Dante and the *Troilus*

In comparison to the obliqueness and ambiguity of Chaucer’s use of classical sources in the *Troilus*, the most striking characteristics of his allusions to Dante are their directness, boldness, and prominence. The *Troilus* begins and ends with allusions to the *Commedia*; a quotation from the climactic prayer of the *Paradiso* marks the high point of Troilus’s ecstasy in Book 3, and many details invite us to compare his love for Criseyde with that of Dante for Beatrice. The solemnity of the context thus created is startling, and it is startling, too, to find even Pandarus playing a Dantean part and inviting us to compare him with Dante’s Vergil at his most magisterial. At the very center of the *Commedia* Vergil states the great principle of the omnipresence of love:

“Né creator né creatura mai,”
cominciò el, “figliuol, fu sanza amore,
o naturale o d’animo. . . .”

“Neither Creator nor creature, my son, was ever without love, either natural or of the mind. . . .” [*Purg. 17. 91–93*]

We are surely intended to recall these lines as we listen to Pandarus’s famous declaration that all men and women are susceptible to “loves hete/Celestial, or elles love of kynde” (1. 978–79).
Of course, much of the point of such passages lies in the parodic manner in which they reflect their originals. Dante's love of Beatrice grows over the course of his journey into a spiritual realization of her role as a vessel of truth. Troilus, by contrast, has been deeply deceived in his worship of Criseyde, and it is only by refusing to recognize this fact that he can preserve the faith that gives his life meaning. In a similar way the "celestial" love Pandarus substitutes for Vergil's elective "love of the mind" is a mere balloon, a vague nothing introduced only to be dismissed, enabling Pandarus to concentrate on the kind of physical desire he understands. Where Vergil goes on in the lines just quoted to remind the Pilgrim that the "good fruit" of his lofty discourse is largely common knowledge ("and this you know," 93), Pandarus shrouds his prosaic view of love in mystery, citing "wyse lered" as authority for his assertions (976). Vergil proceeds to distinguish the unfailing bent of natural love from the liability of elective love to perceptual, emotional, or rational error (Purg. 17. 94–105); Pandarus can succeed in his role as Troilus's guide only by concealing and exploiting this liability as it expresses itself in Troilus's desire for Criseyde.

But these ironies cannot be considered apart from more positive implications. Chaucer has appropriated the resources of the greatest Christian poet to show us through Troilus's experience what human love is in itself, as well as what, being merely human, it cannot be; what rich spiritual capacities are implied by its aspirations as well as how inevitable it is that any worldly attachment, valued too highly, will betray these aspirations. We must take seriously the meaning that Troilus perceives at the heart of his love for Criseyde, though we must also recognize that his sense of having realized that meaning is illusory and that he is in constant danger of "falling away" from the heights of his imaginative vision into despair.

Chaucer's use of Dante is not confined to isolated moments of high parody. Throughout the poem Troilus, Criseyde, and Pandarus appear and reappear in situations enhanced by allusions that invite us to compare them with Dante, Beatrice, and Vergil. A number of important structural elements of the Troilus are best understood in reference to the Commedia, and the central portion of the poem contains a sequence of significant allusions
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that amount to a sustained parody of the climactic events of the Purgatorio.

The best starting point for considering this aspect of the Troilus is the opening of Book 2, in which both the narrator and Pandarus are located in Dantean terms. The narrator's situation is focused in the opening stanza of the Proem:

Owt of this blake wawes for to saylle,
O wynde, O wynde, the weder gynneth clere;
For in this see the boot hath swych travaylle
Of my konnyng that unneth I it steere.
This see clepe I the tempestous mate re
Of desespoir that Troilus was inne. . . .

[2. 1–6]

Despite the tormented syntax and disjointed statement, the lines clearly recall the opening of the Purgatorio:

Per correr miglior acque alza le vele
omai la navicella del mio ingegno,
che lascia dietro a sé mar si crudele. . . .

To course over better waters the little bark of my genius now hoists her sails, leaving behind her a sea so cruel. . . . [Purgo. 1. 1–3]

Dante is here celebrating the release of his imagination from the deadly pressure of the Inferno, where poetry is generated by frustration and ends inevitably in a sense of loss, into a world in which spiritual and poetic fulfillment are possible. The raising of the sails of imagination represents a new freedom to respond to his inspiration in full confidence that it will not betray him. The narrator of the Troilus seeks to establish a similar orientation as he embarks on the story of Troilus's emergence from the inferno of his despair to the hope of a realization of his love for Criseyde. But it is clear that Chaucer's narrator is still at the mercy of something "tempestous" in his material: the violence of his first three lines dramatizes the lack of control made explicit in the fourth, and the uncertain emphasis of "O wynde O wynde," which seems to be nothing more than a purely phonic echo of the
omai of Dante’s second line, suggests an utter confusion as to the nature of the force that drives his poem forward. The recourse to an allegorical gloss in lines 5 and 6 is a clear acknowledgment of the lack of inner coherence in the stanza. The effect of the passage as a whole is to dramatize the problem with which the narrator plays in a gingerly fashion in the remainder of the Proem to Book 2, that is, his lingering anxiety as to the kind of influence being exerted on him by the story he is bound to tell.

The narrator’s conscious misgivings extend only to a vague awareness of something in the story that is not wholly attuned to his own “sentement,” and he is able, with characteristic misguided humility, to attribute the discord to his own insensitivity to the nuances of language. But underlying these symptoms are the same problems of motivation and control that surfaced in the poem’s opening appeal to Tisiphone. In those lines also, Statius bears significantly on the narrator’s dilemma. The opening lines of Book 2 recall not only Dante but a cluster of similes from the Thebaid, in which the image of the storm-driven sailor is used to illustrate the growing madness of the sons of Oedipus. Polynices, rushing through the night from Thebes to Argos, where he will raise an army to lead against his brother, is compared to a navigator caught by a winter storm, who has lost his bearings and so “stands, bereft of purpose [rationis inops], amid the violence of sky and sea” (1. 372–73). The simile seems inappropriate at first because the navigator is wholly suspended while Polynices is acting with outward decisiveness, making his way through dense forest and beating back the menacing undergrowth (376–79). But Polynices’ faculties and motivation are not his own, for they have become wholly subject to Tisiphone and the wrath of Jove. The hapless sailor represents the thwarting of conscious purpose while Polynices’ actions represent submission to an inescapable fate.

Statius presents Eteocles’s situation in the same terms. The shade of Laius, sent by Jove to goad him into preparing for war, rebukes his inactivity by comparing him to a helmsman who idly neglects the rigging and rudder of his ship while a storm gathers around him (2. 105–8). And when disaster strikes in the form of Tydeus, who destroys the Theban cohort sent to ambush him,
Eteocles’ response is illustrated by an image that is very close to Chaucer's—that of a sailor, tricked by the deceptive brightness of the stars into leaving a friendly port, only to be overwhelmed by a great storm:

ipse quidem malit terras pugnatque reverti,
fert ingens a puppe notus, tunc arte relicta
ingemit et caecas sequitur iam nescius undas.

he would rather be on land, and struggles to turn back, but a strong south wind astern carries him along; at last, abandoning his own skill, he groans, and heedlessly lets the blind waves draw him on. . . . [Theb. 3. 28–30]

The lack of self-control implicit in the disjunction of the simile used earlier of Polynices has here become the focal point of the comparison. Where Polynices had appeared outwardly to be choosing his course, Eteocles recognizes that he is powerless in the face of events and cannot free himself from a role about which he feels a deep ambivalence: "now he feels ashamed of his undertaking, now he repents his shame" (3. 22).

