Chapters on Chaucer
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CHAPTER VII

TROILUS AND CRISEYDE (CONTINUED)

IN THE PRECEDING chapter we studied Chaucer's way of beginning the various books of Troilus and Criseyde. We now come to his way of ending them. The first book ends with a description of the state of things after Pandarus leaves Troilus and before the action of the second book begins. In stanza 153 (lines 1065-1071) we are told of Pandarus, in stanzas 154-156 of Troilus. The stanza about Pandarus is linked to the words of parting by lines 1062-1064, lines which belong at once to the body of the book and its ending. We learn that Pandarus is in no hurry; he is taking plenty of time to work out his plans before approaching his niece. The actual interval between the action of the first book and that of the second seems to be about a month; Troilus saw Criseyde and fell in love with her early in April (see lines 155 ff.), and Pandarus experienced his "teene in love" (ii. 61-62) on the third of May. Meanwhile Troilus, cheered by the hope that his friend may be able to help him, lies abed no longer:

1072 But Troilus lay tho no lenger down,
    But up anon upon his stede bay,
    And in the feld he pleyde the leoun:
    Wo was that Grek that with hym mette aday!
    And in the town his manere tho forth ay
    Soo goodly was, and gat hym so in grace,
    That ecch hym loved that loked on his face.

1079 For he bicom the frendlieste wighte,
    The gentilest, and ek the mooste fre,
The thriftiest and oon the beste knyght  
That in his tyme was or myghte be.  
Dede were his japes and his cruelte,  
His heighe port and his manere estraunge,  
And ecch of tho gan for a vertu chaunge.

This passage on the uplifting effects of courtly love answers to the longer one at the end of Book III; see below.

But the hero is not well yet. Book I ends with a stanza that makes things more precise:

1086 Now lat us stynte of Troilus a stounde,  
That fareth lik a man that hurt is soore,  
And is somdeel of akynge of his wownde  
Ylissed wel, but heeleed no deel moore,  
And, as an esy pacyent, the loore  
Abit of hym that gooth aboute his cure;  
And thus he dryveth forth his aventurere.

The first line warns us of a shift of scene, and the last three lines bring out the passivity of the hero, who is constant in bearing what comes to him but leaves active measures to his physician. And it is of interest to note that the physician is not the lady (as in the Book of the Duchess) but the friend and go-between. The stanza wants formal linkage with the beginning of Book II, where thise blake wawes (line 1) and this see (line 3) symbolize the hero’s despair after he fell in love, not his state as “an easy patient” after his physician’s first visit. But though the two stanzas are not bound together syntactically, one may with reason connect the alleviation of the hero’s pains with the clearing of the weather; the figures differ but the meaning is much the same.

The second book comes to an end at a critical point in the action, and the final stanza contrives to gain a maximum of suspense:

1751 But now to yow, ye loveres that ben here,  
Was Troilus nought in a kankedort,
That lay, and myghte whisprynge of hem here,  
And thoughte, “O Lord, right now renneth my sort  
Fully to deye or han anon comfort!”  
And was the firste tyme he shoulde hire preye  
Of love; O myghty God, what shal he seye?

Full suspense was impossible for the audience, it is true, as they all knew that the hero’s suit would prosper. But Troilus himself feared the worst, though he hoped for the best, and the poet by his art makes his hearers and readers see things through the hero’s eyes and react accordingly. The direct address to the lovers in the audience not only makes the last stanza more dramatic but also marks it off from what precedes and makes up, to some degree at least, for the want of a true break in the action. The stanza has no connection with the Proem of Book III but it is closely connected with iii.50-58, lines which present Troilus in the same situation and in the same state of mind, though one notes a certain shift in tone and weight. The integration between ii.1751-1757 and iii.50-58 is so nearly complete, indeed, that one is tempted to interpret the former stanza as a pseudo-ending only. But perhaps it would be better to say that the ending of the second book has a pattern all its own. It serves chiefly to express the hero’s feelings at the moment, and his state of fearful hope, or hopeful fear, comes out with a vividness beyond praise.

