With the falling away of the other characters and the increasing demoralization of the narrator in Books 4 and 5, Troilus comes at last to stand alone. This chapter will trace the major stages of Troilus’s experience in the last two books of the poem. From the point at which he first responds to the prospect of losing Criseyde by rehearsing imaginatively a life and afterlife of solitary romantic pathos, he emerges into the practical world only to reveal his utter powerlessness to help or hinder Criseyde in her plan of action. But in the face of the actuality of loss he experiences an emotional and spiritual renewal and recovers his sense of that quality in his love for Criseyde that enables it to withstand loss and betrayal. The strength of feeling which this resiliency demonstrates becomes in effect the power that carries the poem’s action forward to its conclusion; Troilus breaks out of the bright world of Troy and meets his fate in an atmosphere of austere heroism for which nothing in the poem’s action up to this point has prepared us.

By way of introduction to a consideration of the role of Troilus in the final books of the poem, I would call attention to certain structural features of the transition from Book 3 to Book 4. Though the remainder of Book 3 stresses the happiness of Troilus in love, there is something ominous in the suddenness with which it ends. The shift from a final affirmation of the wonder wrought in Troilus by love (1800–1806) to the dismissal
of Venus and the Muses at the end of Book 3 shows Chaucer rearranging material from the *Filostrato* to achieve a very different effect. Boccaccio’s third chapter, corresponding to Book 3 of the *Troilus*, ends with the warning note about Fortune that begins Book 4 of the *Troilus*. The stanzas of the *Filostrato* that most nearly correspond to Chaucer’s farewell to Venus, signaling the end of the lovers’ joy (4. 23–24), occur only after the Trojan parliament has decided to surrender Criseyde to the Greeks.

One function of Chaucer’s placement of these farewell stanzas is to remind us once more of the limitations of the narrator’s point of view. By dismissing the Muses as well as the god and goddess of love, he points up the narrowness of his conception of the meaning of his poem and of his own role as the poet-servant of the servants of love. Now that the love story has reached its happy climax, he is, as it were, trying to arrest its development. The other side of this desire to leave Troilus suspended “in lust and in quiete” (1819) is the desperate forward lunge in the proem to Book 4, when the narrator, faced with the inevitable, prays to the Furies to bring the whole story, Troilus’s life as well as his love, to the quickest possible conclusion.

But the gesture of dismissal here, in addition to what it tells us about the narrator, also has a thematic significance for the later books of the poem. It has the effect of making the ending of the portion of the *Troilus* that is dominated by love into an event wholly separate from the later, public events that are the ostensible cause of the lovers’ sorrow. By this adjustment Chaucer points up something that has been implied at several points and that Book 4 will confirm. The love of Troilus and Crisseyde has reached its emotional and physical peak; they are suspended in an equipoise from which they must inevitably descend as habit and the ebbing of passion weaken the force of their attraction to each other. It is the existence of this inevitability as something wholly independent of the external operation of Fortune that the ending of Book 3 calls to our attention, and in Book 4 we will see that the alteration of the lovers’ feelings and the alteration of the circumstances that have nurtured their love proceed along intersecting but essentially separate paths.

The early portions of Book 4 describe successively a public event, Troilus’s private response to that event, and an interview
between Troilus and Pandarus, a sequence that is an obvious parallel to the action of Book 1. Chaucer is inviting us to compare Troilus at this crucial stage with his earlier self, and the contrast is striking. Throughout the early stages of Book 4 he shows himself incapable of spontaneous impulse. His feelings, which had earlier fallen instinctively into patterns of articulation derived from the *Roman de la Rose*, Petrarch, and Dante, seem now to have been contaminated by the lugubriousness of the narrator, whose Proem to Book 4 amounts to a total capitulation to the power of Fortune and the Furies. Like the version of Dante's tree simile already discussed, the scene in which Troilus reacts in anticipation to the departure of Criseyde is a strange mixture of pathos, melodrama, and comedy. Once alone in his bedchamber,

```
He rist him up, and every dore he shette
And wyndow ek, and tho this sorwful man
Upon his beddes syde adown hym sette,
Ful lik a ded ymage, pale and wan;
And in his brest the heped wo bygan
Out breste, and he to werken in this wise
In his woodnesse, as I shal yow devyse.
```