Chaucer's narrator is unaware of the implications of what he experiences as a difficulty in directing the course of his narrative, but he too, like the helpless navigator, accepts the limitations of his art, disclaiming authority for the events taking shape in his poem and the atmosphere that surrounds them:

O lady myn, that called art Cleo,
Thow be my speed fro this forth, and my Muse,
To ryme wel this book, til I have do;
Me nedeth here noon othere art to use.
Forwhi to every lover I me excuse,
That of no sentement I this endite,
But out of Latyn in my tonge it write.

[2. 8–14]

The "darkness," which represented the narrator's alienation from the joys of love in Book 1, has here become an inability to respond with assurance to the nuances of the language of love,
an internalizing of his sense of alienation which leaves him by his own account powerless to do anything more than imitate his author’s “Latin” as best he can.

The appeal to Clio, Muse of history, also points to Statius, again by way of Dante. Though none other of the poetae invokes her,¹ Clio appears twice in the *Thebaid*, first in the opening book, where she helps the poet recall the roster of heroes who fell in the cause of Polynices (1. 41–45) and again in Book 10, in which she is summoned to tell the story of Menoeceus’s glorious suicide (10. 628–31). It is typical of Statius’s uneasy relation to his epic task that he should subsume under a single, neutral authority events of such diverse character and significance, refusing to distinguish the inspiration that prompts him to tell of Amphiarous or Menoeceus from that which elicits his nostalgia for Parthenopaeus or his awe at the violence of Capaneus. It is clearly a similar desire to avoid taking full responsibility for his story that leads Chaucer’s narrator to ask Clio to help him cast it in rhyme.

Statius’s appeals to Clio are also noted by Dante’s Vergil, who points to the discrepancy between the impression created by Statius’s poetry and the clear evidence of grace provided by his presence in Purgatory:

“Or quando tu cantasti le crude armi
de la doppia trestizia di Giocasta,”
disse ‘l cantor de’ bucolici carmi,
“per quello che Clìo teco ti tasta,
non par che ti facesse ancor fedele
la fede sanza qual ben far non basta.
Se così è, qual sole o quai candele
ti stenebraron si, che tu drizzasti
poscia di retro al pescator le vele?”

“Now when you sang of the cruel strife of Jocasta’s twofold sorrow” said the singer of the Bucolic songs, “it does not appear, from that which Clio touches with you there, that the faith, without which good works suffice not, had yet made you faithful. If that is so, then what sun or what candles dispelled

¹. The one near-exception is Ovid’s noninvocation of “Clio and Clio’s sisters” in *Ars amatoria* 1. 27 (quoted below, p. 153).
The image of the sailing boat recalls the opening lines of the *Purgatorio* and so contrasts the uncertain character of Clio’s inspiration with the sure sense of purpose that the Christian Statius now shares with Dante. We are bound to share Vergil’s puzzlement at the contrast between Statius’s early darkness and his present state of purity and true belief. The problem is one we will have to deal with in considering the conclusion of the *Troilus*. For the moment, however, I would note only that the passage just quoted, which brings together Jocasta’s twin sons, her “double sorrow,” the image of the sailing boat with which Statius illustrates the brothers’ condition, and the uncertain inspiration of Clio, is a clear precedent for Chaucer’s use of the same imagery. The effect of Chaucer’s allusions in the opening stanzas of Book 2 is thus to identify his narrator with Statius in his most “Theban,” least Dantean aspect, and to set his story at this stage of its unfolding in jarring contrast to the process of spiritual release that Dante traces in the *Purgatorio*. At the same time, by establishing a frame for the Proem with the clear allusion to *Purgatorio* 1 in the opening lines, he implies the accessibility of a Dantean perspective and the possibility that his narrator, like Dante, will find a way out of the dilemma in which we see him, caught amid the dark waters of his ancient source.