The pattern of the third book provides an ending in which the poet addresses Venus and the Muses. Before this formal conclusion Chaucer sets a series of five stanzas describing the hero as happiness in love made him (lines 1772-1806). In these stanzas Troilus appears as perfect in all respects, and his perfections are attributed to the influence of Love upon him. To quote,

1804 Thus wolde Love, yheried be his grace,  
That pride, envye, and ire, and avarice  
He gan to flee, and everich other vice.
The uplifting effects of love had already been treated in the ending of the first book, but here they are more fully and more strikingly described. It seems in every way fitting that the poet should follow this inspired passage with his words in praise of those who gave him inspiration:

1807 Thow lady bryght, the doughter to Dyone,
Thy blynde and wynge sone ek, daun Cupide,
Yee sustren nyne ek, that by Elicone
In hil Pernaso listen for t'abide,
That ye thus fer han deyned me to gyde,
I kan namore, but syn that ye wol wende,
Ye heried ben for ay withouten ende!

1814 Thorugh yow have I seyd fully in my song
Th'effect and joie of Troilus servise,
Al be that ther was som disese among,
As to myn auctour listeth to devise.
My thridde bok now ende ich in this wyse,
And Troilus in lust and in quiete
Is with Criseyde, his owen herte swete.

For further discussion of this ending, see above (pp. 113, 118 f.)

In the fourth book Chaucer goes back to the pattern of conclusion which he used earlier; his last two stanzas simply tell us how his hero felt after the experiences which he underwent in the book:

1688 And after that they longe ypleyned hadde,
And ofte ykist, and streite in armes folde,
The day gan rise, and Troilus hym cladde,
And rewfullich his lady gan byholde,
As he that felte dethes cares colde,
And to hire grace he gan hym recomaunde.
Wher him was wo, this holde I no demaunde.

1695 For mannes hed ymagynen ne kan,
N'entendement considere, ne tonge telle
The cruele peynes of this sorwful man,
That passen every torment down in helle.
For whan he saugh that she ne myghte dwelle,
Which that his soule out of his herte rente,
Withouten more, out of the chambre he wente.

The lovers had just had their last night together, and Troilus left in utter misery, a misery that carries over to the fifth book, where lines 13-14 refer back directly to the end of the fourth and bind the two books together.

The ending of the fifth book is also the ending of the poem as a whole. It therefore makes complications not to be expected in the endings of the other books. First of all, where does the ending begin? The story proper is marked off from the matter which follows it by the final couplet of stanza 262 (lines 1828-1834),

And thus bogan his lovyng of Criseyde,
As I have told, and in this wise he deyde.

With line 1835, in other words, begins the second part of the ending of the poem. But the ending has a first part too; namely, the conclusion of the story proper. I put the dividing line between the body of the poem and its ending at the point where the poet stops telling about Troilus in detail and begins to summarize. The concluding stanzas of the story proper, then, I take to be stanzas 250, 251, 252, 258, and 262 (lines 1744-1764, 1800-1806, and 1828-1834):

1744 Gret was the sorwe and pleynte of Troilus;
But forth hire cours Fortune ay gan to holde.
Criseyde loveth the sone of Tideus,
And Troilus moot wepe in cares colde.
Swich is this world, whoso it kan byholde:
In ech estat is litel hertes reste.
God leve us for to take it for the beste!

1751 In many a cruel bataille, out of drede,
Of Troilus, this ilke noble knyght,
As men may in thise olde bokes rede,
Was seen his knyghthod and his grete myght.
And dredeles, his ire, day and nyght,
Ful cruweily the Grekis ay aboughte;
And alway moost this Diomede he soughte.

1758 And ofte tyme I fynde that they mette
With blody strokes and with wordes grete,
Assayinge how hire speres weren whette;
And, God it woot, with many a cruel hete
Gan Troilus upon his helm to bete!
But natheles Fortune it naught ne wolde
Of oothers hond that eyther deyen sholde.

1800 The wrath, as I bigan yow for to seye,
Of Troilus the Grekis boughten deere ,
For thousandes his hondes maden deye,
As he that was withouten any peere ,
Save Ector, in his tyme, as I kan heere,
But weilawey! save only, Goddes wille,
Despitously hym slough the fierse Achille.

1828 Swich fyn hath, lo, this Troilus for love!
Swiche fyn hath al his grete worthynesse!
Swiche fyn hath his estat real above,
Swich fyn his lust! Swich fyn hath his noblesse!
Swich fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse!
And thus bigan his lovyng of Criseyde,
As I have told, and in this wise he deyde.

