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## IRONY AND SYMPATHY IN *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*: A RECONSIDERATION

By DAVID LAWTON

"The lover who thinks while I was so happy, thinking of my love's faithfulness, she was busy deceiving me, is deceiving himself. If every state in which we live is absolute, that happiness was not contemporary to that betrayal. The discovery of that betrayal is merely one more state, incapable of modifying 'previous' states, though not incapable of modifying their recollection. Today's misadventure is no more real than yesterday's felicity."

Jorge Luis Borges, "A New Refutation of Time".<sup>1</sup>

### I

In her essay in memory of C.S. Lewis, Elizabeth Salter eloquently defended his reading of *Troilus and Criseyde* as "a great poem in praise of love".<sup>2</sup> Enlarging upon Lewis's sense of duality in the work, she argued that "its greatest problem" is the poet Chaucer who "assumes his right to take sudden decisions about the development of his work in mid-career" by deepening the portrayal of human love in Book III and thereby establishing what she saw as an irreconcilable tension with Book V's epilogue. The difficulties of the work spring from this "freedom of imaginative movement", Chaucer's desire to understand the "complex human condition" of love, "to admit its dignity as well as its vulnerability, and to give serious status to bodily as well as to spiritual compassion".<sup>3</sup> This is a comment to equal anything by Lewis, full of excitement and perceptive sympathy; and it is for these qualities that Elizabeth Salter defended Lewis's liberal reading against others less inspired and more severe. Even for those who feel as I do that there is no failure of artistic foresight in the radical contrast between Book III and the epilogue, her essay remains a fine corrective: it is one of the best statements of a "sympathetic" reading of *Troilus* against the "ironic" readings to which we have been increasingly subject. The nomenclature here is borrowed from John P. McCall, who in his review of *Troilus* criticism in 1968 distinguished sharply between a "sympathetic" reading, dualistic and in basic agreement with Lewis, and an "ironic" reading endorsed by McCall as paying, in his view, proper attention to "the various kinds of irony - comic, philosophic and dramatic".<sup>4</sup>



There seems room for arbitration here: I see no good reason why an "ironic" reading should be steadfastly unsympathetic (although most are), or why a "sympathetic" reading should not accommodate the ironies that can be shown to exist. Accordingly, in this essay I attempt some classification of the types of irony in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and I make a few suggestions about the interplay between irony and sympathy in our reading of the poem. I adopt the method and terms recommended by Wayne C. Booth in *A Rhetoric of Irony*.<sup>5</sup> Central to Booth's method is what he calls the reconstruction of irony, and this involves the distinction between stable irony, in which successful reconstruction - which will produce a correct "reading" - is possible, and unstable irony, in which it is not. In all irony, Booth argues, the reader is required to reject the literal meaning, or an unspoken proposition on which it depends, and must proceed to try alternatives. Then comes the crucial step: a decision must be made about the author's beliefs, the way in which alternatives to the rejected meaning conform or fail to conform to the intention of the work. Stable irony allows us to do this; unstable irony does not, and is a total concealment of the author's attitudes beyond the range of critical reconstruction. Cutting across these two kinds, there is also a distinction between overt ironies, which conspicuously assert an irony which the author wants to share, and covert ironies. Booth's achievement is to have provided something close to a "grammar" of irony by which it may be parsed successfully; and central to this is his methodological insistence that critics who claim to detect irony must be explicit and candid, in context, about what the irony is. They are obliged, that is, to state overtly, to "close-read", the proposition(s) on which they judge the irony to rest. Using this method as the basis of a brief study, I shall show that much "ironic" interpretation of *Troilus* emphasizes covert ironies at the expense of overt ones and, more important, claims as stable ironies what are in fact unstable ones; in short, that much of what McCall welcomed as "ironic" reading is critically spurious.

One premise must be stated clearly. I shall be arguing that the ironies of *Troilus* are not all of a kind and do not all point in the same direction, that it is accurate to speak of Chaucer's ironic technique rather than his ironic consciousness. It would be self-defeating to postulate an unreliable narrator-persona, and I should prefer to think of an ironic voice, or as Booth (p.176) proposes for Fielding, a reliable but ironic author.<sup>6</sup>

## II

The major dramatic irony of *Troilus* rests in the reader's foreknowledge about the outcome both of the Trojan wars and the love of Troilus and Criseyde. The proem to Book I foreshadows Criseyde's dereliction (I 56) and places Troilus firmly in the Trojan context by referring to him as "the Kyng Priamus sone of Troye" (I 2),<sup>7</sup> while the narrative of Book I opens with a reminder of the war's cause (I 57-63) and a statement of Calchas' prophetic foresight and his desertion of Troy 64-84). The irony is



continually reinforced, mainly by further stable and overt ironies, such as those on the theme of Fortune's implacable malevolence against Troy, not least in Diomedes's brutal speech to Criseyde in Book V (871-924) forecasting the fall of Troy. It is also reinforced by stable, covert ironies, such as the parallel between Troy and Thebes begun with Criseyde's reading-matter in Book II and culminating in Troilus' dream in Book V and his ironic rejection of its exposition by Cassandra (V 1457-1533). Several of these stable, covert ironies occur in Book IV, where the lovers exercise their free will in making a rational decision to accept Criseyde's departure - a decision, however, which is based on false premises. Criseyde believes that Calchas will consent to her return to Troy as soon as he finds out how well she is faring there (IV 1338-44) - in any case, there will soon be a peace treaty (1345-51); and, while Troilus warns against this, constructing a scenario in which Calchas will encourage Criseyde to marry a lusty Greek, his rejoinder is built on the fiction that Calchas would be wrong to argue that "this citee nis but lorn" (IV 1479). In Criseyde's case, the covert irony is pointed by an overt authorial comment: she "spak right as she mente" (IV 1418). In the circumstances, two hundred lines after her deathly swoon, this can hardly mean that Criseyde did *not* mean what she said, that she was not "in purpos evere to be trewe" (1420) when she left Troilus. It is ironic only because it participates in the general dramatic irony, which negates the efficacy of Criseyde's feelings.

The stable dramatic irony is always present, but in the earlier parts of the poem, when the wheel is ostensibly turning in Troilus' favour, it more often takes covert forms. So Criseyde is influenced in her decision to accept Troilus by the song in praise of love sung by her niece Antigone. This is usually called "Antigone's song"; but when Criseyde asks Antigone who wrote it, Antigone replies:

Madame, iwys, the goodlieste mayde  
Of gret estat in al the town of Troye . . .  
(II 880-1)

I presume that this must refer to Helen, the major cause of the Trojan war. This irony is consistent with that which has Pandarus, on the morning that he first takes Troilus' suit to Criseyde, being woken by "the swalowe Proigne" (II 64) - and her sedative song of a revenge for rape.