The emphasis on deliberate action in the first two lines recalls Troilus's "disposition" to break out in a rage in the tree-simile stanza, which immediately precedes this one. As he sits on the side of his bed, it is as though he were consciously gathering strength for the outburst to follow, and there is a hint of deliberation too in "werken in this wise," which seems almost to contradict the suggestion of an involuntary rush of feeling in "out breste." This hint is reinforced by the narrator's "devyse" in the last line: the verb recurs at 259, after Troilus's initial transport has run its course, and the two occurrences provide a sort of frame or label, identifying Troilus's outburst as a set piece, a grand effect, something demanding artistry to describe. But set

2. Note the bracketing of Criseyde's lament (736–98) with "devyse" (735) and with the narrator's elaborate apology for his artistic limitations (799–805).
in the middle of the stanza is Troilus's face, with its ghastly pallor "fulike a ded ymage," and the trance into which he falls at the end of his soliloquy can hardly be deliberate.

The juxtaposition of Troilus's behavior with that of Troiolo in the equivalent scene of the *Filosrato* reveals a similar joining of contradictory effects. Troiolo is worn out by weeping to the point at which his speech is reduced to incoherent "wild cries" calling for death and condemning the gods (4. 28. 4–8). Chaucer uses this occasion to show another contradiction: when weeping has "refte" Troilus's speech (249), he can still "un-nethes" utter a forceful curse, which Chaucer quotes verbatim (250–52). The comic effect is balanced by the substance of the curse, a condemnation of the day nature brought him into the world, which recalls the self-denying despair of the souls on the shores of Dante's Acheron (*Inf.* 3. 104–6). But in the stanza following, we shift back to comedy, as the passing of Troilus's initial crisis is described in oddly casual terms; whereas Troiolo, still "burning in the fire of suffering," had thrown himself down on his bed without ceasing to weep (*Fil.* 4. 29. 3–5), Troilus seems ready for a nap:

```
But after, whan the furie and al the rage
Which that his herte twiste and faste threste,
By lengthe of tyme somwhat gan aswage,
Upon his bed he leyde hym down to reste....
[4. 253–56]
```

The almost absurdly gentle effect of the last two lines rests in unresolved contradiction to the forcefulness of the first two. In his hymn at the close of Book 3 Troilus had called on God to "twist" those cold hearts unacquainted with love and make them acknowledge its value (1769–71). The verb suggests both the dominance of love and its potential violence. Here Troilus's heart is "twisted" by a fury that has made him long for death; the image and diction link his situation with that of the narrator and remind us of his utter subjection to the power of love, but without forestalling the comic effect of the two lines that follow.

3. The same passage is recalled more vividly by Troilus's blanket condemnation of the gods and the human condition in 5. 207–10, in a situation closely parallel to the present one.
The long soliloquy on which Troilus now embarks follows Boccaccio closely (Fil. 4. 30–36), but a series of interpolations by Chaucer enables us to see Troilus as willfully declining into the role of the conventional abandoned lover. Where Troiolo is angry, Troilus is merely resigned, and from the outset he looks forward to a future of unvarying misery,

\[4· 272–73\]

From this point he passes on to imagine a merely passive state in which he will “alwey dye, and neve re fulli sterve” (280), before commending his soul to Criseyde (302–8, 320–22) and pronouncing a sort of epitaph appealing to happy lovers to remember him, “for I loved ek, though ich unworthi were” (329).