Chaucer ends the story proper with a stanza (lines 1828-1834) the first five lines of which are done in high style, whereas the final couplet is done in a style so simple that it goes beautifully with the hortatory passage that follows. This stylistic division of stanza 262 into two parts answers to a change in the treatment of the theme. The first five lines are analytic as well as rhetorical, whereas the couplet puts the hero together again and presents his story as a whole, from beginning to end. But in spite of this change the stanza has unity enough: both parts sum up the action, lines 1828-1832 giving us a moralizing summary, lines 1833-1834 a factual summary, each presented strictly in terms of the hero.

This stanza originally followed stanza 258, as we saw
above (p. 107), and here I have left out, for the moment, the passage which Chaucer later inserted about the hero's translation to heaven. A feature of stanza 258 worthy of special note is the repetition, in lines 1800-1801, of the statement made in lines 1755-1756, a repetition which the author himself points out. He failed to develop the statement when he first made it, passing on to the hero's combats with Diomede. He therefore came back to his original generalization and proceeded to develop it properly (in lines 1802-1806). The words to the audience, "as I began yow for to seye," call attention to repetition and development alike.¹

Between stanzas 252 and 258 the poet inserted five stanzas which digress from the story proper but make an important part of the ending of the poem. In stanza 253 Chaucer apologizes for not writing about his hero's martial feats, explaining that he has kept to the subject announced at the beginning, that "of his love," and referring his readers to Dares for a full account of Troilus's exploits in battle:

1765 And if I hadde ytaken for to write
    The armes of this ilke worthi man,
    Than wolde ich of his batailles endite;
    But for that I to writen first bigan
    Of his love, I have seyd as I kan
    (His worthi dedes, whose list hem heere,
1771 Rede Dares, he kan telle hem alle ifeere).²

In line 1769 Chaucer also apologizes for the inadequacies of his version of the love story: "I have seyd as I kan ' I

¹ The meaning of lines 1804-1806 is obscured by the punctuation of the editors; the punctuation given above is my own. The poet tells us that Troilus was without an equal in his day except for Hector and with the one further exception that, by God's will, Achilles slew him.

² In fact, of course, Dares is so far from telling them all together that he tells none of them, though he makes the general statement that Troilus was second only to Hector as an upholder of Troy against the Greeks. Chaucer's reference to Dares is a mere device.
have said as well as I know how.' This is a conventional author's gesture of modesty, but, as we have seen, Chaucer likes to make it and brings it in on many occasions. It is obviously appropriate in the ending of the poem.

To this gesture he ties a whole stanza of further apology, addressed to women:

1772  Bysechyng every lady bright of hewe,
    And every gentil womman, what she be,
    That al be that Crisyde was untrewe,
    That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me:
    Ye may hire giltes in other bokes se.
    And gladlier I wol write, yif yow leste,
1778  Penelopees trouthe and good Alceste.

Here the poet apologizes for writing about a woman who was untrue to her lover. He excuses himself on the ground that he did not invent this feature of the story, and he tells the ladies that if they so wish he will write about women faithful in love, and do it more gladly. This stanza so clearly foreshadows the Legend of Good Women that one is tempted to take it for an addition to the poem, made when Chaucer decided (or started) to write the Legend. It may be, however, that our stanza came first, and gave Chaucer the idea of composing the Legend.

After stanza 254 comes a stanza in which apology yields first place to moralizing, though the poet continues to address the women of his audience:

1779  N'y sey nat this al oonly for thise men,
    But moost for wommen that bitraised be
    Thorugh false folk (God yeve hem sorwe, amen!)
    That with hire grete wit and subtilte
    Bytraise yow, and this commeveth me
    To speke, and in effect yow alle I preye,
1785  Beth war of men, and herkneth what I seye!