So rich is this vein of stable irony that it is hard to know where to stop. In Book II, for example, Pandarus is given the somewhat unusual device of an extended analogy, rather in the style of an epic simile, to inspirit Troilus with the hope that Criseyde will incline towards him. The fall of an oak proves that hard work in "a grete empyse" (II 1391) can lead to great joy:

Thenk here ayeins: whan that the sturdy ook,  
On which men hakketh ofte for the nones,  
Receyved hath the happy fallyng strook,  
The grete sweigh doth it come al at ones,



As don thise rokkes or thise milnestones;  
 For swifter cours comth thyng that is of wighte,  
 Whan it descendeth, than don thynges lighte.

But reed that boweth down for every blast,  
 Ful lightly, cesse wynd, it wol aryse;  
 But so nyl nat an ook, whan it is cast . . .

(II 1380-9)

Yet, if I am right, the image is full of foreboding. It is not to be found in *Il Filostrato*, and Root takes it to be an amplification of a proverb, suitably enough for Pandarus. Lines 1387-9 follow a proverb very closely: "Oaks may fall when reeds stand the storm". But the proverb Root suggests, "A great tree hath a great fall", or others like "The tree (oak) is feeble that falls at the first dent", imply little of the detail of lines 1380-6.<sup>8</sup> It is possible, I think, to identify a further source for the image. There may well be an allusion here to the famous passage from Book II of Virgil's *Aeneid* describing the fall of the citadel of Troy:

Tum vero omne mihi visum considerare in ignis  
 Ilium et ex imo verti Neptunia Troia;  
 ac veluti summis antiquam in montibus ornum  
 cum ferro accisam crebrisque bipennibus instant  
 eruere agricolae certatim; illa usque minatur  
 et tremefacta comam concusso vertice nutat,  
 vulneribus donec paulatim evicta supremum  
 congemuit traxitque iugis avulsa ruinam.<sup>9</sup>

Much of the detail tallies. Chaucer's adjective "stordy" suggests the size and age of the tree, like Virgil's *antiquam*, and although Pandarus does not mention mountains, the comparison with an avalanche ("thise rokkes") and other elements ("the grete sweigh", "descendeth") suggest a long and accelerating fall. "The grete sweigh" (1383) would in fact be a remarkably apt rendering of Virgil's *congemuit* (*OED* "sweight": "the sound of a falling body"). It is plausible that Chaucer is alluding to Virgil here. The reconstruction of so learned an irony (at Pandarus' expense) would simply restate the dramatic irony: it associates the outcome of Troilus' love for Criseyde with the conquest of Troy by the Greeks.

It would be easy to overstate the critical implications of such dramatic irony. There is nothing here to show a predestinarian attitude or argue that the lovers are entirely Fortune's slaves. It is a matter of tragic atmosphere, not of philosophy. It is right to insist forcibly that Troilus and Criseyde can and do make important choices at every stage of the narrative. Neither, however, in the face of irony so consistent, can one assert that they are entirely free to do whatever they choose. At the same time, there are stable and overt ironies which stress that the fall of Troy is itself a result of choice. The most important of these is the narrator's comment on the decision of the Trojan parliament to exchange Criseyde for Antenor, a passage which reminds us just how overt Chaucer's overt irony is:



O Juvenal, lord! soth is thy sentence,  
 That litel wyten folk what is to yerne,  
 That they ne fynde in hire desir offence;  
 For cloude of errour lat hem nat discerne  
 What best is; and, lo, here ensauple as yerne.  
 This folk desiren now deliveraunce  
 Of Antenor, that broughte hem to meschaunce.

For he was after traitour to the town  
 Of Troye; allas, they quytte hym out to rathe!  
 O nyce world, lo thy discrecioun!  
 Criseyde, which that nevere dide hem scathe,  
 Shal now no lenger in hire blisse bathe;  
 But Antenor, he shal com hom to towne,  
 And she shal out; thus seyde here and howne.

(IV 197-210)

The rhetorical technique, with its self-conscious exclamatio and sententious pointing of an exemplary moral, leaves nothing of the reader's response to chance - except perhaps a renewed appreciation of the dramatic irony, that the parliament helps to make two traitors in place of one. But there is another important element in this passage, the rather unBoethian extension of the word "world" to include the decisions of human beings: "O nyce world, lo thy discrecioun!" The Trojan "folk" exercise their free will and in so doing place a further constraint on the lovers' freedom of choice. One can hardly argue that ironies implying fatality and ironies implying choice may cancel each other out; the conclusion must be that the poem is an analysis of choice, of limits (including others' choices) set on the freedom of the will, and that the poem poses questions precisely about the *degree* of freedom. Only Pandarus here believes in unlimited free will and it leads him, as it has led some critics, to hate Criseyde (V 1732).

The issue is not whether Troilus and Criseyde are free to choose, but whether anything that they could choose might conceivably protect their love and so guarantee their freedom. And the dramatic irony still stands: present choices once made become historical necessities. As readers we have the mimetic experience of divine foreknowledge, and this is the mainspring of the dramatic irony. But it is also true that, through the author's posture as a concerned historian and through the ironies of choice, we also undergo an equivalent of Troilus' (and Chaucer's?) experience, of wishing that things did not have to be as they are. It is the tension between these two sorts of irony, ironies of fatal necessity and ironies of fateful will, that creates the balance between involvement and detachment, between appreciation of the lovers' nobility and wise pessimism about their frailty - the "sort of paradoxical sympathy" that G.G. Sedgewick saw as the pleasure of "general dramatic irony": "for, though it is sympathy, it is likewise detached . . . The whole attitude of the interested spectator is ironic".<sup>10</sup>

The interplay which is the substance of these ironies, between necessity and will, assists us in certain discriminations on the



surface of the narrative. It is true, as Robert apRoberts argues, that Chaucer goes to some lengths to make Criseyde's departure from Troy appear unavoidable, the equivalent of Boethian "conditional necessity". ApRoberts then suggests, however, that Chaucer intends this impression to mitigate Criseyde's fall to Diomedes. I fail to see how this view can be upheld: the ironies of Book V work solidly against it, and they are supported by some explicit, non-ironic condemnation. In this part of the poem there are small-scale covert ironies, such as Criseyde's writing her wretched answer to Troilus' last letter "for routhe - / I take it so" (V 1587-8). But the reconstruction of this requires great care. Does Chaucer mean that Criseyde is not sorry? He cannot mean this: Book V is full of Criseyde's guilt and remorse. The contrast must be between her sympathy and its inadequate manifestation in the letter (which Shakespeare's Diomedes would have called paltering), or it must lie in the singularly comfortless way Criseyde demonstrates her *routhe* to Troilus in Book V compared with Books II and III (and with the *routhe* she takes on Diomedes).

Such ironies, however, and the same phrase "for routhe", make a fine test-case for knowing when to stop. Criseyde is to blame, and Chaucer says so:

And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,  
For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,  
Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yit for routhe.