The course of this imaginative descent to the shades is not unbroken; at its center are two stanzas that balance remembered happiness against present misery in terms that remind us of the broader dimensions of Troilus’s experience and the more than conventional lover’s sorrow that burdens his imaginings. In the first he reproaches the god of love for violation of “trouthe”:

\[4· 292–94\]

In the second he views the torment of his bereavement as driving him toward a final darkness:

\[4· 299–301\]

Like the narrator’s appeals to the Furies, the introduction of Oedipus here is startling and disturbing: the grim imaginings of the narrator seem to have surfaced in Troilus’s own imagination and overcome his earlier lofty view of love’s service. Deprived of the light essential to his existence as a lover and convinced that
he is at the mercy of an inevitable fate, he is entering the dark world of those “that ben despeired out of loves grace.”

But while it is possible to use mythography or psychology to develop a more sustained comparison between Troilus and Oedipus at this point, there is something fundamentally incongruous about the pairing. Oedipus’s darkness is the result of far more than a young man’s first setback in love. Troilus’s comparison is not arbitrary, but it is melodramatic, and it occurs, moreover, in the course of a soliloquy whose fatalistic and increasingly funereal cast creates an impression of unique, irremediable privation that is not justified by his actual situation. In a scant hundred lines he lays out a scenario for the rest of his life, inspired by the willful assumption that the worst is inescapable. Moreover, the crisis Troilus faces exists largely in his own mind, for at this point he has failed even to consider the possibility of resisting or evading the parliament’s decree. And of course, he has no idea yet of the full horror of the isolation he will know after he has been betrayed not simply by circumstance, but by the very source of the light that gives his life meaning. In view of all this, juxtaposition with Oedipus tends to diminish rather than enhance Troilus’s tragic stature. His imaginings, the narrator suggests, are themselves food for sorrow (339), and it is the collaboration of sorrow with its imaginative rehearsal that reduces Troilus finally to a trance, a state that is at least partly due to genuinely overpowering feelings, but which we must see at the same time as largely of Troilus’s own making.

Troilus maintains his posture throughout his interview with Pandarus, who has himself become so upset that “for wo, he nyste what he mente” (349) and who finds himself, for once, “So confus, that he nyste what to seye” when ushered into Troilus’s presence. His uncharacteristic confusion and inarticulateness almost seem intended to suggest a response more plausible than Troilus’s to their common sorrow. His attempt to rally Troilus’s spirits only provokes more elaborate declarations of Troilus’s intention to “lyve and sterve” in perfect fidelity:

But fro my soule shal Criseydes darte
Out nevere mo; but down with Proserpyne,
Whan I am dede, I wol go wonne in pyne;
Troilus Alone

And ther I wol eternaly compleyne
My wo, and how that twynned be we twyne.

[4. 472–76]

Responding to Pandarus's urging that he take action and steal Criseyde away, Troilus reveals a capacity for logical argument which we have not seen previously. From his opening lines there is an odd formality about his procedure, as he demands an “audience” for the presentation of his case and promises Pandarus equal opportunity to present his own (544–46). He then takes up a series of possible lines of action, shows how in each case he would run the risk of violating Criseyde's honor in some way, and concludes with an almost syllogistic precision:

Thus am I lost, for aught that I kan see;
For certeyn is, syn that I am hire knyght,
I moste hire hooour levere hao thao me
In every cas, as lovere ought of right.
Thus am I with desir and reson twight...

[4. 568–72]

Troilus immediately bursts into tears again, but his rationalizing of his inaction and the dogmatism with which he cites courtly values as a constraint should arouse our suspicion, as they arouse that of Pandarus, who tells him, “Devyn nat in resoun ay so depe, / Ne curteisly ...” (589–90). But Troilus is unmoved by Pandarus's increasingly vigorous appeals to his hardihood and “corage,” and the interview ends when Pandarus resolves, with no apparent encouragement from Troilus, to confer with Criseyde.