Chaucer here tries to persuade the ladies that the moral of his poem is not "altogether for men only" but is also,
indeed mostly, for women. Yet the moral he would have them draw is not the one we might have expected: be faithful to your lover. It would never do for him to teach them such a lesson; the implication that they needed (or might need) that kind of teaching would surely offend them, and would be discourteous besides. But though he could not with propriety warn them against actual or potential evil in themselves, he could perfectly well warn them against such evil in others. Now the tale obviously teaches virtuous men to beware of women. How can this moral be stretched so that it holds for virtuous people generally? The trick can be turned by expressing the moral in more general terms: beware of false folk. But Chaucer was not satisfied to do this. He preferred to phrase the moral in such a way that it holds for women only: beware of men. In making this the moral of *Troilus and Criseyde* the poet was making fun, of course. He could have found no moral for his tale more completely paradoxical, on the face of it, and therefore more amusing. And his fun-making went on, to the very end of the stanza. He tells the ladies of his audience to “beware of men and listen to what I say.” There is one man they can believe, and Chaucer is that man.

Stanzas 254 and 255 obviously go together, and the moral, “beware of men,” paradoxical and funny for *Troilus and Criseyde*, fits in all seriousness most of the tales that make up the *Legend of Good Women*. We may be sure that these two stanzas owe their being to a single inspiration, and that they are connected in some way with the *Legend*. They look more than ever like additions to our poem when we go on to stanza 256:

1786  Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye,
       Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye,
       So sende myght to make in som comedye!
       But litel book, no makynge thow n’envie,
But subgit be to alle poesy,
And kis the steppes where as thou seëst pace
Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.

This stanza with its serious, yet intimate tone would follow stanza 253 appropriately enough, but after stanza 255 it seems out of place. The break in the flow of the verse is so obvious that the editors commonly mark it with a dash, set at the end of line 1785.

In stanza 256 Chaucer has combined conventional features and given to the whole a personal stamp with more than his usual success. The author’s address to his poem is such a feature; it goes back to classical antiquity. Chaucer no doubt knew various examples of its use in classical and medieval literature, and we can point to no particular one of them with assurance as his model. When he called his book little he presumably had in mind not its length but its importance. In other words, the thrice repeated *litel* is a modest gesture, and goes with the humility preached in the last three lines of the stanza. The warning against envy is a literary device much used in endings. The list of major authors in line 1792 also has a conventional character, though one finds it nowhere exactly duplicated. The same authors, with several others, appear in the *House of Fame*, lines 1456-1512. I have already discussed (p. 104 above) the first three lines of the stanza in another connection.

Stanza 256 is followed by a stanza in which Chaucer concludes his address to the poem:

And for ther is so gret diversite
In English and in writing of oure tonge,
So prey I God that non myswrite the
Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge;
And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,
That thow be understande, God I beseche!

But yet to purpos of my rather speche.
Here the address has become little more than a device for linking the stanza to the preceding lines. Chaucer no longer tells his poem how to behave; instead, he prays to God in its behalf, and in effect, though not in form, he addresses the future copyists and readers of the poem, imploring them to be on their guard against the mistakes which an imperfect knowledge of the language may lead them to make. The poet's concern for a good text comes out also in the familiar lines addressed to his copyist Adam:

Adam scriveyn, if ever it thee bifalle
Boece or Troylus for to wryten newe,
Under thy lokkes thou most have the scalle
But after my makynge thou wryte trewe!
So ofte adaye I mot thy werk renewe,
It to correcte and eek to rubbe and scrape,
And al is thorugh thy negligence and rape.

Here however the mistakes are due to negligence and haste, not to any defaute of tonge.

The last line of stanza 257 marks the end of the digres­sive passage and points back to the poet's "earlier speech" for the thread of the narrative now to be resumed. We are not told just where to find the loose end which is to be picked up, but, as we saw above, stanza 258 begins by repeating, in variant form, lines 1755-1756, a device which makes unmistakable the point of resumption. The editors commonly set a dash at the end of stanza 257, in spite of the obvious fact that line 1799 is there to prepare the reader for the resumption of the narrative in lines 1800 ff. The dash goes with the one after line 1785, and the two serve to enclose stanzas 256 and 257, thus marking them parenthetical. But, as we have seen, the truly parentheti­cal stanzas are 254 and 255, even though Chaucer by begin­ning stanza 254 with a participle has linked it grammati­cally to line 1769. In my opinion line 1769 once ended
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with a full stop and lines 1770-1771 were not parenthetical but simply made a separate sentence. This was immediately followed by the two stanzas in which Chaucer addressed his “little book.” When the poet inserted the stanzas addressed to women he tied them very neatly to line 1769 with his “beseeching,” but in so doing he made the final couplet of stanza 253 parenthetical, and thus gave to the stanza a closing awkwardness which it did not have when it was first written.