(V 1097-9)

It spoils a delicate judgement to find irony here. What could the irony conceivably be? The poet says three things: that he would like to excuse Criseyde, but can't - he admits the "untrouthe"; that Criseyde was sorry; and that he is still prepared ("for routhe") to pity her. To undermine one of these three elements would also be to cast doubt on the others. And which one would it be: the poet does not feel compassion; Criseyde was not sorry; perhaps, even, there has been no "untrouthe"? The result is total interpretative collapse, an infinitely unstable irony. And why postulate an irony of this kind when there is no irony signalled (for the statement is not evidently incongruous)? Criseyde is to blame: that is not to say that one must regard her as evil or bad, or expect Chaucer to sound like Boccaccio at the end of *Il Filostrato*, or assume, as Donaldson seems to do, that to assign blame is a central purpose of the poem. This is more like Henryson's attitude to Cresseid than Chaucer's to Criseyde, and in Henryson, significantly, the dimension of the Trojan wars has been almost entirely lost: Henryson's Greek camp is a well planned assemblage of handsome town-houses. Criseyde does not become an abstract principle in Book V, nor is she without sorrows, some of her own making; but we are asked to view Book V from Troilus' standpoint, and for him she is like a hostile Fortune, her desertion the spiritual equivalent of the Greeks' destruction of Troy. Criseyde's character is not of paramount importance, unless we are prepared to argue that with another woman Troilus could have achieved an infinity of earthly happiness. Criseyde's character is a part, perhaps a product, of the *amplificatio* of the poem; it is itself a demonstration of the major thematic ironies. The frequent



local ironies at the characters' expense are rhetorical, not psychological.

I have detected two central themes behind the stable ironies of *Troilus*, and I have noted some of the most important examples of covert irony. Most of the stable irony in the poem, however, is overt, and the longer examples closely follow the pattern of IV 197-210 (above, p. 98). For example, stanzas 31 to 34 of Book I (211-38), enlarging upon Troilus suddenly falling in love, begin with an *exclamatio* against the world and will,

O blynde world, o blynde entencioun! (211)

comment extensively on the obvious irony in Troilus' precipitate loss of his previous contempt for love, and offer Troilus as an example to "Ye wise, proude and worthi folkes alle" (233) of the *sententia* that "may no man fordo the lawe of kynde" (238). Since this is an overt irony, there is little point in treating it as a covert one. It is only reinforced by the local unstable irony (an analogy not a simile) comparing Troilus to "proude Bayard" (218). Nor should one feel, in hope of finding more in these stanzas than meets the eye, that Chaucer protests too much: the style of *Troilus* is based on amplification. It is an art of large ironic surfaces as much as strait depths. These four overt stanzas tell us what they tell us, and reinforce our sense of ironic superiority to Troilus. D.W. Robertson's treatment of this passage is in fact inspired by a category mistake: this is not covert irony and cannot be reconstructed to make the serious moral point that Troilus is denying his spiritual humanity and sinking into animal lust.

This passage demonstrates that much of the local overt irony of the poem is unstable; it reinforces the reader's superiority but it cannot be reconstructed. There is another obtrusive example on the verge of the central love-scene, as Troilus embraces Criseyde:

What myghte or may the sely larke seye,  
Whan that the sperhawk hath it in his foot?

(III 1191-2)

This is a predatory image: are we then justified in extracting, say, a feminist moral? Certainly not: almost immediately Troilus says to Criseyde "Now be ye kaught" (III 1207), and Criseyde's reply firmly states that her capture is the result of her own free choice (III 1210-11). Can the analogy with hawk and lark be taken as an indication, again, of animal lust? It surely cannot: what stated grounds for connection are there between birds killing and and humans making love? This has to be an unstable irony, and it is very common in Chaucer's poetry: a use of metaphors (rarely), similes or analogies that are almost conceitful in their contextual incongruity. They present the main evidence for declining to follow Elizabeth Salter in speaking of Chaucer's "sudden decisions about the development of his work in mid-career", for by their means Chaucer appears to foreshadow later (and, by inference, planned) changes of tone. The technique deserves to be called Ovidian, and it underlies Dryden's comparison between Chaucer and Ovid in terms



of wit and "turn of words".<sup>11</sup> It is one of the keys to Chaucer's and Ovid's mastery of *epanorthosis*, the skill of frequent, sudden and effortless shifts of tone, and in both authors it produces a partly mannerist art where the mannerism does not necessarily detract from the reader's sympathy. It certainly does not detract from the "paradoxical sympathy" of Sedgewick's spectator. It merely treats us as the spectators we are and does not seek "a willing suspension of disbelief". It is a tonal instability by which time is refuted: the poem's tone creates the one sort of time in which today's felicity and tomorrow's misadventure - as well as another age's retrospect - can, after all, be contemporary.

At this stage of my essay, as I thought originally, it seemed appropriate to give some examples of ironic misreading or over-reading by other critics. Yet I have found surprisingly few worthwhile examples of sustained close reading to justify this exercise. There is, of course, on the ironic side, the notorious reading of Troilus' address to Criseyde's empty house, "O thow lanterne of which queynt is the light" (V 543); but the case for a pun on "queynt" here manages to be both grammatically feeble-minded and logically inept (for if Troilus is to be convicted of idolatry, he must see more light in Criseyde than a "queynt").<sup>12</sup> This does not command attention, let alone assent. On the sympathetic side (more or less; more to Troilus, less to Criseyde), Donaldson has offered a witty study of his narrator's portraits of Criseyde - in Book I, for example:

So angelik was hir natif beautee,  
That lik a thing immortal seemed she,  
As dooth an hevenissh parfit creature  
That down were sent in scorning of nature

(I 102-5)

Here is Donaldson's paraphrase, in terms of "what the narrator has succeeded in saying": "in his opinion, there was none so fair in the whole city of Troy (and one wonders how he got to Troy that was sacked several thousand years ago), because her natural beauty surpassed everyone's, being so angelic (or angel-like), that she seemed like an immortal thing (i.e. an angel), as does a heavenish perfect creature (i.e. an angel), of the kind that might be sent down in scorn of Nature (i.e. her natural beauty was so great that it was supernatural)" (*Speaking of Chaucer* p.54). The ironies (*lik*, *as*, *seemed*) enable us to see through the narrator and to distrust descriptions in terms of appearance, seeming, *manere*, other people's opinion and so on. Let us assume that this is irony and reconstruct it: "Criseyde, though beautiful, was still a human being". And even the milder reconstruction places exactly the wrong emphasis on Criseyde's beauty, since the lines exist to tell us quite how beautiful a human being Criseyde was. Then why should we assume irony? More to the point, how can we assume irony when we find Troilus described in an exactly comparable manner?

And in the town his manere tho forth ay  
So goodly was, and gat hym so in grace,  
That ech hym loved that loked on his face.

(I 1076-8)



So lik a man of armes, and a knyght,  
 He was to seen, fulfild of heigh prowess;  
 For bothe he hadde a body and a myght  
 To don that thing, as wel as hardynesse;  
 And ek to seen hym in his gere hym dresse,  
 So fresssh, so yong, so worthy semed he,  
 It was an heven upon hym for to see.

(II 631-7)

In the second stanza Criseyde is the witness, and the lines undoubtedly prepare us for her response to Troilus: "who yaf me drynke?" (II 651). But the style is much the same. "So lik a man of armes"; "so worthy semed he": these lines cannot possibly be reconstructed to mean that Troilus was an unworthy sluggard in the field.