But having thus located his narrator vis-à-vis the larger thematic world of the *poetae*, Chaucer seems to shift his ground in the remainder of the Proem, and deals with the narrator’s predicament as an insensitivity to the poetic values associated with medieval love poetry. He does so, moreover, in terms that strongly recall Dante’s discussions of poetic language:

```
Wherfore I nyl have neither thank ne blame
Of al this werk, but prey yow mekely,
Disblameth me, if any word be lame;
For as myn auctour seyde, so sey I.
Ek though I speeke of love unfelyngly,
No wonder is, for it no thyng of newe is;
A blynd man kan nat juggen wel in hewis.
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Ye knowe ek, that in forme of speche is chaunge
Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge
Us thinketh hem, and yit thei spake hem so,
And spedde as wel in love as men now do;
Ek for to wynnen love in sondry ages,
In sondry londes, sondry ben usages.

[2. 15–28]

The narrator’s gloomy comparison of himself to a blind man with no sense of color resembles Dante’s rebuke to those “idiots” who burst into song with no understanding of poetic construction so that “we feel scorn for them just as for a blind man making distinctions among colors” (De vulgari eloquentia 2. 6. 3). Chaucer goes on to discuss the mutability of language (22–25) in terms that closely resemble those of Convivio 1. 5, in which the nobility and permanence of Latin are contrasted with the unstable and corruptible vernacular. The attitude toward the vernacular which this last passage seems to imply is, of course, one that Dante later strongly rejected, explicitly in the De vulgari eloquentia and implicitly in his encounters with earlier Italian poets in Purgatory. In setting this passage side by side with the image of the blind man, Chaucer is suggesting contradictory motives for the narrator’s dislocation. On the one hand his language is “unfeeling” because he is himself insensitive to love; on the other he is accurately rendering his author’s meaning, but historical developments have rendered this meaning remote and strange.

In either case the narrator’s attitude toward his own language is one of extreme diffidence, and it is clear that in claiming to be at the mercy of his auctour, and hence of the language and behavior of a bygone time, he is evading problems that lie much closer to home. In large part his difficulties reflect the peculiarly hybrid character of the Troilus: it is very hard, as we have seen, to adopt a consistent narrative stance toward a medieval romance that makes a radical assertion of its adherence to the tradition of the poetae, a pagan love story told from the perspective of Dante and the Roman de la Rose. But at this point these larger problems of authority are less apparent than in the Proem
to Book 1. The plot of the *Troilus* has been reduced for the moment to the unfolding of Pandarus’s practice of the art of love, a “usage” which, if it is not simply universal, is as typical of medieval culture as of that of the ancient world.

Ovid had pointed to the problem the art of love poses for the “serious” poet when he disclaimed for his *Ars Amatoria* the traditional sources of poetic inspiration, insisting that his real Muse was experience:

\[
\text{nec mihi sunt uisae Clio Cliusque sorores}
\text{seruanti pecudes uallibus, Ascra, tuis;}
\text{usus opus mouet hoc: uati parete perito;}
\text{uera canam} \ldots
\]

Clio and Clio’s sisters did not appear to me as I tended my flocks in the vales of Ascra; practice inspires this work: defer to the experienced bard; I will sing about real things. . . . \[1. 27–30\]

Like Ovid, the narrator of the *Troilus* is preparing to sing of “real things.” But he enters on his task with none of Ovid’s bravado: he is not so bold as to repudiate Clio, history, and tradition, but his relation to them is anxious and confused. The *poetae* cannot provide a model for his undertaking, and he must finally take full responsibility for his account of love. But there is clearly something in the “practice” he is about to describe that disturbs him and makes him fear that his audience will reject it (29–35). The real practitioner of love’s art in the *Troilus* is neither the narrator nor his hero, but Pandarus. Pandarus’s motives and methods, while they do serve to bring love to fulfillment, reveal in the process the cynicism and emotional impoverishment that are inseparable from the Ovidian love doctor’s philosophy: a distrust of spontaneous feeling, doubts about the possibility of intimacy, and a sense of deprivation far closer to real bitterness than the “unlikeliness” to which the narrator himself confesses.\(^2\)

\(^2\) On this aspect of the *Ars amatoria* and its narrative persona, see H. M. Leicester, Jr., “Ovid Enclosed: The God of Love as *Magister Amoris* in the *Roman de la Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris,” forthcoming in *Res Publica Litterarum*. 
The action of Book 2 opens with a view of Pandarus and a second allusion to Dante, which confirm the narrator's misgivings and build on the allusion to the *Purgatorio* with which his Proem begins. Though it is May, the time of "bawme" and gladness, Pandarus is introduced by a description that points up his alienation from the season and gives substance to the narrator's uneasiness about his own language by twice stressing the contradiction between Pandarus's ability to "speke of love" and his distempered state of mind:

That Pandarus, for al his wise speche,
Felte ek his parte of loves shotes keene,
That koude he nevere so wel of lovyng preche,
It made his hewe a day ful ofte greene;
So shope it, that hym fil that day a teene
In love, for which in wo to bedde he wente....

[2. 57–62]

In the following stanza Pandarus lies "half in a slomberynge" while the swallow Procne sings of her tragic marriage and its violent end:

The swalowe, Proigne, with a sorwful lay,
Whan morwen com, gan make hire waymentynge,
Whi she forshapen was, and evere lay
Pandare a-bedde, half in a slomberyng...

[2. 64–67]

The singing of Procne closely echoes a similar account in the *Purgatorio* (9. 12–14), but whereas in Dante her function is largely emblematic, here her song is urged on Pandarus with a peculiar vehemence. Her role would seem to be completed by the first three lines of her stanza (64–66), which correspond closely to Dante's description. But after the narrator has shifted to Pandarus, and the narrative seems about to resume, Procne unexpectedly reappears, and now

so neigh hym made hire cheterynge,
How Tereux gan forth hire suster take,
That with the noyse of hire he gan awake.

[3. 68–70]
The association of Pandarus’s arousal with the content, as well as the noisiness, of Procne’s song points up not only the moral implications of Pandarus’s role, but also the complexity of his motivation. It is another of the many instances in which private feelings seem to be interwoven with his office as “fictile power” and motive force.3

We can learn a good deal about Dante’s relation to the Troilus by comparing the context of Chaucer’s allusion with that of its source in the Purgatorio. There Procne’s song signals that hour before dawn “when our mind, more a pilgrim from the flesh and less captive to thoughts, is in its visions almost divine” (Purg. 9. 13–18). The sleeping Dante dreams of being borne upward by an eagle to the fiery outer boundary of the sublunar world and wakes to learn from Vergil that while asleep he was carried by Saint Lucy to the threshold of Purgatory. There is an obvious contrast between the rich suggestiveness of the divine visitation in Dante’s scene, in which the interplay of dream and visionary reality calls attention to the complexity of Dante’s spiritual situation and the intricacy of his relation to Vergil, and the way in which Chaucer focuses our attention on Pandarus’s thoughts and feelings. The original function of the image of Procne, as of the figure of Ganymede to whom Dante compares himself within the dream (22–24), is to dramatize the uncertainty of the Pilgrim’s response to his initial experience of divine “ravishment.” This response is comparable to Troilus’s identification of himself with Adonis, Daphne, or Europa when love and Pandarus begin to encroach on his deepest feelings. Pandarus by contrast is concerned with a simpler kind of ravishment. The final image in Dante’s account of the dream episode is of the beautiful eyes of Lucy, indicating to Vergil the entrance of Purgatory (61–63); Chaucer leaves us with the leering innuendo of the line in which the narrator sends Pandarus off on his mission to Criseyde: “Now Janus, god of entre, thow hym gyde!” (2. 77). The effect of the allusion is thus to contrast Pandarus’s mission with Vergil’s and to make still more plain what had been implied by the narrator’s hapless evocation of the opening lines of the

Purgatorio at the beginning of the Proem to Book 2: this is not the world of the Commedia, and the quest on which we are embarked is not a spiritual one; Pandarus is not Vergil, and the realm into which we are being led, with Criseyde at its center, is not Purgatory.

For better or worse, however, Pandarus is the Vergil of the Troilus: he mediates to Troilus the favor of the lady in whom Troilus’s hope of bliss resides, and he brings Troilus to the threshold of that bliss, though he himself, like Vergil, is excluded from it. Chaucer echoes Dante in dramatizing Troilus’s gratitude for Pandaruss guidance. But Troilus never feels the unity of purpose that enables the Pilgrim to tell his Vergil that “a single will is in us both” (Inf. 2. 139). The rush of feeling that makes his heart “spread for joy” when Pandarus announces Criseyde’s willingness to receive his attentions (2. 979–80) is followed not by a decisive setting forth, but by an expression of utter helplessness (981–87). Where Vergil’s art and genius have the function of sustaining and articulating Dante’s experience of spiritual self-discovery, Pandarus’s are applied to preparing Troilus to experience a false, worldly paradise. His eloquence, in contrast to Vergil’s is not prompted by heavenly powers but by the pressure of a preoccupation with erotic love which is itself conditioned by frustration.

