreysed." He is careful with regard to meaning too, leaving the prefix unchanged if the original, though negative in form, is actually used in a positive sense, as when "immortalis . . . animus," rendered as "courage . . . qui n'est pas mortieux," becomes "corage immortel" (IV, pr. 4, 43). And for even better evidence of his concern with meaning, there are a few instances where the adoption itself is positive in form, taken from the French rather than the Latin, as when "Vestes . . . indissolubili materia," rendered as "robes . . . de materie pardurable," becomes "clothes . . . of perdurable materie" (I, pr. 1, 20–21). Chaucer reserves the *un-* prefix for adjectives and participles conveying a negative sense only.

He also puts it on a few nouns to express a privative meaning, negation in the sense of absence or lack rather than contradiction. Even this little, however, is a sign of how free he is with the prefix, because this kind of construction is quite rare in Middle English. The ones he does make tend to be mechanical, *instabilitas* becoming *unstablleness* (II, pr. 4, 148), for example, but still he is careful about
making them. When he comes to Boethius's infortunium, a word that, according to the concept of fortune in the Consolatio, cannot be privative in sense, Chaucer simply lets it stand as infortune (IV, pr. 7, 27). And when the idea of immortality first turns up, as a noun, but this time rendered in positive terms in French, he adopts the French rather than the Latin word, replacing immortalitas with perdurability (II, pr. 7, 91).

He does use un- a few times with a positive meaning, however, as a verb prefix, an etymologically distinct but eventually identical form which is reversative in sense, negative only in undoing the action of the verb. Ingeniously enough, he works with it mainly to translate verbs which are positive in form, not even reversative in meaning, making metaphorical use of the reversative sense of the prefix, as when "rerum causas euoluere" becomes "to unwrapp the... causes of things" (IV, pr. 6, 2-3). He is careful with this prefix too, in an odd way, restricting new formations to metaphorical use and translating some actual reversatives in the original by adoption, for example, "tu auras desarme" as "schaltow desarmen" (I, m. 4, 16).

The reversatives are odd in another way also, the only words formed with un- which do not spring from the mechanics of translation, and, surely by no coincidence, the only ones which show Chaucer working imaginatively. The others show him working efficiently, resourcefully, discriminatingly, but along the lines set by his model, consistently shaping his forms according to those in his source. As a group, they offer the clearest evidence in Boece of how translating directly influences his language, yet they are part of the whole set of words prefixed by un- that Elliott singles out as the prime evidence that Chaucer is experimenting with the creation of new words in Boece. Out of the whole set, the words in this group, none of them recorded in English before, are the most likely to be new, yet, in the thirty-one nouns and adjectives among them, twenty-six represent words prefixed by in- in the original. What Chaucer is doing is translating words with this prefix, experimenting only in the sense that the act of translation itself is an experiment with language, though one that in this case does indeed produce fruitful results. He makes the prefix an extremely serviceable but mainly utilitarian means of translation in Boece, but then, as I have shown elsewhere, manages to put it to considerable literary effect in his later poetry. The question of experimentation aside, working on a translation like Boece does force him to develop habits of language that serve him well later.

Boece contains about fifty more new formations, coming from a variety of derivational patterns and ranging from single instances to
more than a dozen examples of a given pattern. On a smaller scale, many of them are like the three major patterns, systematic methods for conveying specific kinds of meaning, and, taken as a whole, they demonstrate both Chaucer’s versatility in exploiting derivational resources to solve problems of translation and his acuity in understanding the conditions in which to use them. His sense of the adverbial suffix -ly as a universal formative, for example, makes it as much a means of adoption as of derivation for him. Although French noun and adjective suffixes were often retained on words adopted into Middle English, adoptions retaining the adverbial suffix are virtually non-existent.\textsuperscript{14} Chaucer adopts none that way, while out of his thirteen new formations with -ly, none of the eleven Romance roots show up as adjectives in English before Boece, and nine are taken straight from adverbs in his source, so that essentially what he is doing is adopting the adverbs but providing them with an English suffix, as when “agreeablement” becomes “aggreablely” (III, m. 1, 7).