Although I cannot agree with Donaldson, his mode of criticism is essentially fair practice: that is, it gives a complete reading of how what Donaldson takes to be the meaning of the passage is attained. By contrast, it must be said that ironic readings of the poem are frequently unfair. An extreme recent example is an essay by Alan Gaylord on "The Lesson of the *Troilus*".<sup>13</sup> The first part of the essay consists of an attack on sympathetic readers such as Donaldson, David and, particularly Salter, who, Gaylord charges, revise the lesson of the poem "to accord with modernist predilections" for such suspect notions as duality and complexity. It is as if in the good old days passionate love was a laughably simple phenomenon, like bubonic plague. Gaylord places himself in an embarrassing critical position: he disdains complexity while embracing irony; and only adept reasoning and close explication could rescue him. In fact, the one exemplary passage of close reading, of Troilus' extended soliloquy on free will in Book IV (958-1078), is vague, concluding that "Troilus has been wading in water that is too deep for him" (p.35), on the strange ground that the passage is ill-written; and, for the rest, historical speculation about what Gower and Strode might have thought does little to bolster Gaylord's credentials as authentic keeper of the medieval tablets. (Nor, for that matter, would any amount of extraneous reference to other medieval sources resolve the tone of Chaucer's poem).<sup>14</sup> This is a response to Gaylord's stance as critic in his rather patronising censure of what are, after all, the considered judgments of distinguished medievalists, not the jejune maunderings of naive modernists. I have highlighted it not in order to be gratuitously rude but because its tone is unhappily typical of much ironic reading. Such huffing is unnecessary, and obscures the considerable strength of much ironic reading (especially, of course, Robertson's). There is another reason for dwelling on Gaylord's approach. The case to be made about Troilus' predestinarian soliloquy is good and plausible: interestingly, Gaylord does not make it, for his close reading ends the moment he invokes Boethius. This under-lines the premise on which ironic reading is based. Rather, therefore, than expend more words on further close reading, on which ironic interpretation does not depend, it seems better to confront the question: how Boethian is *Troilus and Criseyde*?



For some critics, it is really the poem's machinery that is Boethian - the authoritative analysis of mutability, the workings of fortune in a sublunar world as a necessary aspect of what eternally is Divine Providence, give a destinal framework for the poem which makes it possible that Troilus' destiny is to love, and lose, Criseyde. This is not to say that Chaucer is wholeheartedly Boethian. For Alfred David, in Book III "Boethius, like the melancholy Jacques, is made part of the comedy to gladden our hearts";<sup>15</sup> more sombrely, T.A. Stroud writes that Chaucer "does not even seem to share Boethius' belief that man can grasp the principle reconciling foreordination and free will. All men are dwelling in a besieged Troy."<sup>16</sup> For others, what is Boethian is the poem's temper and final meaning. It is not only that Troilus hopes for happiness from what is mortal, flawed and inevitably transient, and must die before he can escape the torment of Fortune and recognise how fragile human happiness is. It is also that human love and sexual passion is to be viewed, by the student of Philosophy, austerely, even coldly, with moral distrust and in the spirit of *contemptus mundi*. Boethius may exalt the cosmic power of love, but he denies it sexual human expression.

There is no conceivable objection to saying that *Troilus* is a Boethian poem in its philosophical machinery, its language for change. The kind of love experienced by Troilus is tragic and noble, trapped within cycles of time with their ambiguous promise of a change and a renewal that may be more biological than spiritual, and it is also - in an absolute perspective - foolish, since it desires a stasis that is possible only in death. The extremes of human love generate the tension between mortal flesh and immortal spirit which temporal existence, their temporary union, may have concealed but cannot, without grace, remove. I take this to be the essence of a "sympathetic" reading of the poem. An "ironic" reading inspired by Lady Philosophy's answers would reject these as real problems, even though the questions are posed in the poem and the answers, as Elizabeth Salter saw, are not overtly provided.

The Boethian machinery serves to universalize the story; but the poem is not entirely Boethian in philosophical temper. In the epilogue, Chaucer is ready to imply that his book is worthy to

. . . Kis the steppes wher as thou seest pace  
Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan and Stace

(V 1791-2)

but he is also wholly ready to concede that it may require moral and philosophical correction from those medieval writers, Gower and Strode. It is *Boece*, after all, that is a book of "moralitee", while *Troilus* belongs with "enditynges of worldly vanitees".<sup>17</sup> For Boethius denies the value of human sexual love. It is not a Boethian decision even to begin a poem of 8000 lines about a love-affair, still less to allow his hero such evident delight in false felicity:

Hire armes smale, hire streyghte bak and softe,  
Hire sydes longe, flesshly, smothe, and white



He gan to stroke, and good thrift bad ful ofte  
 Hire snowissh throte, hire brestes rounde and lite;  
 Thus in this hevene he gan hym to delite,  
 And therwithal a thousand tyme hire kiste,  
 That what to don for joie unnethe he wiste.

(III 1247-53)

There is no accounting in Boethian terms for the sheer specificity of this sequence, for its audacious association of carnal and spiritual delight, or for the mutual trust and understanding that has already been developed between Troilus and Criseyde (III 464-7). As a presentation of a Boethian moral it is about as convincing as would be a condemnation of pornography in a series of slide-lectures. Yet it is true that sympathetic readings have tended to underplay the poem's Boethian elements, and the justice of much ironic reading should be granted. What must not be granted, however, is that the *Consolation* can be used as a straightforward gloss on *Troilus*. To deprive a Boethian interpretation of inevitable force, and many claimed ironies, it is enough to admit that Chaucer's relation with Boethius in *Troilus* is dialectic, rather like his relation with Macrobius in the *Parliament of Fowls*. If I find most sympathetic readings preferable to most ironic ones, it is because they permit more careful distinction between a poem and a crib.

But the preference cannot be absolute. Chaucer's dialogue with Boethius opens up an endless range of interpretations and the result, for altogether honourable reasons, is an endless argument: as in Biblical criticism, every verse has its counter. This is an area where neither Chaucer nor ourselves can be granted full Boethian freedom of choice. At the start of this essay I proposed to arbitrate between irony and sympathy, and I can best do so by suggesting that both types of reading respond, albeit one-sidedly, to definite and disparate elements present in the poem throughout its thematic and stylistic levels. It seems to me that ironic reading, despite the literal-minded religiosity of its conclusions, really brings into prominence the ludic aspects of *Troilus*; and that the various sympathetic readings engage, not without wishful thinking, with its religious anxieties. In Dante's *Comedy*, Dante the dreamer, who believes that he is led by love of an earthly woman, swoons out of his pity for Paolo and Francesca, placed in the Inferno by Dante the poet, who knows that Beatrice is the Beatific vision: how, this poem asks, can "Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona", love which "condusse noi ad una morte" ever become or lead into "l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle"?<sup>18</sup> This is what I have called, inadequately, religious anxiety: it is the source of Dante's supreme scene of pathos, and it is the mainspring of Chaucer's concerns in *Troilus*. On the ludic plane, I must abbreviate here an argument that deserves more extensive airing. Writing on Andreas Capellanus, in *Preface to Chaucer*, D.W. Robertson has done much to reinstate the wit of his treatise, which consists in self-contradiction, paradox, a zany mixture of right and wrong, sophistry and casuistry of argument; yet Robertson's conclusion, that Andreas is writing a satire, very nearly a tract, on foolish love, is at odds with the great good humour of his analysis. Robertson is quite correct to stress the Christian tensions inherent in a twelfth