It is thus wholly appropriate that Troilus, the Pilgrim of Chaucer’s poem, should have no part to play in a scene that corresponds to Dante’s initiation into the experience of Purgatory. The stages in his progress toward sexual bliss are attained through wholly external manipulation on Pandarus’s part and bear only an incidental relation to the Dantean aspect of his love. Whereas the roles of Vergil and Dante are so closely interrelated that Vergil is a necessary element of Dante’s own consciousness,

4. Troilus 2. 967–69; cf. Inferno 2. 127–29. Boccaccio also follows Dante closely at this point (Fil. 2. 80. 1–4, 6, which repeat Inf. 2. 127–30, 132), but there are several correspondences between Chaucer and Dante which have no equivalent in Boccaccio. Both the Pilgrim and Troilus make declarations of submission to their guides (Tr. 2. 974–75, Inf. 2. 140), and Troilus, like the Pilgrim and unlike Troiolo, feels the effect of his experience in his heart (Tr. 2. 979–80; cf. Inf. 2. 131, 136–37). 5. Lines 981–87 correspond to Fil. 2. 88, but Chaucer achieves an irony that has no equivalent in Boccaccio by moving them forward so that they follow immediately the stanza in which Troilus had declared “al brosten ben my bondes” (976).
Dante and the *Troilus*  

Troilus’s progress toward fulfillment takes place in two spheres, the contemplative and the practical, which are almost completely separate, and requires only minimal communication between himself and Pandarus. His role as a lover is almost entirely invented for him by Pandarus, and he is brought to the physical consummation of love while preserving his consciousness unsullied by carnal thoughts. If Vergil is effectively reason for Dante, Pandarus can be said to perform the function of sexual desire and of that Ovidian ingenuity that desire stimulates. Like Vergil he is intimately involved in shaping his protégé’s response to the promise of his experience, but the response he elicits remains almost entirely subliminal until the moment of consummation in Book 3.

Pandarus cannot, of course, resolve matters wholly on his own. His power to direct and exploit Troilus’s activity as lover depends on Troilus’s first being in love, and there is something in Troilus’s love, an equivalent to what Dante feels as “good courage” (*Inf.* 2. 131), which the role imposed on him by Pandarus is inadequate to circumscribe. His spiritual idealism is never, as it were, fully incarnated in the lover of Criseyde, but continues to exist on a separate plane of contemplative vision to which he is capable of withdrawing even as he lies with Criseyde in his arms. It is this idealism—the virtue that exists in potential before his discovery of love and survives the betrayal of his love by Criseyde—that finally determines his awareness, and ours, of the meaning of his experience, at a level of which Pandarus is sublimely unaware.

The compartmentalizing of the experience of Troilus and Pandarus is only one instance of the fragmented perception of reality that typifies the pagan world of the *Troilus*. Like the disjointed prophecy of Cassandre and the self-deluded chivalric pride of the Trojan aristocracy, the inability of Troilus and Pandarus to appreciate one another’s goals and motivations reflects the incoherence of a world view that is chronically worldly and shortsighted, incapable of placing personal and social values in a historical and spiritual perspective. One of the chief purposes of Chaucer’s allusions to Dante is to provide us with just such a perspective, and this purpose appears particularly clearly in his use of Dante’s dream scenes.

Troilus is Chaucer’s equivalent to Dante’s Pilgrim, and his
absence from the scene introduced by the song of Procne at the beginning of Book 2 means the absence of any equivalent to Dante's dream of the eagle. Pandarus, of course, has no dream at all; it is a symptom of his lack of an inner dimension that, lying half asleep, he should hear only the "cheterynge" of Procne about Tereus's rape of her sister Philomela and be aroused by it to set in motion the seduction of his own niece. But later Criseyde has a dream, centered like Dante's on possession by an eagle (2. 925-31). Its position in the second half of Book 2 precisely corresponds to that of Pandarus's nondream in the first, and it is introduced by a reference to the song of the nightingale which complements the reference to the swallow Procne in the earlier scene.

Rather than auguring a spiritual experience, however, Criseyde's dream is an anticipation of physical submission to love, and its details express perfectly the limitations of her character and outlook:

And as she slep, anon right tho hire mette,
How that an egle, fethered whit as bon,
Under hire brest his longe clawes sette,
And out hire herte rente, and that anon,
And dide his herte into hire brest to gon;
Of which she nought agroos, ne no thyng smerte;
And forth he fleigh, with herte left for herte.

[2. 925-31]

Most obviously the dream illustrates Criseyde's anticipation of accepting Troilus as her lover: that an exchange of hearts takes place, rather than simply the ravishing of Criseyde's, hints at her confidence in Troilus's "trouthe." The absence of fear ("she nought agroos") suggests that her responsiveness has been informed by the confident idealism of the song of Antigone, which she had heard shortly before falling asleep. But at the same time there is a marked emphasis on the physical: the exchange of hearts recalls the occurrence of the same motif in the final stanza of Antigone's song (872-73) but Chaucer has transformed the idealizing cliché in a way that emphasizes physical action. He has done so, moreover, by adapting the imagery of violence from
Troiolo’s dream of the boar in the *Filostrato* (8. 23–24), and the effect is to superimpose on the more immediate significance of the dream a prevision of Criseyde’s still unforeseen surrender to the more aggressive love of Diomede.6

One effect of this double focus is surely to point up the limits of Criseyde’s power to provide for herself in love by fore-shadowing the dissolution of her love for Troilus. But the dream also hints very gently at a reason for this failure by suggesting that the love of Troilus does not wholly meet Criseyde’s expectations. The love for which she prepares herself through the long build-up of Books 2 and 3 contains an element of force, of “ravyne,” which is wholly lacking in Troilus’s behavior toward her. Ostensibly—certainly to Criseyde’s conscious awareness—this lack of aggression is part of the unique beauty and gentilesse of Troilus as lover, and in terms of the larger purposes of the *Troilus* it is a symptom of what makes his love most deeply meaningful. But to the finally worldly nature of Criseyde, in her hour of need, Troilus’s love will come to appear as no more than a confection of abstract virtues, and she will turn for solid comfort to Diomede, perhaps without knowing why she does so.

Thus a dream announced by the portentous idealism of Antigone’s song and centered on a powerful Dantean image of divine visitation not only fails to deliver the dreamer from her bodily state but also emphasizes the depth of her engagement with the here and now.7 Rising for a while to an appreciation of Troilus’s virtue, Criseyde will fall away again into the material world, without having realized in any way the visionary dimension that is so real a part of Troilus’s experience of their love. The utter circumscription of Criseyde’s dream world is a clear

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7. A number of details precisely oppose Criseyde’s dream experience to that of the Pilgrim. Where Dante’s eagle is unbearably radiant (“terribil come folgor,” *Purg* 9. 29), Criseyde’s is almost grotesquely vivid (“whit as bon,” 926). Dante is borne upward to the sublunar sphere of fire (90), while Criseyde apparently remains in her bed. Dante and his eagle “burn” together until the intensity of the imagined fire “scorches” and awakens him (31–33); Criseyde’s eagle performs his exchange of hearts painlessly, and the dream evidently ends without awakening her (932).
indication of how radically separate the world of the *Troilus* is from that of the *Purgatorio*. A similar gravity governs the dreaming of Troilus himself. Though his waking experience of love is charged with spiritual intuition, his dreams are centered on worldly events: he is abandoned or taken captive (5. 249–52) or, in the dream of the boar, confronted with the blunt fact of the physical reality of his betrayal by Diomede, a message he cannot read and from which he immediately recoils into his private love world. The final effect of the dreams in the poem is much like that of Cassandre’s discourse: a bleak, secular prophecy that expresses both the interconnection of the lives of the characters and their essential separateness: the obsessive energy of Pandarus’s scheming, the utter dislocation of Troilus’s inner life, and the practical and self-regarding terms on which Criseyde responds to both.

The most striking and puzzling allusion to a dream scene from the *Commedia*, though it is not connected to any dream in the *Troilus*, occurs in Book 3 in the stanza that announces the coming of day after the lovers’ first night together:

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Whan that the cok, comune astrologer,
Gan on his brest to bete, and after crowe,
And Lucifer, the dayes messenger,
Gan for to rise, and oute hire stremes throwe,
And estward roos, to hym that koude it knowe,
Fortuna Major . . .