To an extent Troilus is simply overwhelmed by the change in his fortunes, and we may see the recurring funereal-infernal emphasis of his lamentings as a genuine response to greater sorrow than he has known before. But the almost perverse fecundity of these imaginings, and the way they conspire with the new rational element in his thinking to prevent his attempting some decisive action, suggest that at an unconscious level they are the symptom of an alteration in the love that had previously provided a focus for all his emotional energy. The passion that had made him descend from idealism into carnal involvement
with Criseyde and that had reached a peak of its own in the later portions of Book 3 has now begun to ebb. The result is a failure of purpose, an irresolution, which he interprets as a constraint imposed on him by fortune.

This irresolution will be made painfully clear in Troilus’s long last scene with Criseyde, in which, after a few sporadic and feeble attempts to assert himself, he will finally acquiesce in the plan that will lead directly to his betrayal. Throughout this long episode he will appear very much as “sely Troilus,” the victim of his very innocence and virtue, unwavering in his commitment to values and abstractions but powerless to take action in his own behalf and so as vulnerable to the whims of fortune as he has been “subject” to love and blissful Venus throughout the poem. But before introducing the long and emotionally exhausting scene, Chaucer interpolates the famous soliloquy, based on Boethius’s discussion of divine foreknowledge and human free will, which serves as a cumbersome but powerful means of expressing in absolute terms Troilus’s sense of helplessness.

In the *Consolation*, the prisoner’s struggle to deal with the problems of “fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute” is his last attempt to sustain his side of his dialogue with Lady Philosophy. He ends by denying the efficacy of hope, prayer, or virtuous behavior in a world where all is predetermined, and the poem that follows expresses his exasperation with the limits of human knowledge. For Boethius this crisis seems to mark the point at which philosophy begins to require the support of something like religious faith; the arguments with which Lady Philosophy seeks to extend the prisoner’s understanding of providence and of the timeless vision of God climax in a series of affirmations which, though beautiful and compelling, elicit no rational response from the prisoner.

For Chaucer, too, the subject of the long speech seems to be a test of the limits of philosophy and, more significantly, a test of the adequacy of pagan “faith” to sustain itself amid the constraints of ignorance and the many temptations to fatalism. But he has also adapted the speech carefully to Troilus’s situation. The Troilus who could affirm his sense of divine love with such intensity when the impulse to do so was reinforced by love of a more immediate kind has now been betrayed by that lesser love
and subjected to the necessity that governs his own physical and emotional nature. This loss of intensity is paralleled by the “descent” from vision to philosophical argument. The descent is appropriate psychologically as well as symbolically, for Troilus has his own emotional reasons for denying the freedom of his actions. What constitutes a serious rational dilemma for Boethius’s prisoner is for Troilus largely the construct of his own self-defeating powers of rationalization.

Thus once again, as at so many points in Book 4, we must recognize Troilus’s seriousness in this speech and at the same time keep our distance from it. The setting, a temple in which he invokes the gods while being stalked unawares by Pandarus, suggests both the essential purity of his response to his Boethian predicament and his vulnerability in the absence of a sustaining Lady Philosophy, his liability to succumb to the weakness of his own affirmative powers and the persuasiveness of his worldly friends. We must surely accept as genuine the conviction with which he appeals to the “pitous goddes”

To doon hym sone out of this world to pace;
For wel he thoughte ther was non other grace.

But the stanza following, which introduces the soliloquy, undercuts the force of these lines somewhat by reminding us of the rationalizing element in Troilus’s outlook:

He was so fallen in despeir that day,
That outrely he shop hym for to deye.
For right thus was his argument alway:
He seyde he nas but lorn, weylaway!
“For al that comth, comth by necessitee;
Thus to be lorn, it is my destinee.”

From the despair of the first line we pass to determination (“shop”) and an increasingly intrusive sense of “argument” to the point at which we begin to hear Troilus’s own voice actively engaged in proving the helplessness of his situation. And the emphasis on argumentation, the very fact of Troilus’s ability to
“dispute” with himself in the midst of his “heaviness” (1083–84), is as much to the point as the sense of helplessness the speech reveals. Unlike Boethius’s prisoner, Troilus does not pursue his argument to the point of denying the value of hope and prayer. He begins and ends by appealing to the gods, and the contradiction between this gesture and the burden of his argument makes it plain that he has not engaged at a profound level the problem with which he professes to deal. The causes of Troilus’s dilemma are more psychological than circumstantial, and the force of his argument is largely an unconscious response to the need to fill an emotional void. Its validity as a characterization of his situation is further weakened by the fact that Pandarus, entering at its conclusion, immediately and almost effortlessly argues Troilus out of his inactivity (1114–22) and sends him off to commiserate with Criseyde.