century version of an *ars amatoria*. My point is simply that Andreas (like Chrétien, Jean de Meun and indeed Gower in the frame of the *Confessio Amantis*) delights in generating these tensions - and then sidestepping them. We should take a dim view of efforts to depict Ovid's personal opinion of love from the *Ars* and the *Remedia*, given the witty circularity of the entire rhetorical performance. Yet this is how we are prone to examine Andreas. We assume that clerkly casuistry has a meaning extrapolable from the performance; and I do not believe that this is so. The skill of Andreas, and Chrétien, is in unstable irony, in raising a number of complex moral issues in order to make them vanish. It is a self-conscious feat of literary prestidigitation; it is play. Rhetoric disguises and displaces meaning. But love is never more than the game that presents it, and lovers, as well as being players, are the played upon.

I would argue that *Troilus* contains a unique interweaving of these two major ideas of love, a religious view, troubled in its hope of reconciling sacred and profane love, and the ludic, in which the game of love, amoral and ironically perceived by a detailed observer, is less than flattering to its players. Both are present throughout *Troilus*, and the proper response to the poem, accepting their interplay of irony and sympathy, is - like the poem itself - oxymoronic. The religious aspect comprises the hazards of love. It offers great heights, a love that is mutuality and spiritual communion, an image reflected both in *Troilus*' first oxymoron "For ay thurste I, the more that ich it drinke" (I 406) and Criseyde's figurative "Who yaf me drinke?" (II 651). Such mutuality at its best may seem to be wordless (III 463-9); yet the language of love as a game, though it may offer consummation, renewal and even self-improvement, accepts the normal constraints on human communication. We may believe that we know what our lover thinks moment by moment; in fact, this is a tragic misconception. As *Troilus* puts it in Book I:

O verray fooles, nyce and blynde be ye!  
Ther nys nat oon kan war by other be.

(I 202-3)

What view of love does Chaucer invite his readers to take? The Prologue to Book I, adopting the stance of love-elegist who weeps and writes, invokes the fury Tisiphone (I 6-7), suggesting both the kind and degree of love's agony (Pandarus speaks of a woe as sharp as that of Titius in hell, his stomach rent by vultures: I 785 ff) and love's ultimate futility, recalling the infernal fury that despatches Arcite in the *Knight's Tale*. But the contrast developed from Boccaccio in this prologue is between hell and heaven: joyous lovers are invited to remember their own "passed hevynesse" (I 24) and to feel pity for star-crossed lovers

And preieth for hem that ben in the cas  
Of Troilus, as ye may after here,  
That Love hem brynge in hevne to solas

(I 29-31)

The ambiguity is established in line 31, and nothing preceding helps



clarify it: is the "hevene" in which "solas" can be found transcendent or immanent, religious or ludic? The following stanza, anticipating the poem's ending, moves unequivocally, and unexpectedly, in the religious direction

And biddeth ek for hem that ben despeired  
 In love that nevere nyl recovered be,  
 And ek for hem that falsly ben apeired  
 Thorough wikked tonges, be it he or she;  
 Thus biddeth God, for his benignite,  
 So graunte hem soone owt of this world to pace,  
 That ben despeired out of Loves grace.

(I 36-42)

Not only is there the ambiguous foreshadowing of Criseyde's disgrace (I 39); there is, more significantly, the implication that death is the only solace for the disappointed and perhaps (I 42) spiritually troubled lover. In this context, the link between Troilus' love and Troy's welfare already having been articulated, the Prologue postulates love as suffering to which we, as modern Hectors, are to react with compassion.

Love is therefore presented at times as an illness, a threat to life: what is thirsting more the more one drinks but a spiritual diabetes? Almost as often as Troilus pledges his commitment to Criseyde does he mention his death (I 427, 1057). Pandarus is to threaten Criseyde with the prospect of causing Troilus' death, and his own suicide, by the withholding of her compassion. This may be hyperbole, but it has been endorsed by the narrator: "Lo, here his lyf, and from the deth his cure" (I 469). Troilus believes that his destiny is to love (I 520), and this is the cause of his woe: and the belief early on induces a death-wish that is ironically prophetic (I 526-7). His appeal to Criseyde to save him from death (I 536-7) drinks from the same ironic cup. Evidently, this sort of love is also a threat to the soul, as is underlined by comic blasphemy, like Pandarus' prayer to "Inmortal god . . . that mayst nought dyen, I Cupide I mene" (III 185-6), or the cunning authorial comment "Blyssyd be Love that kan thus folke converte" (I 308), which exemplifies a type of wordplay that hints at connections between the earthly and the heavenly:

Alle other dredes were from hym fledde,  
 Bothe of th'assege and his salvacioun

(I 463-4)

This also involves downright sleight of hand: the notion is implanted that Troilus' love represents a *loss* of virtue (I 438), only to be countermanded by the comment that his love is good for Troy (I 470-83), and leads to an *access* of virtue (I 1079-85). Love is at once torturer and comforter, betrayer and reformer. Like an illness, it is not a matter of choice. Troilus did not wish to love; nor did Criseyde: "This false world, alas, who may it love?" (II 420). But they have no choice, or rather - in a polite society - they cannot refuse; and so, as creatures, they resemble their creator: "God loveth, and to love wol nat werne" (III 12).



But love is also presented as a game, for the "Lawe of Kynde" is comic by virtue of its compulsion. Hence the animal imagery. A horse must do what a horse must do; Troilus is like proud Bayard (an image echoed by Pandarus in I 953); he is like a limed bird (I 353); he is caught in a snare (I 507), the old Ovidian connection of *amor* and *amūs*; just as, physically, he is caught in a cupboard (III 601). This is the clerkly code: "He was tho glad his hornes in to shrinken" (I 300). It is a ludic conception of love that is the only one Pandarus understands: "Sometime a man moot telle his owene paine" (II 1501), sometimes a friend must blackmail his niece, sometimes a woman must write her first letter, and sometimes a dinner party and a feigned illness are just what a wise "purveyance", *sub specie ludi*, would decree. As long as their love remains on this level, Pandarus has a total control that extends to supplying everything from cushions to, apparently, rain: "But God and Pandare wiste al what this mente" (II 1561). The idealistic Troilus presents some problems to the arch-manipulator (see, for example, III 1188-90). For Troilus' game behaviour tends to become both exaggerated and sincere, like undisciplined method acting. We even see him working hard to remember his lines: "Mafay," thoughte he, "thus wol I sey, and thus" (III 52). And it is on this level (how will it affect her delicate social position, what will people say?) that Criseyde first worries about Troilus' proxy overtures. Criseyde has more than her share of what accompanies the ludic clerkly view, a Christian pessimism (related to cynicism) about the love game: "Full sharp bigynning breketh ofte at ende" (II 791); "That erst was nothing into nought it turneth" (II 798). The attitude is expressed in a symbolic and ambiguous exchange between Criseyde and Antigone in Book II. Antigone complains of men and their thoughtless games: "They weenen al be love if oon be hoot" (II 892). Criseyde appears indifferent, and, as it were, metaphysically preoccupied: "Ywis, it wil be night as faste" (II 898). Yet when that night falls, it is she who breaks through the structures of game with an altogether new tone of unforced spontaneity:

Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere,  
Ben yold, ywis, I were now nought heere!