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[3. 1415–20]

The emphasis on signs and meanings in this passage calls attention to itself. The interpretative role of the cock and the message conveyed by Lucifer are part of the common order of daily events, but the trailing reference to Fortuna Major seems intended to emphasize the obscurity of this figure. The same emphasis is evident in the passage that is Chaucer’s source for this reference, *Purgatorio* 19, in which Dante describes the time just before dawn

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quando i geomanti lor Maggior Fortuna
veggiono in oríente, innanzi a l’alba,
surger per via che poco le sta bruna . . .
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when the geomancers see their Fortuna Major rise in the east before dawn by a path which does not long stay dark for it . . . [Purg. 19. 4–6]

The term *Fortuna Major* was employed in geomancy, a mode of astrological calculation in which configurations of dots created by the geomancer without reference to the heavens were correlated with patterns perceptible among the stars of the zodiacal signs and referred to the authority of one or another of the seven planets as a basis for interpretation. For both Dante and Chaucer such bastardized astrology is probably a symbol of the random and often spurious means by which human understanding creates for itself a sense of coherence and purpose. In the *Commedia* the figure introduces Dante’s dream of the Siren, a female figure who is grotesquely malformed and inarticulate until endowed with beauty and eloquence by the effect of fleshly desire on Dante’s imaginative perception of her:

> Io la mirava; e come 'l sol conforta  
> le fredde membra che la notte aggrava,  
> così lo sguardo mio le facea scorta  
> la lingua, e poscia tutta la drizzava  
> in poco d’ora, e lo smarrito volto,  
> com’ amor vuol, così le colorava.  

I gazed upon her: and even as the sun revives cold limbs benumbed by night, so my look made ready her tongue, and then in but little time set her full straight, and colored her pallid face even as love requires. [Purg. 19. 10–15]

Thus endowed, the Siren sings seductively to the Pilgrim until the sudden appearance of a *donna santa*, at whose admonition Vergil seizes her and tears away her garments to expose the foulness within. Dante awakes at the foul smell she gives off and finds himself in broad daylight.

8. On the medieval practice of geomancy, which involved no scientific knowledge and was classed with the more dubious forms of astrology and magic, see Paul Tannery, *Le Rabolion: traités de géomancie arabes, grecs et latins*, in his *Mémoires scientifiques*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1920), pp. 318–411; for a medieval discussion of the properties associated with Fortuna Major (which, however, seems to have no special bearing on either poet’s reference to the figure), see Tannery, pp. 380–82. A book made for Richard II in 1391 (now MS Bodley 581) contains geomantic material.
The scene that Fortuna Major introduces in the *Troilus*, in which Criseyde and Troilus exchange dawn-songs and vows of fidelity, has none of the ugliness of Dante’s treatment of the Siren. But the relationship between dreamer and dream in the *Purgatorio* passage anticipates some of the most striking features of Chaucer’s dawn-song sequence and its aftermath. Both Troilus and the Pilgrim are suspended in contemplation of a beauty that, like the patterns traced by the geomancers, derives its meaning from their own subjective needs. As Dante’s eager gaze endowed the Siren with beauty, so it is the credulous desire of Troilus that sustains Criseyde’s dominant role in the dialogue in which they respond to the coming of dawn and gives her words an absolute value for him. Her equivalent to the Siren’s song is her initiation of the dawn-song sequence; she usurps the role normally taken by the male lover in the dawn song and elicits from Troilus an almost mechanically symmetrical response. But it is Troilus whose total involvement with love is emphasized, who refuses to accept the need to separate, and who insists on prolonging the ritual of songs and vows in which the scene consists. His sense of reality is subject to Criseyde’s influence to the point at which she comes to seem to him the center of “al the lyf ich have” (1477). As the Siren had arrested and turned aside her victims in mid-voyage (*Purg.* 19, 19–22), so Troilus is led to repudiate the affairs of the day and the cares of the city, asking only that Criseyde remain true to him. This request draws from her a protestation of fidelity so heavily freighted with appeals to God to witness her sincerity as to make us wonder whether anything but Troilus’s invincible trust in her sustains her words.

The dawn scene ends with Troilus’s departure, and we follow him home to his own chamber, where he communes, Dante-like, with the image of Criseyde in his mind, wholly oblivious to the physical desire that has now become an element in his devotion (1541–47). There is no shocking revelation like Vergil’s unveil-

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ing of the Siren to waken him from his amorous delusion. But the parallel with the Siren dream is sustained for us by the strange and, for most readers, unsettling scene between Pandarus and Criseyde on the morning following the night of love. Pandarus appears while Criseyde is still in bed, and his bantering quickly reduces her from indignation at his having betrayed her into Troilus’s arms to a kind of coquettishness. He then proceeds to thrust himself upon her with increasing urgency, rummaging under the bedclothes, proffering his “sword,” and finally kissing her, before the narrator steps in to divert our attention:

I passe all that which nedeth nought to seye,
What! god foryaf his deth, and she also
Foryaf, and with hire uncle gan to pleye,
For oother cause was ther non than so.
But of this thing right to theeffect to go,
Whan tyme was, home to hire hous she wente,
And Pandarus hath hooly his entente.

[3. 1576–82]

As always, we may take the narrator’s tone of hearty reassurance here as a sign that he has missed the point: phrases like “I passe al that,” and “right to theeffect to go,” which had earlier expressed his eagerness to hasten on the sexual climax, are now used in an attempt to gloss over what is taking place between Criseyde and her uncle. The high good humor of “What! god foryaf his deth” fails to obscure the glaring ambiguity and potential blasphemy of the phrase in this context, and the conclusiveness of the final line obviously raises more questions than it answers. But there is no sure way to determine the object of Pandarus’s “entente” here; we cannot tell just what takes place between uncle and niece, and we do not need to know. The real meaning of the scene, reinforced by the parody of Dante that lies behind it, is in the utter betrayal of Troilus it represents, the travesty of his pure devotion in its combination of blatant innuendo with suggestions of blasphemy. Once again, as with the refractive use of the dream episode of *Purgatorio* 9, the meaningful event, the encounter of Pandarus and Criseyde which
corresponds to the moment of moral enlightenment in the Siren scene, takes place wholly outside the sphere of Troilus's consciousness, exposing his deluded sense of Criseyde's worth without in any way disabusing him of it.

A note of caution is necessary at this point. In casting Criseyde as the Siren in the scenes just discussed, I do not mean to compare her in her own person to the "ancient witch" whom Vergil unmasks. As many critics have pointed out, there is no reason to doubt Criseyde's good will toward Troilus at this point in the story; even her bedroom scene with Pandarus has been praised for its tact, and Pandarus's behavior has somehow been read as showing an avuncular sympathy with young love. It is only when contrasted with the innocent idealism of Troilus, for whom she is "inly fair" (1606) and who describes the effect of sexual fulfillment in almost Pauline terms as instilling in him a "newe qualitee" (1653–55), that her acceptance of Pandarus's advances is compromising. The scene brings us down to earth, and its bald suggestiveness is unique in the poem, a departure from the prevailing courtly decorum fully as striking as Troilus's earlier appropriation of the climactic prayer of the Paradiso to express his ecstasy just before the consummation of his love.

Indeed the Dantean allusions that point up the contrast between Troilus's great moment of visionary ecstasy and Pandarus's achievement of his debased "entente" also define symbolically the terms on which Troilus's experience of love is to be evaluated. They show us that his remarkable capacity to experience love on spiritual terms has as its corollary a terrible vulnerability to corruption and betrayal on the earthly level. In addition they emphasize Troilus's radical innocence. Unlike Dante in the earthly Paradise, Troilus brings no history of involvement with "false images" to his confrontation with Criseyde. He is experiencing love for the first time, and Chaucer

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manages to convey the effect of his discovery of bliss in virtually prelapsarian terms.