The insertion of stanzas 253-257 (lines 1765-1799) into the ending of the story proper amplified and elaborated this ending but left it essentially the same. The later insertion of stanzas 259-261 (lines 1807-1827), however, made a fundamental change in the nature of the ending. The story no longer ended with the hero’s death and the summing up which formally closed the action. Between death and summary now came an account of the hero’s translation to heaven:

1807 And whan that he was slayn in this manere
   His lighte goost ful blisfully is went
   Up to the holughnesse of the seventhe spere,
   In convers letyng everich element,
   And ther he saugh, with ful avysement,
   The erratik sterres, herkenyng armonye
   With sownes ful of hevenyssh melodie.

1814 And down from thennes faste he gan avyse
   This litel spot of erthe that with the se
   Embraced is, and fully gan despise
   This wrecched world, and held al vanite
   To respect of the pleyn felicite
   That is in hevene above; and at the laste
   Ther he was slayn his lokyng down he caste.

1821 And in hymself he lough right at the wo
   Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste,
   And damned al oure werk that foloweth so
   The blynde lust the which that may nat laste,
   And sholden al oure herte on heven caste.
And forth he wente, shortly for to telle,
Ther as Mercurye sorted hym to dwelle.

Death was indeed a release for Troilus. His soul rose “full blissfully” to heaven, and there “with full contemplation” he saw the planets and heard the music of the spheres. From this point of vantage he considered intently the things of earth and realized their vanity in terms of the complete happiness of heaven. In particular, he laughed within himself at the woe of those he saw weeping so hard for his death.\(^3\) On this particular he based two generalizations: (1) he condemned all we do “that follows in this way blind impulse that cannot last,” and (2) he concluded that during our earthly life we “should cast all our heart on heaven.” After making these generalizations Troilus went on to the heavenly abode which Mercury chose for him. One finds it noteworthy that the hero’s love affair is not once referred to, directly or indirectly, in the whole passage. At most one may say that the affair makes part of “this foolish world” and like other mundane matters has become vanity to Troilus.

Chaucer presents his hero’s insight, not as a lesson which earthly experience taught him but as wisdom which he won in virtue of his translation to heaven. From his station in the hollowness of the seventh sphere he could not fail to see the truth. But what had he done to earn a place in heaven? So virtuous, valiant, and famous a hero might well be rewarded thus in pagan antiquity, and Mercury’s presence makes it clear that Chaucer here as elsewhere in the poem was using conventional machinery classical in origin. As we have already seen, he took the ascent to

\(^3\) Chaucer does not tell us why his hero found the mourning funny; presumably it did not occur to him that any of his readers would need an explanation. Many modern readers miss the point, however, which is that Troilus by dying exchanged misery for happiness and earth for heaven and it therefore struck him as funny indeed that his friends should be grieving over an event which made him rejoice.
heaven from the _Teseide _of Boccaccio, where it crowns the heroic career of Arcite, but Boccaccio in turn was imitating the apotheosis of Pompey in the ninth book of Lucan’s _Pharsalia_. Both Chaucer and Boccaccio may have used, besides, Cicero’s _Somnium Scipionis _for this and that. Chaucer’s exaltation of his hero, though an afterthought, makes a fitting end for the tale, since it gives to Troilus the supreme reward of virtue.

So far, we have been concerned with the first rather than the second part of the ending of the poem; that is, with the ending of the story proper (lines 1744-1834) rather than the matter which follows it (lines 1835-1869). We come now to the second or concluding part of the ending. It begins with an apostrophe which marks it off sharply from what precedes, but its first three stanzas none the less are stylistically linked to the last stanza (lines 1828-1834) of the first part. Lines 1828-1832 are done in a style continued in stanza 265:

1849  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 guerdon for travaile
      Of Jove, Appollo, of Mars, of swich rascaille!
      Lo here, the forme of olde clerkis speche
      In poetrie, if ye hire bokes seche.