(III 1210-11)

After this there can be no more game. The night of marvellous joy passes, and in the morning it is Criseyde who shatters the genre, the literary play of the *aube*, with a resonant prophecy, dramatically ironic, of "desseverance" (III 1424).

The ludic language has a definite function, firstly in implying that, like all games, the love between Troilus and Criseyde will end, and secondly, in providing the broadest possible gloss on the futility of that love which, like Troy, is doomed. After his first sight of Criseyde, Troilus is actually seen deciding to play the game, "loves craft to suwe", as, like Gower's dreamer at the end of the *Confessio*, he makes a mirror of his mind:

Thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde,  
In which he saugh al holly hire figure;  
And that he wel koude in his herte fynde,



It was to hym a right good aventure  
 To love swich oon, and if he dede his cure  
 To serven hir, yet myghte he falle in grace,  
 Or ellis for oon of hire servantes pace;

Imaginyng that travaille nor grame  
 Ne myghte for so goodly oon be lorn  
 As she, ne hym for his desir no shame,  
 Al were it wist, but in prise and up-born  
 Of alle lovers wel more than biforn;  
 Thus argumented he in his gynnyng,  
 Ful unavysed of his woo comyng.

Thus took he purpos loves craft to suwe,  
 And thoughte he wolde werken pryvely,  
 First to hiden his desir in muwe  
 From every wight yborn, al outrely,  
 But he myghte ought recovered be therby;  
 Remembryng hym that love to wide yblowe  
 Yelt bittre fruyt, though swete seed be sowe.

(I 365-85)

I have quoted these three stanzas in full because they represent the movement between the two registers of love commentary outlined here. Troilus' imagination takes the form of religious language, signalled explicitly by the "grace" of line 370; we have here the secular equivalent of Langland's "Kynde Knowyng". Line 378 straightforwardly reminds us that Chaucer is keeping nothing in reserve, enabling us to share completely the dramatic irony. The next five lines, 379-83, have moved from idealism to game, with its slightly demeaning furtiveness indicated in "pryvely" and "in muwe": Troilus cannot escape the cupboard. The last two lines summon up in Troilus' mind a memory of conventional wisdom which is in its grammatical ("though") as well as its lexical structure ("bittre"/"swete") oxymoronic.

The oxymoron is more than a rhetorical device in *Troilus*, as in some other medieval love poetry. It is in its own right a theme, the intolerable contradictions of human love, and a mode, a way of containing these contradictions as all passion, both sublime and commonplace, does. For the oxymoron always combines opposites, such as eternity and time, love and war, God and man, and in *Troilus* its terms deliberately combine religious passion and ludic casuistry, sympathy and irony. Pandarus' role in the poem is to be the oxymoronic counter to Troilus ("By his contrari is everything declared", I 637), and the major speaker of amplified oxymoronic set pieces. One of the most famous is his "Wo worth the faire gemme vertulees" (II 344ff.), in which there are two kinds of dramatic irony: first, this is the burden of what Pandarus will say of Criseyde after her desertion of Troilus; second, Criseyde's "routhe" (II 349), not Criseyde herself but love in a besieged Troy, is "the faire gemme vertulees". The defect in Pandarus' use of oxymoron is that he perpetually looks at only one aspect of its Janus-face:



For thilke grownd that bereth the wedes wikke  
 Bereth ek thise holsom herbes, as ful ofte  
 Next the foule nettle, rough and thikke,  
 The rose waxeth swoote and smothe and softe;  
 And next the valeye is the hil o-lofte;  
 And next the derke nyght the glade morwe;  
 And also joie is next the fyn of sorwe . . .

(I 946-52)

These lines are meant to be encouraging, but they are also capable of being acutely depressing - after one has experienced the "glade morwe" and the "joie". In this case, oxymoron fulfils on the linguistic level the role of Boethian fortune; it is a microcosm of the structure both of medieval tragedy and, by simple inversion, comedy. Moreover, because oxymoron always implies a temporary union of opposites, it enacts for an audience the condition of human love; and within the poem it holds together "contrary states of the soul" by nothing more than poetic virtuosity. Lastly - and this is the origin of critical debate on *Troilus* about irony and sympathy - any one reading of an oxymoron at once implies its opposite. The structural equivalent of oxymoron is therefore dialectic, a simultaneous potential of thesis and antithesis. Structurally, oxymoron leads to a palinode which both is and is not palinodal: while we are physiologically unable to perceive simultaneously that a line drawing, say, can be two things at once, we must at some stage accept cognitively that this is so. To call the ending epilogue or palinode is simple to divulge the shape of our original impression. The terms of the ending overtly contrast divine love with earthly love seen as a human game. These are terms very similar to those of the first three books until Criseyde shatters the ludic structures. Yet from the high mutuality of Book III's consummation to *Troilus*' death we are made to experience an oxymoronic transformation of these terms: human love seen, ambivalently, as a divine game.

### III

Is there any sense, then, in which the epilogue's superb praise of divine love can be seen as compatible with Book III's celebration of human mutuality? The study of irony provides a little new insight, for the epilogue is necessary to the poem's processes of irony.

The last six stanzas, from "Swich fyn hath lo! this *Troilus* for love" (V 1828), are a microcosm of the conflicts of the poem: they are also a last example of the interest in pattern displayed throughout, for they are carefully structured into two parallel groups of three. The first of the parallel groups, stanza 262 (V 1828-34) and 265 (1849-55), depends on the same device of repeated exclamation, "Swich fyn" and "Lo here" respectively. Stanza 262 is a valediction to *Troilus*, and its use of "fyn" to mean both "goal" and "close" is drawn probably from Boethius' Book IV metre 6, in which Philosophy recommends the view from the fixed stars as that which reveals the fixed universal - God - and transcendent love, "the fyn of good". This is the metre from which Stroud plausibly



argues that Troilus' astral journey is a reward for his earthly love, "by love returned". The stanza combines a tender final look at Troilus' noble qualities, his "grete worthynesse", his "noblesse" and the pattern of his love and death with a note of *contemptus mundi*:

Swich fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse!  
And thus bigan his lovyng of Criseyde,  
As I have told, and in this wise he deyde.