We can better appreciate the significance of Troilus’s experience if we consider its Dantean aspect in a broader and more sequential way, by comparing the central portion of Book 3 of Chaucer’s poem to the final cantos of the *Purgatorio*. The tension between inner vision and external circumstance which comes to a head in Troilus’s confrontation with Criseyde at the house of Pandarus can be seen as the antithesis of what Charles Singleton has called “the pattern at the center” of the *Commedia*, the elaborate ritual of Dante’s reunion with Beatrice in the earthly Paradise at the summit of Purgatory. In both cases the encounter effects a significant transformation. Under the stern tutelage of Beatrice, Dante emerges from a quest he had inevitably conceived in largely private and erotic terms and after a painful process of self-recognition comes to learn that his experience has prepared him for true participation in Christian history, as a citizen of “that Rome whereof Christ is a Roman” (*Purg.* 32. 102). Troilus on the other hand approaches his great encounter with confused and uneasy intimations of the divine mystery at the heart of his love, but the initiation he undergoes draws him away from such concerns into physical lovemaking. Dante’s experience concludes for our purposes with the pageant of the history of the church which prepares for Beatrice’s prophecy of deliverance. Troilus is irrevocably alienated by his experience from any such larger awareness as Dante attains. If Dante’s experience is a recovery of purity and vision, a *restauratio*, Troilus’s is a falling away, a descent into the world of false pleasure from which Dante has been liberated once and for all.

The introduction of Troilus and the Pilgrim into their respective paradises constitutes the crowning achievement of the artistry of their guides. Vergil throughout the *Commedia* has devoted his “art and genius” to the reorienting of Dante’s reason and will. His final speech, in *Purgatorio* 27, signals the completion of his work and frees Dante to pursue his pleasure in response to the beauties of a Paradise that is the fulfillment of Vergil’s own

dream (Purg. 28. 139–41). Pandarus, too, is realizing a dream or fantasy of his own in the achievement of Troilus’s quest, but his “engyn” has operated in a wholly external way, manipulating and constraining his pupil rather than informing and strengthening his will. Where Vergil releases Dante into the “sweet air” of a realm whose unchanging climate rewards the Pilgrim’s own hard-won stability, Troilus is confined to a “litel stuwe” (3. 601) until drawn by Pandarus, under cover of a darkness made darker still by a “smoky reyn,” into a windowless inner room. Vergil is in sure touch with Dante’s feelings and can urge him forward by promising the advent of Beatrice, confident that the Pilgrim is morally and psychologically prepared for his encounter with her (27. 133–42). But when Pandarus comes to summon Troilus to the “hevene blisse” that awaits him in Criseyde’s chamber, he finds his pupil uneasy, recalcitrant, and wholly incapable of self-determination. Troilus’s response to Pandarus’s promise of reward is near panic. Whereas Vergil concludes his enterprise once and for all by commending Dante’s reconstituted will, “free, upright, and whole” (140), and his last words in the Commedia are a bestowal on Dante of the crown and mitre of self-command (142), Pandarus is compelled to rebuke the “wrecched mouses herte” of his disciple, throw a fur robe over his shirt, and literally drag him into the presence of Criseyde (736–42).

The same parodic contrast is evident in the psychological states of the two lovers, manifested at this crucial stage in the imaginative processes by which both translate their experience into mythic terms. Again the opposition is striking: in place of Dante’s sense of undergoing a metamorphosis of desire (Purg. 27. 123), Chaucer gives us Troilus’s catalogue of hapless mortals pursued in love by gods. The brief reminiscences of Europa, Adonis, Herse, and Daphne emphasize the dominance of the gods’ passion, and the only human feeling clearly indicated is the “drede” that leads to the transformation of Daphne.

Dante is initiated into Paradise by Matelda, who, in addition to guiding him toward his reunion with Beatrice, provides a focus for the lingering sexual element in his adoration. As he gazes at her, he is reminded of Proserpina at the moment of her ravishment, and her eyes seem as full of love as those of Venus when,
accidentally wounded by Cupid's arrow, she fell madly in love with Adonis (Purg. 28. 49–51, 63–66). This emphasis on the erotic has puzzled commentators, but should remind us that Matelda, like the Siren, is the embodiment of an imaginative experience rather than a sacramental one. Though her beauty is not, like the Siren’s, wholly of Dante’s own making, and while it shows him capable of realizing Paradise in imaginative terms, it is inevitably conditioned by that long service as a poet of love which has been his preparation for Paradise. His desire here is a metaphor for the experience of grace that Beatrice will grant him, very much as Menoeceus’s visitation of divine virtue is Dante’s Statius’s metaphor for the creation of the intellective soul.

Troilus’s thoughts also tend naturally to dwell on myths of love, but his sexual feelings are at odds with his spiritual intimations. Under the pressure of a confused sense of being psychologically and physically “possessed” by love, his impulse is to avert the sort of engagement Dante imagines and longs for. Dante is yearning back from a world conditioned by the loss of primal innocence toward the state in which innocent desire was possible, and Matelda is largely the projection of this yearning. Troilus is faced with the loss of his own innocence, and his imaginative response is a series of mythic images of his helpless state. Where Dante compares Matelda’s innocent rapture to the longings of Ovid’s amorous Venus, Troilus invokes that same Venus in the name of Adonis, the object and in a real sense the victim of her love (3. 720–21).

The difference between the two lovers’ relations with their guides is pointed up again when Troilus is brought face to face with his lady and finds he can no longer depend on his mentor for reassurance. Where Vergil had withdrawn his support only after rendering Dante psychologically capable of enduring the agony of self-recognition he must undergo as Beatrice chastises him, Pandarus has prepared for this confrontation by inventing

the story that Troilus suspects Criseyde of having given her love to “Horaste” (792-98). Faced with Criseyde’s elaborate display of grief at his suspicion, Troilus is utterly demoralized. In place of Dante’s powerful expression of sorrow and love in response to Vergil’s sudden disappearance (Purg. 30. 49–54) we see Troilus forced to the inescapable recognition that through his involvement with Pandarus he is guilty of complicity in a plot both dishonest and, worse, unsuccessful:

“O Pandarus,” thought he, “allas, thi wile
Serveth of nought, so weylaway the while.”

[3. 1077–78]

Dante finally comes to terms with the history of his pursuit of false images and is made to confess a guilt that his whole previous experience in the Commedia has conditioned him to recognize. Guided by the song of the pitying angels, he weeps in anguish (Purg. 30. 94–99) and is then drawn forward to a confession of his error. Troilus, whose moral awareness has been systematically subverted, has no sustaining ritual to help him express his true feelings and can only disclaim responsibility for his role in the game Pandarus has played. He sheds no tears, and though he is dominated by a keen sense of guilt, he cannot acknowledge it. He feels himself damned by his complicity to a moral and emotional limbo, so alienated from Criseyde by Pandarus’s deceptions that his feeble protestation of innocence (“god woot that of this game, / Whan al is wist, than am I nat to blame” [1084–85]) has the effect of a dying man’s last words. And the swoon that follows is described in terms that make it the emotional equivalent of death, a suspension of the operation of his bodily spirits and hence of all feeling:

And every spirit his vigour in knette,
So they astoned or oppressed were.
The felyng of his sorwe, or of his fere,
Or of aught elles, fled was out of towne;
And down he fil al sodeynly a-swowne.

[3. 1088–92]

The intensity of Troilus’s experience here reflects the implosion upon him of an unendurably powerful feeling of unworthi-
ness and the conviction that Criseyde’s dangier has banished him from her favor once and for all. Though his sense of guilt is confused and inarticulate, a conflict of feelings only dimly realized, rather than the vivid “recognition” of Dante (Purg. 31. 88), his crisis attests to the depth of his commitment to love and the reality for him of the threat of annihilation which that commitment entails. Because he has believed so profoundly in the power of Criseyde’s love to bestow a “grace” that is virtually the gift of life, the quasi-death he had experienced on first encountering her gaze in the temple of Pallas (1. 306–7) has now become associated in his mind with the loss of her favor. He is for the moment “despeired out of loves grace,” and his whole nature acquiesces in the abandonment of life itself, which is his imaginative response to this loss.13

Of course, this death is only a prelude to the miracle of his reawakening to find himself restored to favor. The crisis has the practical effect of literally introducing him to the bed of love, but leaves him “wonder sore abayst,” in a state of suspension between spiritual and physical experience. His moral and psychological dislocation are made worse by the fact that Criseyde is much less concerned with proving his character and submitting him to penance than with defending herself from suspicion, and when she miscalculates the effect of her tears, causing Troilus to swoon, she too becomes desperate. Thus, instead of the stern but all-confirming “ben son, ben son Beatrice,” we are shown Criseyde bending over Troilus’s inert body and promising him “in his ear”

“Iwys, my dere herte, I am nat wroth,
Have here my trouthe, and many another ooth;
Now speke to me, for it am I Criseyde.”
But al for nought . . .

[3. 1110–13]

Where Beatrice rebukes Dante’s moral childishness and admonishes him to live up to the manhood seemingly implied by his beard (Purg. 31. 61–69), confident that the shame will ultimately