Moreover, lines 1849-1853 make a continuation of lines 1828-1832 in thought as well: they point the moral which the poet had already drawn in line 1832; namely, that the sad fate of Troilus exemplifies the transitory character of worldly things.\(^4\) The two hortatory stanzas 263 and 264

\(^4\) The insertion of stanzas 259-261 (lines 1807-1827) greatly weakened this argument, of course, as the hero, or at any rate his ghost, now had the happiest of all possible fates: he had been brought to the “full felicity that is in heaven above,” and this presumably as a reward for virtuous living in his earthly abode. But Chaucer chose to let what he had written stand.
(lines 1835-1848) which come between, stanzas in which the poet urges young people to take warning by the example of Troilus and reject earthly for heavenly love, make a stylistic break in the passage, though in matter they depart but little from the context in which they are set. But we have already seen (p. 129) that the stylistic break actually comes, not at the end of stanza 262 but between its fifth and sixth lines: the final couplet of the stanza agrees in style with the engagingly simple hortatory stanzas. I take it, then, that the juxtaposition of two styles which Chaucer found needful in the final stanza of the story proper has its natural continuation in the three stanzas that follow, stanzas 263 and 264 conforming in style to the two lines immediately preceding them, and stanza 265 resuming the high style of lines 1828-1832.

It must be added that the hortatory stanzas have a highness of tone (though not of formal style, apart from the "O" with which the passage begins) and a depth of feeling not to be found in lines 1833-1834, the summary character of which precluded anything of the kind. These two stanzas are of Chaucer's very best, and their simple beauty shines the brighter for the rhetoric of their setting:

1835  O yonge, fresshe folkes, he or she,  
In which that love up groweth with youre age,  
Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte  
And of youre herte up casteth the visage  
To thilke God that after his ymage  
Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire,  
This world that passeth soone as floures faire.

1842  And loveth hym, the which that right for love  
Upon a crois,oure soules for to beye,  
First starf, and roos, and sit in hevene above;  
For he nyl falsen no wight, dar I seye,  
That wol his herte al holly on hym leye,  
And syn he best to love is, and most meke,  
What nedeth feynede loves for to seke?
Chaucer's plea to "young folks," and his denunciation of paganism which follows, make a striking contrast with the body of the poem, where he treats courtly love and pagan ways sympathetically enough. We have here, indeed, what amounts to a recantation, reminiscent of the so-called Retractation at the end of the *Canterbury Tales*, where "the book of Troilus" is named among the poet's "translaciones and enditynges of worldly vanitees, the which I revoke in my retractiones." Most modern readers find such endings esthetically disturbing. They feel that an author ought to keep to one point of view. But the Christian moral of the Troilus story is perfectly clear, and it is unreasonable to blame Chaucer for pointing it out. In so doing he followed a familiar and deeply rooted medieval literary convention, that of the religious ending. Such an ending might be perfunctory, but in a serious major work the moral application of the story would have to be taken seriously. Or so Chaucer thought, true man of the Middle Ages that he was. Moderns who think otherwise might well consider the possibility that Chaucer was right after all.

It has been suggested that Chaucer wrote his condemnation of courtly love and paganism to stave off ecclesiastical censure or worse. But we have no reason to think that a poem about courtly lovers whose love affair came to grief would have moved the authorities of the Church of England to action, in the midst of the great schism, and the classical paganism of the poem's setting would have disturbed these authorities even less. Moreover, we may be sure that Chaucer meant what he said. Himself worldly, he knew that unworldliness was the better part. Even the wife of Bath recognizes that

D 75 The dart is set up for virginitiee.

Here however one notes with interest that Chaucer does
not commend the wife of Bath's solution to his young people in whom "love up groweth." The wife says,

D 113 I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age
In the actes and in fruyt of mariage.

But Chaucer ignores this way out, in the *Troilus* at least. The lovers think of everything else when their parting impends, but it does not occur to them, or even to the scheming Pandarus, that marriage might keep them together. And in the conclusion of the poem the young people are urged to seek heavenly instead of earthly love; the sacrament of marriage is not even mentioned. Chaucer seems to have taken it for granted that love and marriage were incompatible. In this particular, if in no other, he clung to courtly-love teaching to the end of the chapter.