The interview that follows is obviously painful for all concerned, but here, too, comedy intrudes, first and most strikingly with Troilus’s elaborate reaction to Criseyde’s swoon at the outset. Chaucer devotes four stanzas to the sequence of calling her name, probing for signs of life, discovering that she is dead, lamenting her death, and laying out her body. Each gesture is repeated two or three times, and they follow one another in rapid succession like the expressions of alarm, confusion, and chagrin in an early silent movie. Then four stanzas are given to Troilus’s desperate resolve and the final speech, delivered with sword in hand, in which he prepares to join Criseyde in death. The speech itself follows Boccaccio closely and is not inherently comic, but the effect of its placement at the end of the elaborate pantomime of Troilus’s response to Criseyde’s apparent death is to make it seem no more than a further piece of posturing. As such it helps to prepare the wonderful moment that instantly dispels any lingering hint of seriousness in the scene: Troilus, his sword pressed against his heart, is about to commend his spirit to Criseyde, when she, “as god wolde,” stirs, sighs, calls his name,

4. On the un-Boethian character of the soliloquy as a whole, see F. Anne Payne, *Chaucer and Menippean Satire* (Madison, Wis., 1981), pp. 125–33. Her argument, however, goes too far in its stress on this aspect.
Troilus Alone

And he answered: 'lady my Criseyde, 
Lyve ye yit?' and leet his swerd down glide. 
[4. 1214-15]

When Criseyde is once again sufficiently her alert self so that her eye strays aside and discovers Troilus's naked sword, the discovery leads to the delicious shared pleasure of reflecting on their near brush with death and the greatness of soul that each would have displayed had it been necessary. Criseyde is so far carried away as to imagine committing suicide with this very sword (1240-41), but then, as if recognizing that this was an overindulgence ("hoo for we han right ynough of this," 1242), she recalls their present commitment to love and its problems with a rather disconcerting abruptness:

And lat us rise and streight to bedde go, 
And there lat us spoken of oure wo. 
[1243-44]

In the rest of the scene most of the speaking is Criseyde’s; Troilus listens to her increasingly confident presentation of her plan of action “with herte and erys spradde” like a faithful dog (1422) and puts down his own misgivings by resolving to trust her in any event.

Troilus’s trust and Criseyde’s course of action carry forward unbroken into Book 5, but whereas Troilus has appeared almost foolishly pathetic in the scene just discussed, Criseyde’s actual departure has a gradual but significant effect on him. Confined within a city that has become a monument to lost love, Troilus experiences the actuality of loss, which parallels, at a far more intense level, the sense of betrayal he had felt in the early scenes of Book 4. There is nothing staged about the fury to which he gives vent after returning from his embassy, and it is the narrator, rather than Troilus himself, who articulates the “infernal” element in his ravings (205-12). The nightmares of abandonment which Boccaccio’s Troiolo describes to Pandaro (5. 26-27) are here reported objectively, and Chaucer alters his version so that the violent bodily quakes and tremors and the sense of
falling from a great height which came over Troiolo in his
dreams become part of Troilus's actual waking experience (253–
59). When he announces his impending death to Pandarus and
issues detailed instructions for his funeral and the disposition of
his effects, though the gesture in itself remains absurd, the pre-
cise and literal emphasis gives an impression of conviction which
had been lacking in the death speeches of Book 4.