strengthen him, Criseyde’s chiding of Troilus (“is this a mannes game?” 1126) merely exposes the hapless innocence in which he had been led to play the “childissh jalous” (1168).

But Troilus’s swoon, like the loss of consciousness Dante undergoes under the pressure of intense contrition (Purg. 31. 88–90), is a rite of passage. Dante revives to see the face of Matelda moving above him as she bears him through the absolving stream (31. 91–96); Troilus finds himself in bed, with Criseyde doing “al hir payne” to bring him around (1118–20). Dante’s absolution from his old error is symbolized by his emergence from the stream into the dance of the Cardinal Virtues, who “cover him with their arms” as they dance about him (31. 103–5); Troilus’s, more simply, by the gesture of Criseyde herself: 14

\[
\text{hire arm over hym she leyde,} \\
\text{And al foryaf . . .}
\]

\[3. 1128–29\]

Though Troilus will require some further assurance of his forgiveness, his emergence from Purgatory to a state of readiness to receive the promised bliss is essentially complete at this point. We have already traced the arc of his paradiso, the intensity of feeling which rises to issue in his beautiful prayer to divine love before descending again into the material world. But it is possible to pursue the analogy of the Purgatorio a stage further and to recognize that the revelation that completes Dante’s experience in the earthly Paradise also has its negative equivalent in the Troilus.

In Purgatorio 32, after a second loss of consciousness, Dante awakens to see again Matelda. She points out Beatrice, transformed from her earlier, almost unendurable splendor to reappear as the reflected glory of truth revealed, the guiding wisdom of the church in the world, seated on the bare ground and guarding the chariot that is the image of the church. Beatrice grants Dante a vision of the earthly history of the church, repre-

14. Criseyde is perhaps recalling Dante’s description of the Virtues when she compares herself to Prudence with her three eyes at 5. 744–45; cf. Purg. 29. 131–32.
sented as a series of violations visited upon the chariot itself (Purg. 32. 109–60). A diving eagle strikes the chariot, causing it to roll like a ship in a storm; a ravenous fox tries to enter it but is repelled by Beatrice; the eagle reappears and enters, leaving the car adorned with his plumage; a dragon comes out of the earth and breaks open the bottom of the car. Then the chariot itself is transformed into a monster; a harlot appears seated on its back, attended by a giant who kisses her repeatedly until, when she looks lustfully at Dante, he beats her from head to foot and finally drags both monster and harlot away into the forest.

Such densely symbolic panoramas are a temptation for the medievalist, who tends to see in them what he most wants to see. And it would be an arbitrary exercise at best to seek any too precise relation between this vision and the events of Troilus. Nonetheless, I would suggest a broad parallel between Dante’s imagery and that which the Troilus, by various means, concentrates around the person and bed of Criseyde. As the repeated violations of the church lead to its corruption and finally the Babylonian captivity of the Avignon papacy, so the equivalent images in the Troilus trace the effects of the encroachments of Pandarus, Troilus, Diomede, and history itself on the freedom and integrity of Criseyde.

Like the chariot of Dante’s vision, Criseyde is first assailed by the eagle of her dream, then with increasing importunity by Pandarus, and at last by Troilus. Her union with Troilus, I would suggest, corresponds to the second descent of Dante’s eagle upon the chariot. Representative originally of the endowment of the church with temporal goods, it is equivalent in Chaucer’s scheme to the materialization of love. Without in itself involving any base motive (Dante himself concedes that the “feathering” of the chariot had been done “perhaps with sincere and kind intent,” 138), the union nonetheless marks a stage in a process of corruption by material things which leads to eventual harlotry.

Pandarus’s role is easily enough related to that of the heretics and false counselors who corrupt the church from within by

15. Mario Praz, The Flaming Heart (New York, 1958), pp. 39–40, suggests a number of correspondences between the imagery of Criseyde’s dream and that of the pageant of Purgatorio 32.
claiming to speak with true authority and whom Dante represents by the fox, “starved of all good food” (120), that seeks to enter the chariot. I think Chaucer is also recalling this scene as he describes Pandarus's dealing with Criseyde on the morning after the consummation. Like Beatrice, Criseyde recognizes Pandarus for what he is—“fox that ye ben” she calls him (1565)—and recognizes the danger of his “wordes white” (1567); but she has already acquiesced in his design on her, and the scene in which he reveals the effects of his “starvation” by seeking to act out that design in his own person, literally or symbolically, merely confirms its corrupting effect.

The remaining events of Dante's vision, the dragon's damaging of the chariot, its metamorphosis, and the final scene of harlot and giant, may be loosely correlated with the disruptive events of the war and Criseyde's later, far more compromising submission to the blasphemously uncourtly Diomede. These specific matters are less important than the broad Dantean pattern of which they form a part, which enables us to gauge the dimensions of Troilus's experience of love and recognize the seriousness with which Chaucer views both the love and its betrayal. The point of this elaborate borrowing from the Commedia—the casting of Pandarus as arch-heretic, Criseyde as Siren and harlot and her bed as a mock church—is not simply to condemn their moral and spiritual blindness, though we should certainly be warned by it not to let sentimentality obscure our awareness of these failings. Its primary function is to provide a setting in which to consider the love of Troilus for itself, and the identification of these lesser characters with evil archetypes becomes meaningful only to the extent that we see Troilus's vision of love as comparable to Dante's. The scene between Pandarus and Criseyde completes the parody of Dante which I have called the “pattern at the center” of the Troilus by giving us a powerful image of the violation of Troilus's devotion and by setting this violation in an allusive context that makes it not simply a human betrayal but the desecration of something at least potentially divine. It exposes in the most forceful way the emptiness at the heart of Troilus's love, the failure of that love to integrate the spiritual and physical elements in his experience. There is no meaningful connection between the Criseyde of Troilus's vision
and the Criseyde who incarnates that vision: she is now a Siren, now a Matelda, now prophetically a harlot, but never a beatrix. The pattern at the center of the Troilus has no true center, no sacred presence or transforming event to offset the steady descent of Troilus’s love from vision into materiality. Allusion to Dante makes us aware of this absence, which Chaucer’s hapless and self-deceived narrator could not have done by himself, and by forcing us to view Troilus’s betrayal in a context that emphasizes its enormity, provides an intimation of what we and the narrator will finally come to realize as the true spiritual dimensions of the poem. But this final discovery will take place only after Troilus himself has lived through the consequences of his betrayal and come to his own posthumous realization that “felicite,” whatever it may be, lies far beyond the love of Criseyde.

The next significant allusion to Dante occurs at the beginning of Book 4, where Chaucer introduces Troilus’s grief over the threatened loss of Criseyde with a version of the tree simile from Inferno 3. As noted in Chapter 1, this simile in its original context helps us focus on the process of Dante’s introduction to the world of the dead (see page 40). Troilus, too, is preparing to descend into a psychological inferno more hellish than any of his woes hitherto, a world in which he will commune in imagination with Proserpine, Oedipus, and other “ancient suffering spirits.” It would be hard to imagine a more powerful comparison than Dante’s simile.

But neither Troilus’s situation nor Chaucer’s treatment of it is simple. Troilus’s desperate state is at least partly of his own making, and his hopelessness is shown at certain moments to be almost willful. The rhetoric in which he yearns for death, imagines an afterlife of perpetual mourning, and rationalizes his present inactivity as an imposed condition is a genuine reflection of his sense of loss and abandonment, but it has in it an element of self-indulgence and melodrama that suggests that it is an emotional substitute for something else. What it replaces, I think, is the passion of the early stage of Troilus’s sexual involvement with Criseyde, a passion that had reached its physical and emotional peak in Book 3 and is now becoming a steadily weaker bond between them, so that both unconsciously acquiesce in the separation that threatens them. As Dante undergoes the
vicarious experience of death and damnation in his Inferno, so
Troilus's rhetorical and emotional energies collaborate in an
imaginative rehearsal of the experience of loss, an exercise that
leaves him psychologically diminished, powerless to alter the
destiny that Criseyde's scheming prepares for him.

Here as so often in the poem it is necessary to maintain a
double view of the experience of Troilus. In Book 3 we must
recognize the comic incongruity of the juxtaposition of his ec-
stasy with Pandarus's "bysynesse" and at the same time take his
spiritual experience seriously in itself. So in Book 4 we must
recognize the ironic breach between what is actually taking place