The poet likewise meant what he said in stanza 265 about the pagan gods. It was part of the tragedy of Troilus that he lived in a time and place far from the grace of God, the gift of Jesus Christ to mankind. Our virtuous hero had no access, in his life time, to the consolations and the joys of the faithful. He appealed to his gods for help in his misery, but he appealed in vain. Only after death did he win that insight which the Christian may win in earthly life. Chaucer rightly lays stress on the part which religion played in the action, even though that part proved negative rather than positive in its effects, since the religion was false and could do nothing for the hero.

This brings us to another function of the ending, perhaps the most important function of all. The poet, after he has told his story, looks back upon it and sees it in the large. His concluding stanzas give us some idea of what this comprehensive view revealed to him. We learn, among other things, that Chaucer came to see his tale in terms

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6 Line 555 of the fourth book might be taken as a reference to marriage, but the context points in another direction.
of his faith. When he began the poem it was his purpose (as he puts it) to tell the double sorrow of Troilus in loving, but when he came to the end he found he had made an exemplum, with a moral lesson which he could not dodge or overlook. His ending took shape accordingly. It differs in point of view from the body of the poem, but the difference makes the whole richer and nobler than it could have been otherwise. We must rejoice that Chaucer did not tell the story proper in the spirit of a preacher, making exemplary points as he went along, but we may congratulate ourselves that in the ending he brought his religious convictions to bear in words so informed with faith and so charged with beauty.

The last two lines of stanza 265 make a kind of apology for the pagan machinery:

1854 Lo here the forme of olde clerkis speche
In poetrie, if ye hire hokes seche.

By attributing to classical models the “forme” he used, Chaucer is able to make these models responsible for the paganism of his poem. The attribution is right enough, for that matter, though the implication that the poet’s immediate sources were classical gives a (designedly) false impression. One is reminded of the Latin source claimed in the proem of the second book.

Two more stanzas remain:

1856 O moral Gower, this book I directe
To the and to the, philosophical Strode,
To vouchen sauf, ther nede is, to correcte,
Of your benignites and zeles goode.
And to that sothefast Crist that starf on rode
With al myn herte of mercy evere I preye,
And to the Lord right thus I speke and seye:

1863 Thow oon and two and thre, eterne on lyve,
That regnest ay in thre and two and oon,
Uncircumscrip, and al maist circumscrive,
Us from visible and invisible foon
Defende, and to thy mercy everichon
So make us, Jesus, for thi merci dignite,
For love of mayde and moder thyn benigne.

Lines 1856-1859 serve as yet another modest gesture, conventional like the others: the poet directs his work to his friends Gower and Strode for any corrections they may find needful. The author’s request carries with it a complimentary implication; the two friends would naturally feel flattered at being asked to correct Chaucer’s poem. Here the compliment is the main thing; it seems altogether unlikely that Gower and Strode actually did any correcting, or were expected to do any.

Lines 1860-1869 bring the poem to a devotional close with a prayer drawn in part from Dante’s Paradiso (xiv. 28-30). The Canterbury Tales likewise end with a prayer, and this way of closing was customary for literary works in Chaucer’s day, as in the Middle Ages generally. It answers to the benediction at the close of a religious service, and reminds us that even works of entertainment might have a moral purpose besides. Here it is particularly appropriate, for it comes as the culmination of an elaborate and beautiful ending which grows more and more religious in tone and spirit as it proceeds. The closing prayer of Troilus and Criseyde takes us as near the throne of God as we are ever likely to get by the literary road.

The five endings differ markedly in length. That of Book I comes to 28 lines; Book II, 7 lines; Book III, 49 lines; Book IV, 14 lines; and Book V, 126 lines. The longest ending is naturally the one that ends the poem. The ending of Book III is also long, because it marks the height of the hero’s bliss and sums up what he owes to Love and what the poet owes to Venus and the Muses. The ending of Book I is long enough to mark the flight of time and the change in the hero’s fortunes. There is no true break in
the action between Books II and III and between Books IV and V, and the endings of Books II and IV are correspondingly short. In general the endings meet with ease the needs that called them forth, and of the last we can say with J. S. P. Tatlock, "For a combination of grandeur and charm the ending is seldom matched in poetry." 6

* Modern Philology XVIII 625.