The power of Troilus's feelings, his conviction that Criseyde's
return is a matter of life and death to him, and his obsessive
need to dwell on her loss come increasingly to govern the move-
ment of this section of the poem. The narrator confesses himself
exhausted by the very thought of Troilus's emotion (270–74).
Even Pandarus is overwhelmed by a “folye” of such force and
can only reflect that

\[
\ldots\text{ whoso wol not trowen red ne loore,} \\
\text{I kan nat sen in hym no remedie;} \\
\text{But lat hym worthen with his fantasie.} \\
\text{[4. 327–29]}
\]

With no further reason to manipulate Troilus's feelings, Pan-
darus can only seek to distract him from them, arguing at length
against his preoccupation with his dreams and drawing him for
the first time into society. But Troilus spends his week at the
house of Sarpedon in a “maze” (468), thinking only of Criseyde
when in company and imagining her present when alone.

More important than the dominating influence of Troilus's
obsession in itself is the revival of his power to give expression to
the love that lies behind it. The melodramatic rhetoric of despair
that had predominated in Book 4 is now replaced by something
like the innocent idealism of the earlier books as Troilus, in the
course of expressing his sense of bereavement, affirms the
meaning of what he has lost. The first significant expression of
this renewal of vision appears in the two-stanza apostrophe to
Criseyde's abandoned house (540–53), which in most respects
presents his situation in a highly ironic light. In this passage the
sense of desolation seems at first overwhelming, and the passage
is further burdened by the heavy irony of the sexual implica-
tions of his images. The house itself, a finite, material place, is a
monument to the limitations imposed on the lovers by the limited vision of Pandarus, the “architect” of their relationship (1. 1062–71). The lantern to which it is compared is a common image for chastity, and the irony of the fact that its light is “queynt” is reinforced by the probably punning significance of that word. Its characterization as a ring “fro which the ruby is out falle” recalls Pandarus’s use of this image with unmistakable sexual innuendo in commending the idea of love to Crisyeyle (3. 585). The first stanza, moreover, is pervaded by the sense of finality: the light is “queynt”; day has turned to night; the house is “desolat,” “empty,” and “disconsolat”:

WeI oughtestow to falle, and I to dye,
Syn she is went that wont was us to gye!

But in the second stanza, though its tone remains elegiac and the sense of loss prevails, the language of idealization is beginning to work more actively:

“O paleis, whilom crowne of houses alle,
Enlumyned with sonne of alle blisse,
O ryng, fro which the ruby is out falle,
O cause of wo, that cause hast ben of lisse,
Yit, syn I may no bet, fayn wolde I kisse
Thi colde dores, dorste I for this route;
And fareweI, shryne of which the seytnt is oute!”

Here the unconscious sexual emphasis of the previous stanza is joined with reminders of Troilus’s spiritual blindness, culminat-
ing in the bizarre idolatry of the shrine that has been literally abandoned by its mortal saint. And the abortive gesture of affirmation, the kiss Troilus would bestow upon the doors, “dorste I for this route,” sums up all the pathetic futility of his attempts to deal with Criseyde’s removal. But in this deeply ironic context a line like “Enlumyned with sonne of alle blisse” still glows with the pure devotion of the early stages of Troilus’s love. He has known what he has known, and the passage reminds us that his faith in that early vision remains undiminished. When both Pandarus and the narrator have been reduced nearly to silence by their premonitions (468–69, 505–8), Troilus continues to be borne up by the sustaining power of memory, and it is this that comes strongly to the fore in the stanzas that follow his address to the empty palace. Though he immediately succumbs again to the pain of his loss, growing deadly pale and speaking with difficulty, the apostrophe has set in motion a process of recollection, and as he continues to ride through the city, reviewing “his newe sorwe and ek his joies olde” (558), the emphasis on remembered joy becomes steadily greater. He recalls his first sight of Criseyde, her words to him in an affectionate moment, her playfulness and, finally, the place where “my lady first me took unto hire grace” (580–81). As the Black Knight in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* is drawn out of a near-fatal lethargy and his spirit renewed by the compulsion to rehearse the history of his love, so Troilus dwells on the memory of Criseyde’s voice and manner until they have become so real that he can take pleasure in them undisturbed by the thought of their absence:

“And at that corner, in the yonder hous,  
Herde I myn alderlevest lady deere  
So wommanly, with vois melodious,  
Syngen so wel, so goodly, and so cleere,  
That in my soule yit me thynketh ich here  
The blisful sown. . . .”