and what seems to Troilus to be taking place and at the same
time respect the deep emotion that so distorts his sense of reality
as to force him to live out the experience of loss on what seem to
him life-and-death terms. This complex focus is already implicit
in Chaucer's use of Dante's image of the tree deprived of its
leaves to describe Troilus's feelings as he lies alone in his cham-
ber contemplating the Trojan parliament's decision to exchange
Criseyde for Antenor:

And as in wynter leves ben biraft,
Ech after other, til the tree be bare,
So that ther nys but bark and braunche ilaft,
Lith Troilus, byraft of eche welfare,
Ibounden in the blake bark of care,
Dispose wood out of his wit to breyde,
So sore hym sat the chaungynge of Criseyde.

[4. 225–31]

The simile has a very different character from that of the allu-
sions to Purgatorio and Paradiso in Book 3. There we were given
broad analogies of structure and iconography that enabled us to
isolate and assess the specially privileged qualities of Troilus's
experience without the necessity of analyzing his feelings closely.
Here, by contrast, we are taken to the very heart of Troilus's
emotional condition.

As I suggested in chapter 1, Dante's version of this simile
shows a marked shift in the direction of subjective and vicarious
emotion when compared with the passage in Vergil which is its
source: Chaucer carries Dante's alteration of Vergil's image a
step further. Where Dante, like Vergil, begins by comparing dead souls to falling leaves, Chaucer introduces the leaves only for the purpose of emphasizing strongly the bareness of the tree itself, which is reiterated by the interpolation of a wholly original line (227). But as he develops the image, though its initial effect remains coherent and powerful, its stark power gives way to an increasing irony and an emphasis on the implications of narcissistic self-consciousness in the Dantean version. Troilus as we behold him is lying on his bed, and when we are quietly reminded of this by “lith” in 228, it is as though the tree in the simile were lying down as well, prostrated by the shock of losing its foliage. The effect is to offset somewhat the force of “byraft of ech welfare,” and a similar effect is conveyed in the next line, in which the vivid and somber image of Troilus bound by “the blake bark of care” is both enriched by the suggestion of metamorphosis and weakened by the distracting hint of a pun on “bark.” In the next line the metamorphosis theme is undercut by an unmistakable pun on “wood,” and the self-consciousness latent in the simile as a whole surfaces in its application to a Troilus who is “disposed,” as if by a careful decision, to lose his wits.

The comic element in the stanza is not, of course, its whole point, and there is a danger that such an analysis of it will go too far in distracting attention from the force of Chaucer’s image and the obligation to take it seriously imposed by its context in literary tradition. Chaucer’s use of Dante in the Troilus is never merely facetious, and if it is clear by the end of the stanza that Troilus’s feelings have not brought him as close as he imagines to “the woeful pass,” it is clear as well that he has been rendered helpless by them, “bound” to undergo an experience that very strongly resembles despair. But the comedy is unmistakably there, and its function is to distance us a little from his reactions. The tree simile shows Troilus’s reactions being programmed by Dante’s, which in turn are controlled by Vergil’s. The governing

16. Norton-Smith, Geoffrey Chaucer, p. 202, aptly contrasts with these lines those earlier passages in which the emergence of hopeful thoughts in Troilus has been compared to the growth, and even the recovery after frost, of plants and leaves. One may also compare the conflict of strong feelings under whose pressure he had intuitively identified himself with the metamorphosed Daphne at 3. 726–27.
presence of convention is thus strongly emphasized, and in the long scene that follows we see the strength of Troilus’s feelings affirmed and at the same time undermined by the conventional means through which they are expressed.\textsuperscript{17}

In Book 5 the actual departure of Criseyde provokes a more authentic despair, but at the same time revives the idealizing and spiritual tendencies of Troilus’s love. As he reviews the “proces” of his romance, he recapitulates its private, Dantean aspect in a way that confirms its inviolate status and provides him with the emotional strength to withstand the revelation of his betrayal. This retrospective process is climaxed by the long letter that represents Troilus’s last direct address to Criseyde. This letter is very different from its counterpart in Boccaccio (Fil. 7. 52–75), which deals openly and somewhat melodramatically with Troïolo’s sense of abandonment and his fear that Criseïda has betrayed him. In Troilus’s letter everything is muted. He mentions the bare facts—Criseyde has been gone two months and he has not heard from her—but they are interspersed with repeated apologies for his presumption and his only hint at any misgivings about her conduct takes the form of an appeal for her forgiveness for having harbored such thoughts:

\begin{quote}
“And by the cause ek of my cares colde,
That sleth my wit, if aught amys masterte,
Foryeve it me, myn owen swete herte.”
\end{quote}

[5. 1342–44]

Later he goes so far as to remind her of the obligations of “trouthe” (1386), but he speaks with the same lack of conviction that crippled his attempts to dissuade her from leaving in Book 4\textsuperscript{18} and immediately retreats again into the depths of his humility, asking only for leave to die if he has been guilty in any way or if Criseyde no longer wishes to see him (1387–93).

This life-or-death view of his condition assumes a new urgency here. It is Troilus’s way of expressing not only his deepest

\textsuperscript{17} See chapter 7.

\textsuperscript{18} Lines 1395–96 clearly echo 4. 1490–91, in which Troilus fears that neither “routhe” nor “trouthe” will enable Criseyde to resist the attractions of life among the Greeks. Cf. also 5. 1585–89.
fears but also the depth of his feelings of love and need, and we can hear an increasingly prayerful note in his request:

“That hereupon ye wolden write me,
For love of god, my righte lode-stelTe . . . .”
[5. 1392–93]

Here, as at several points in the early books, Troilus seems almost to be invoking two gods at once, and in the final stanzas of the letter his sense of radical dependency on Criseyde becomes itself a religious state. It is to Criseyde that he prays, “With hope, or deth, delivereth me fro peyne” (1400). In the lines that invoke her beauty—lines in which Troilus expresses for the first time since her departure a strong desire for something other than death—it is almost as though he were looking forward to a vision of that beauty in a realm beyond bodily existence:

“Iwys, myn hernes day, my lady free,
So thursteth ay myn herte to byholde
Youre beaute, that my lif unnethe I holde.”
[5. 1405–7]

So Dante, praying to Beatrice near the close of the Paradiso, looks forward to the point at which his soul will be released from his body in a state of exalted love worthy of her favor (Par. 31. 88–90). Like Dante’s, the prayer of Troilus is his final direct address to his “glorious lady,” and like Dante’s it claims for her the status of a unique manifestation of divine grace. Dante declares,

“di tante cose quant’i’ho vedute,
dal tuo podere e da la tua bontate
ricosco la grazia e la virtute . . .
La tua magnificenza in me custodi,
si che l’anima mia, che fatt’ hai sana,
piacente a te dal corpo si disnodi.”

“Of all those things which I have seen I acknowledge the grace and the virtue to be from your power and your excellence. . . . Preserve in me your great munificence, so that my soul, which
you have made whole, may be loosed from the body, pleasing unto you.” [Par. 31. 82–84, 88–90]

Troilus in a kind of desperate earnest imputes virtually the same powers to Criseyde:

“In yow lith, whan yow list that it so be,
The day on which me clothen shal my grave.
In yow my lif, in yow myght for to save
Me fro disese of alle peynes smerte!
And fare now wel, myn owen swete herte!”

[5. 1417–21]

These lines represent not only Troilus’s farewell to Criseyde, but the completion of the Dantean phase of his career. Like all of Troilus’s Dantine gestures, this final, consummate praise of Criseyde is in one sense meaningless; even Troilus will soon have to acknowledge that she has betrayed him. But from another point of view the prayer is a final confirmation of the strength and integrity of Troilus’s imaginative idealism. The allusion to Dante is a kind of seal, attesting to the depth of feeling that produces this final affirmation and reminding us that Troilus’s love of Criseyde has been and will remain the most important thing in his life, a vita nuova. Together with the memory of the time when Criseyde’s palace had been “enlumyned with sonne of alle blisse,” this wholly private perception of her meaning for him will endure to the end, unaffected by the historical realities that are soon to be forced upon him by Cassandre’s prophecy, the death of Hector, and the sight of Criseyde’s token on the captured armor of Diomede. Chaucer has allowed his pagan hero to say of Criseyde “that which was never said of any woman” save Beatrice, and it is the same conception of Troilus’s love as a religious vocation that will allow him at his death to ascend to the eighth sphere. In the meantime the realization of his betrayal will convert Troilus’s conscious feelings from love to heroic wrath, but the Dantine element in his experience continues to exist intact beneath the outward violence of his last days, and it is as both a visionary lover and an embodiment of heroic virtue that we must view him at the close of the poem.