He will attach -ly to any kind of adjective to work out a translation, even constructing \textit{witnessfully} (IV, pr. 5, 10) as a solution to \textit{testatius}, but he is more discriminating with -ness. He uses it freely on English adjectives, constructing both \textit{wealfulness} and \textit{blissfulness} for \textit{felicitas}, as mentioned earlier, but with French roots, he limits himself to familiar forms. Translating \textit{rondece} and \textit{aspreté} as \textit{roundness} (IV, m. 1, 5) and \textit{aspreness} (IV, pr. 4, 150) may look the same as his practice with adverbs, but both roots are recorded as adjectives in English before the mid-fourteenth century. Their phonological simplicity seems irrelevant, because Chaucer adopts the phonologically similar \textit{igaulté} as \textit{egalité} (II, pr. 4, 115), even though a few sentences later he derives the adverb \textit{egally} (II, pr. 4, 126) from the same root, which does not turn up as an adjective in English until Chaucer himself adopts it further along in Boece (II, m. 7, 16). And in phonological contrast, he does construct a word like \textit{preciousness} (II, m. 5, 39) from a French base recorded as an adjective in English at the end of the thirteenth century, yet he adopts \textit{agreeability} (II, pr. 4, 115) when he needs a noun derived from \textit{agreeable}, his base for \textit{agreeably} and also one of his adoptions (II, pr. 5, 87). Unlike -ly, -ness is not a suffix to put on newly adopted adjectives. Immediate hybrids, though normal when deriving adverbs, are not characteristic of deadjectival nouns in Middle English, so that Chaucer adopts French derivations instead. Besides \textit{egalité} and \textit{agreeability}, he has a dozen more such adoptions in Boece, but only one more new hybrid formation with -ness, \textit{frailness} (IV, pr. 2, 15), a word whose root appears as an adjective in English by the mid-fourteenth century.

With another sizable group of nouns, derived from verbs by -er
mainly as translations of agent nouns in his source, he sets himself more stringent requirements, forming all but one on English roots, adopting only about half as many as he derives, and working meticulously with both groups. His concern to use English roots pushes him to two words so unusual that, ironically enough, one is never recorded again in English, the other not until the late nineteenth century, henter (I, pr. 3, 79) as one unit of a doublet translation of rapiens, and leecher (IV, pr. 6, 216) for medicator, the suffix added because he has used leech to translate medicus three sentences before. Although he does struggle with these medical terms, more often he tries to preserve the sense of technical designations by adopting them, the only agent nouns that he does adopt, orator (IV, pr. 4, 255), for example, when used explicitly in its legal sense. But in another passage where it is used in a more general sense, Chaucer, careful to make the distinction, translates it with a doublet, producing another adoption, rhetorien, and following the French annoncer with pronouncer (II, pr. 3, 55-56), his one formation on a French root, but a root recorded as a verb in English well before the mid-fourteenth century. He also uses the suffix a few times for rhetorical efficiency, expressing an implied idea of agency more directly than his source, most memorably when he translates “gloire... est... grans souflaiz en oreilles” as “glorie... thow... art... a greet swel-lere of eres” (III, pr. 6, 5–6).