(V 1832-4)

Stanza 262, in short, is a valediction of the poem's narrative. In Stanza 265, the note of *contemptus mundi* is much stronger, but the couplet again melts into a regretful tenderness:

Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites!  
Lo here, what alle hire goddes may availle!  
Lo here, thise wrecched worldes appetites!  
Lo here, the fyn and guerdoun for travaille  
Of Jove, Appollo, of Mars, of swich rascaille!  
Lo here, the forme of olde clerkes speche  
In poetrie, if ye hire bokes seche!

(V 1849-55)

The moral condemnation of the first three lines is sweeping; but the last two lines of the stanza make it clear that Chaucer has slipped from talking about the craft of love to talking about the craft of poetry, and we may refer this shift of attention at least to the two previous lines (1852-3). We may make more sense of their reference if we recall that Mars is addressed in the proem to Book IV, that Apollo is the tutelary deity of the muse of poetry, Clio, addressed in the proem to Book II and the muse of epic poetry, Calliope, addressed in the proem to Book III, and that Jove is not only the chief of all pagan powers and gods addressed in every proem but is named specifically, with Mars and Calliope, in the chain-of-love proem to Book III. By this stage of the epilogue we have receded from the narrative proper to its frame, from the play of emotion to its recollection.

The second group, stanzas 263 (1835-41) and 266 (1856-62) begin with apostrophes to an assumed audience, "O yonge fresshe folkes" and "O moral Gower . . ." respectively, and introduce in both cases the sententious third group, stanzas 264 (1842-8) and 267 (1863-9). Both these stanzas deal with the love of Christ, which stanza 264 commends and stanza 267 actively celebrates. There is a double structure in this pattern which in its religious orientation fulfils the whole poem's patterning, and resembles - in its pattern of *exclamatio*, direct address to an audience, and exemplary pointing of a sententious moral - the formal structure of the poem's set-piece overt ironies. It is ironic only by the broadest possible definition of irony in its contradiction between *contemptus mundi* and tenderness, the very contradiction which is usually seen in its juxtaposition with the central love-episode. I cannot see how we can do without the concept of duality here, and it is a duality which has been present throughout in the



interrelation of the poem's two major fields of irony, dramatic, stressing fatal necessity, and voluntary, stressing fatal free will. However logically incompatible, both paired opposites - necessity and contempt, tenderness and will - are true. If it suggests that there is nothing absolute about human happiness, it also suggests that there is nothing absolute about *contemptus mundi*. But there is everything absolute about the love of God, and the consolatory surge of these stanzas is an act of faith in the Pauline sense: we do not see, and therefore we hope. We hope that flesh may be redeemed by spirit, dialectic resolved in unity and duality dispelled in triplicity. *Troilus and Criseyde* is, by design, a structure of duality: "Thus goth the world; God shilde us from meschaunce!" There remains the hope, at once supportive and daunting, that Providence is otherwise.

The consolatory movement of the final six stanzas has a retrospective effect on the three preceding stanzas, 259 to 261 (V 1807-27). Troilus' astral journey is developed from Boccaccio's *Teseida* and from Dante, but its inspiration is in this case Boethian, significantly not from one of Boethius' proses but from two poems, from Book IV metre 6 and from metre 7 of the same book, which foreshadows the whole structure of the poem's narrative, opening with the Trojan wars and ending with the stars ("For the erthe overcomen yeveth the sterres"). Retrospectively, when Christian faith has been fully articulated, the sequence is consolatory, a moving demonstration of grace and an assurance of transcending mortality. On the first reading, however, it is surely not consolatory; it is rather the quintessence of *contemptus mundi*, Troilus as Boethius. And what we do not know is more important than what we can later discover. The debate about the exact quality of Troilus' journey and what it represents is not entirely relevant to its prime function in the epilogue. For we do not know why Troilus laughs; we cannot see what he sees and, being alive, we cannot now feel what he feels. The ironic spectator is thrown down from his seat and onto his knees; he becomes the butt of another's superiority. It is a humbling reversal and it ensures, as nothing else in the poem ensures, that we cannot retain an ironic response to the whole work. For the epilogue exists to shock us out of irony, not into it. It confers on the whole poem the qualities of the central love-episode: authenticity, universality, impenetrability.<sup>19</sup> It is not, we find, a poem that works by special pleading, for in the end we find that we are in the position of the mortal Troilus. This is like a *Consolation* written by "Boethius" the stooge: the questions are indeed real, paradoxical, unresolvable by mortal minds; and that is exactly why we require that leap of faith which alone can offer a resolution. In a sense undreamed by Pandarus, *Successore novo vincitur omnis amor*. The cure for love is love itself.

In short, there is no such thing as a valid "ironic" reading of *Troilus and Criseyde*; the only valid questions, pointed by the poem's multiple ironies, are about the limits applicable to "sympathy". For the tragedy of the poem is not so much to do with its characters as it is abstract, a pattern of mutability in which passion is overborne by circumstance, and the eternalizing impulse of human love left standing by short time. It is a performance



consistent with Aristotle's standard: design is exalted above character, just as for Aristotle the monochrome sketch is preferable to the finished painting, and the pattern of the work, to use Aristotle's analogy like the rhythm of the dance, bodies forth a universal principle of underlying flux.<sup>20</sup> In such an imitation of life and change there can be a poem, a "refutation of time", but there can never be unity. There is no denying Elizabeth Salter's judgment that the epilogue is severe; and, depending on one's response to oxymoron, one may even feel with her that the nobility of the poem lies in Book III. Yet the harshness of the epilogue is the grim guarantor of the poet's truth. There is a very real place in this for discord; or in Spenser's words, too suited to the occasion of this essay, "All Musick sleepes, where death doth leade the daunce".<sup>21</sup>



# NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *A Personal Anthology*, ed. A. Kerrigan (London, 1972) pp.39-40.
- <sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Salter, "Troilus and Criseyde: A Reconsideration", in *Patterns of Love and Courtesy*, ed. John Lawlor (London, 1966) pp.86-106, referring to C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford, 1936) p.197.
- <sup>3</sup> Salter, pp.89, 91, 103-4.
- <sup>4</sup> John P. McCall, "Troilus and Criseyde", in *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, ed. Beryl Rowland (Toronto, 1968), pp.370-84. McCall's article contains a useful bibliography. Of earlier criticism, I shall pay special attention to E.T. Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (London, 1970), pp.46-101 (subsequent references will be incorporated in the text); D.W. Robertson, Jr., "Chaucerian Tragedy", *ELH* 19 (1952) pp.1-37, rpt. in *Chaucer Criticism*, II: *Troilus and Criseyde and the Minor Poems*, ed. R.J. Schoeck and J. Taylor (Notre Dame, 1961) pp.86-121; and a modified version in his *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton, 1962) pp.472-502. This is a classic statement of an "ironic" reading. See also Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley, 1957) pp.124-65; Charles A. Owen Jr., "The Significance of Chaucer's Revision of *Troilus and Criseyde*", *Modern Philology* 55 (1957-8) pp.1-5, rpt. Schoeck and Taylor, pp.160-6; Morton W. Bloomfield, "Distance and Predestination in *Troilus and Criseyde*", *PMLA* 72 (1957) pp.14-26, rpt. Schoeck and Taylor, pp.196-210; Donald R. Howard, *The Three Temptations* (Princeton, 1966); Anthony E. Farnham, "Chaucerian Irony and the Ending of the *Troilus*", *Chaucer Review* 1 (1966-7) pp.207-16. I have also consulted Robert apRoberts, "Criseyde's Infidelity and the Moral of the *Troilus*", *Speculum* 44 (1969) pp.383-402, and "The Boethian God and the Audience of the *Troilus*", *JEGP* 69 (1970) pp.425-36; Stephen A. Barney, "Troilus Bound", *Speculum* 47 (1972) pp.445-58; C. David Benson, "'O Nyce World': What Chaucer really found in Guido Delle Colonne's History of Troy", *Chaucer Review* 13 (1979) pp.308-15; Georgia Crampton, "Action and Passion in Chaucer's *Troilus*", *Medium Ævum* 43 (1974) pp.23-36; Lonnie J. Durham, "Love and Death in *Troilus and Criseyde*", *Chaucer Review* 3 (1968-9) pp.1-11; Lawrence Eldredge, "Boethian Epistemology and Chaucer's *Troilus* in the light of Fourteenth Century thought", *Mediaevalia* 2 (1976) pp.50-75; Joseph E. Gallaher, "Theology and Intention in Chaucer's *Troilus*", *Chaucer Review* 7 (1972-3) pp.44-66; John M. Ganim, "Time and Tone in Chaucer's *Troilus*", *ELH* 43 (1976) pp.141-53; Richard F. Green, "Troilus and the Game of Love", *Chaucer Review* 13 (1979) pp.201-20; Elizabeth R. Hatcher, "Chaucer and the Psychology of Fear: Troilus in Book V", *ELH* 40 (1973) pp.307-24; Monica E. McAlpine, *The Genre of Troilus and Criseyde* (Ithaca, 1978); Colin Manlove, "Rootless Moot Grene Soone Deye: the Helplessness of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*", *Essays and Studies* 31 (1978) p.1-22; Richard H. Osberg, "Between the Motion and the Act: Intentions and Ends in Chaucer's *Troilus*", *ELH* 48 (1981) pp.257-70; Edmund Reiss, "Troilus and the Failure of Understanding", *MLQ* 29 (1968) pp.131-44; Donald W. Rowe, *O Love, O Charite: Contraries Harmonised in Chaucer's Troilus* (Carbondale, Illinois, 1976); A.C. Spearing, *Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde* (London, 1976); Martin Stevens, "The Winds of Fortune in the *Troilus*", *Chaucer Review* 13 (1979) pp.294-307; Davis Taylor, "The Terms of Love: a Study of Troilus's Style", *Speculum* 51 (1976) pp.69-90; Ann Chalmers Watt, "Chaucerian Selves - especially Two Serious Ones", *Chaucer Review* 4 (1969-70) pp.229-41; Rose A. Zimbardo, "Creator and Created: the Generic Perspective of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*", *Chaucer Review* 11 (1976-7) pp.285-98; and, more generally, Donald R. Howard, "Medieval Poems and Medieval Society", *Medievalia & Humanistica* 3 (1971) pp.99-115, and Gerald Morgan, "Natural and Rational Love in Medieval Literature", *Yearbook of English Studies* 7 (1977) pp.43-52.



- 5 Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago, 1974). I have also profited by a reading of D.H. Green, *Irony in the Medieval Romance* (Cambridge, 1979). Green's analyses of irony in *Troilus* are mainly addressed to what I here consider as dramatic irony.
- 6 I have discussed this question in my essay "Skelton's Use of Persona", *Essays in Criticism* 30 (1980) pp.9-28; see particularly pp.9-11 (on *Troilus*).
- 7 All quotation of *Troilus* is from *The Book of Troilus and Criseyde* by Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. R.K. Root (Princeton, 1926; rpt. 1945). The dramatic irony has often been noted since Kittredge; see McCall.
- 8 See Bartlett J. and Helen W. Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly before 1500* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968) p.609; *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, revised by F.P. Wilson (Oxford, 1970) p.584.
- 9 P. Vergili Maronis, *Aeneidos: Liber Secundus*, ed. R.G. Austin (Oxford, 1964) lines 624-31. ("Then in truth all Ilium before my eyes was sinking into the flames; I saw Neptune's Troy uprooted and overturned. It was like an ancient rowan-tree high in the mountains when farmers all around, with stroke after stroke of their axes, strive to fell it. It is bruised with their iron; it begins to tremble and threatens to fall; its crest shakes, its boughs sway, until gradually, overcome by its wounds, it gives a last groan and, torn down from its place, drags ruin down the mountain-ridges.").
- 10 G.G. Sedgewick, *Of Irony, Especially in Drama* (Toronto, 1935) pp.32-3.
- 11 *Essays of John Dryden*, ed. W.P. Ker, 2 vols. (London, 1900) II, pp.254-7, cited by Richard L. Hoffman, *Ovid and the Canterbury Tales* (London, 1966) p.vii.
- 12 John F. Adams, "Irony in *Troilus*' Apostrophe to the Vacant House of Criseyde", *MLQ* 34 (1963) pp.61-5. For an ironic reading of the speech, which is ill-at-ease with the "pun", see Ida L. Gordon, *The Double Sorrow of Troilus* (Oxford, 1970), pp.132-8; and for a much less ironic reading, Morton W. Bloomfield, "*Troilus*' Paraclausithyron and its Setting", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 73 (1972) pp.15-24.
- 13 Alan Gaylord, "The lesson of the *Troilus*: Chastisement and Correction", in *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Mary Salu (Cambridge, 1979) pp.23-42.
- 14 This objection can be made to reports of contemporary understanding of *Troilus*, such as Usk's, emphasized by Gaylord, p.39, or that reported by Lee W. Patterson, "Ambiguity and Interpretation: A Fifteenth Century Reading of *Troilus and Criseyde*", *Speculum* 54 (1979) pp.297-330.
- 15 Alfred David, "Chaucerian Comedy and Criseyde", in *Essays*, ed. Salu, pp.90-104 (p.99).
- 16 Theodore A. Stroud, "Boethius' Influence on Chaucer's *Troilus*", *Modern Philology* 49 (1951-2) pp.1-9, rpt. Schoeck and Taylor, pp.122-35.
- 17 *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (London, 1957) p.265: the *Retracciouns*.



- <sup>18</sup> The quotations are, in order, from *Inferno* v. 103 and 106, and *Paradiso* xxxiii, 145.
- <sup>19</sup> The phrase is that of Charles A. Owen Jr., "Mimetic Form in the Central Love Scene of *Troilus and Criseyde*", *Modern Philology* 67 (1969-70) pp.125-32.
- <sup>20</sup> The interpretation of Aristotle is not that of Lewis but that of John Jones, *Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (London, 1965).
- <sup>21</sup> From *The Shepheardes Calender*, November: the lament for Dido.