[5. 575–80]

The passage shows us more than the resurgence of Troilus’s idealism, of course; it shows us also how utterly vulnerable he still is to “hire mevynge and hire chere,” the poise and discreet
coquetry with which Criseyde had conquered him in Book 1 (288–94). It shows us to how great an extent he has been isolated by his fascination with these graces, how they have bred in him a wholly private conception of love with no clear relation to external reality, the character of Criseyde, or even sexual desire. But in the very process of exposing the disorientation of “sely Troilus,” the passage points up once again the innocence and reverence that make his love unique and important. Nobody but Troilus himself could intuit the “entente” with which he addresses Cupid in the prayer that follows; when he tells the god “thow woost wel I desire/Thi grace moost of alle lustes leeve” (591–92), he is clearly appealing for a grace that involves the sexual, but involves it only as part of a larger religion of love, the “byleve” in which Troilus is irrevocably bound to live and die (593).

What Troilus wants most of all is a reconfirmation of the meaning he has sensed in love, but what he is actually given is a growing understanding of the terms on which love has been granted. His prayer begins with a beautiful intuition of the uniqueness of his experience, which expresses both his suffering and his dedication:

“O blisful lord Cupide,  
When I the proces have in my memorie;  
How thow me hast werreyed on every syde,  
Men myghte a book make of it, like a storie.”  
[5. 583–85]

The oddly moving quality of these lines derives not only from the weary lover’s capacity still to claim a meaning for the experience that has defeated him, to rise to the dignity of affirming it as his destiny, but also from the dawning awareness that this destiny has been lived through, that the end is near. In the prayer’s final lines he hints at this end. Shifting abruptly from thoughts of his private need, he appeals to the god to withhold from Troy the cruelty that Juno had visited on Thebes, and with

---

6. Chaucer may be pointing to this incommunicability when he tells us that lines 582–602 are “thought” by Troilus (582), meaning perhaps that they are not actually spoken and are hence inaccessible to Pandarus.
this gesture he acknowledges at least the possibility that Troy and his love are doomed. His acknowledgment is tentative and highly subjective, for he is no more ready to accept the implication that Criseyde’s absence is part of an inevitable course of events than he will be at a later point to admit the validity of Cassandre’s reading of his dream of the boar. But in spite of his resistance, his imagination is moving toward the intuition of a pattern in the events that have affected his love, and he is becoming prepared inwardly for the shock of the discovery of Criseyde’s infidelity.

Troilus withstands this dawning knowledge as best he can. He still has in reserve the desperate energy of his last direct address to Criseyde, the letter that reaffirms her role as one uniquely empowered to save or condemn him; and in the aftermath of his interview with Cassandre there is a point at which he actually seems ready to defy the omens that point to his betrayal. Having cited Alceste in rebuttal of Cassandre’s reading of his dream, he seems for a moment to draw inspiration from her exemplary spiritual courage:

Cassandre goth; and he with cruel herte
Foryat his wo, for angre of hire speche;
And from his bed al sodeynly he sterte,
As though al hool hym hadde made a leche.
And day by day he gan enquere and seche
A sooth of this, with al his fulle cure....

[5. 1534–39]

There is no precedent in Troilus’s experience for the sort of healing anger to which he responds in these lines. It is tempting to see his sudden recovery of both health and purpose as a reintegration of physical and spiritual virtue like that which empowers Hercules to pursue Alceste in the face of death. For the first time, it seems, he is prepared to act in response to what he sees as his fate, to embrace his destiny like a tragic hero.