The remaining dozen or so new formations scatter into a half-dozen categories, a couple of them distinctive in that Chaucer uses them as a means of syntactic compression, for example translating “sens paour” with dreadful (III, m. 12, 9) and “versa vice mutentur” with misinterchange (IV, pr. 5, 21). One category is interesting because it ought not to be included at all, four derivations formed on French patterns, producing words that look like adoptions but that are not recorded in French, as when fatalis and destinable come out as destinal (IV, pr. 6, 81), and conduiseress as guideress (IV, pr. 1, 8). This group demonstrates his versatility in handling derivational patterns, but his acuity in distinguishing their usefulness is revealed by an even smaller group, two verbs derived by conversion, one from a noun, the other from an adjective, his translations of “sociari” as “to ben ifelaschiped” (III, pr. 6, 31) and of “saevit” as “woodeth” (IV, pr. 4, 7). In Middle English, the only method generally employed to derive finite verbs from other parts of speech was conversion, derivation by a zero suffix. Elsewhere in his writings, Chaucer forms conversion verbs freely and imaginatively, but as a means of translation, their usefulness is diminished by their semantic characteristics. In contrast to explicit derivational affixes, which carry a specific
semantic value and narrow the derivation down a specific area of meaning, conversion produces variable meanings because the zero suffix has no specific semantic value but can indicate any kind of action or state associated with the verb being converted. To illustrate the problem with a few conversions formed by Chaucer himself in his poetry, \textit{seed} becomes an intransitive verb describing what Arcite's affection for Anelida will not produce \textit{(Anel 306)}, while \textit{saffron} becomes a transitive verb describing what the Pardoner's Latin words will put into his preaching \textit{(CT, C 345)}; and \textit{round} becomes an intransitive verb describing what shape the Friar's semicope takes by itself \textit{(CT, A 263)}, while \textit{noble} becomes a transitive verb describing what quality the Virgin Mary inspires in human nature \textit{(CT, G 40)}. Conversion is fine for imaginative poetry, but for translation all the evidence shows that Chaucer manages derivational processes to help him render meaning as accurately as he can, using them for precise semantic distinctions, so that rather than accept the imprecision of conversion, he tends to adopt verbs instead, ending up with more than fifty adoptions in contrast to the two conversions.

The paucity of conversions in Boece, like the abundance of gerunds and participles, signals a quality of Chaucer's writing that has long been recognized and admired by serious students of his work, his respect for language. Time and again in his poetry he worries about defining the relationship between a writer and his materials, voicing his concern about the accuracy, adequacy, and propriety with which words convey meaning, insisting that language be a true reflection of whatever reality it represents—and demonstrating his convictions by the way he writes himself. In Boece, his sense of responsibility to Boethius's meaning combines with his appreciation of the semantic properties of linguistic forms to produce a system of derivations and adoptions that will justly, as Dame Philosophy puts it, "unplyten . . . sentence with wordes" \textit{(II, pr. 8, 10–11)}.

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2. Idem. Actually, Elliott is quoting Bernard Jefferson, \textit{Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy} (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1917), p. 26, who had considered this notion only to dismiss it as unlikely. Jefferson, who did not concern himself with derivations, felt that Chaucer's new adoptions were more likely based on convenience, a way of making up for the dearth of suitable English equivalents to the Latin philosophical terms in the original.

3. Although I believe it is reasonable to draw conclusions about Chaucer's innovations taken in mass, citing exact figures for them strikes me as implying an accuracy unwarranted by the kind of evidence available, so that I generally use round num-
bers. My collection of new adoptions and new derivations is based on the evidence of the Middle English Dictionary as published to date, A through penance, and the Oxford English Dictionary for the remainder of the alphabet, but I have based all judgements about precedence of citations on the dates assigned by the editors of the MED to the works of Chaucer and other Middle English writers. As a practical matter I have assigned Boece precedence over all other works also dated ca. 1380 by the editors of the MED.


6. II, pr. 5, 45; III, pr. 7, 9; III, m. 9, 28; III, pr. 10, 232; III, pr. 11, 138; III, pr. 11, 154; III, pr. 11, 177; III, pr. 12, 40; IV, m. 1, 8; IV, m. 1, 32.


8. T. F. Mustanoja, for example, in a substantial chapter devoted to participial constructions in Middle English, dismisses it in a single sentence: "The attributive participle, which shows no essential difference from its present-day counterpart" (a rolling stone, etc.), is not discussed in the present work at all": A Middle English Syntax, Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique de Helsinki, 23 (Société Néophilologique, 1960), p. 552.

9. See Marchand, pp. 229–30; MED, s.v. -able.

10. See Marchand, p. 204. According to the citations in the OED, besides the words current in Old English, only eighteen more had appeared in Middle English before Chaucer worked on Boece.

11. See Marchand, pp. 204–05.
14. Both the MED, s.v. -ment, and Marchand, pp. 331–32, deal with -ment only as a nominal suffix in English, with no mention of it as an adverbal one.
16. See Donner, pp. 11–12.