But the potential significance of this moment of renewal and seeming reorientation is never realized, and despite Troilus’s initial zeal, his pursuit of truth is curiously unproductive. His only real action in the course of the next hundred lines is to
write again and again to Criseyde, and his letters are not demands for information but “pitous” appeals for her return. Far from pursuing knowledge, he makes excuses for Criseyde’s absence and goes against his own instincts by refusing to question the motives of the letter she eventually sends him. The righteous wrath in which he resolves to seek out the evidence that will vindicate Criseyde, and in which he appears for a moment the embodiment of heroic virtue, proves inadequate to overcome his underlying fear that she cannot be vindicated.

In bringing Troilus’s virtue briefly into focus by these elaborate means, only to show it issuing in failure, Chaucer is presenting something comparable, though on a smaller scale, to the elaborate parody of Dante’s *Commedia* at the center of Book 3. As this had enabled him to balance the intense Dantean vision of Troilus against the ironies of the dawn-song sequence and the grotesque parody of Criseyde’s morning interview with Pandarbus, so the sudden rise and decline of Troilus’s heroic virtue here contrasts the idealism that inspires that virtue with the reality that betrays it. The real Criseyde is neither a Beatrice nor an Alceste: the Criseyde Troilus believes in, the quasi-divine being he invokes as uniquely empowered to save or damn him, and the woman in defense of whose honor he is here miraculously restored to life exists now entirely in his imagination and must coexist even there with the suspicion that there is no real being capable of adequately reciprocating his devotion or justifying his willingness to die on her behalf. Hence, rather than resulting in heroic action, his virtuous impulses are suspended by a wholly internal conflict—a need to know the truth and a terror of discovering it. There can be no positive resolution to such a crisis. Only after he has irrefutable evidence of his betrayal in the form of his own brooch affixed to Diomede’s armor does he embark upon the final heroic action that leads to his death at the hands of Achilles. At this point his heroism has nothing left to affirm; he is powerless to “unlove” Criseyde (1696–98) or even to wish her ill, and so can never quite abandon himself to that furor to which even Vergil’s Aeneas finally succumbs. Boccaccio’s Troiolo had looked forward to vanquishing Diomede as a way of causing pain to Criseida (*Fil.* 8. 16) and had even called on the heavens to do away with Criseida herself
(8. 18); but Troilus, while eager to meet with Diomede, cannot entertain toward him anything like Troiolo's bloody thoughts (8. 21) and relinquishes to God the office of doing "vengeance of this vice" (1708). The necessary condition for Troilus's final display of courage is not madness or hatred, but despair; and the only motive for his "wrath" is the desire to achieve his own death.

Thus it is that in the final stanza of his final speech Troilus makes his one really self-assertive gesture. For the first time in the poem he prepares himself to act on the basis of sure knowledge and toward a definite end:

“And certeynly, withoute moore speche,
From hennesforth, as ferforth as I may,
Myn owen deth in armes wol I seche;
I recche nat how soone be the day...."

[5. 1716–19]

Even here, however, Troilus spends two lines clearing his throat before coming out with his fatal vow, and even then the vow is followed by a final backward glance:

“But trewely, Criseyde, swete may,
Whom I have ay with al my myght yserved,
That ye thus doon, I have it nat deserved.”

[5. 1720–22]

And this wistful note will sound again as the poem moves haltingly toward its conclusion. For Troilus's are only the first in a series of "last words."

After a brief final speech by Pandarus, the narrator steps in to offer a moral that seems at first to have something of the ironic finality of Cassandre's "Wepe if thow wolt, or lef":

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....

[5. 1746–49]
The note of finality in these lines is deceptive, for the narrative resumes immediately, but the lines do mark a stage in the complex articulation of the final phase of Troilus’s experience. At this point the love story as such is over, and the remainder of the poem will dramatize the narrator’s attempt to bring it to a decorous conclusion.

After two stanzas that show Troilus pursuing Diomede in vain across the battlefield, the narrator steps in to call attention to the new departure that Troilus’s rage represents:

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. . . .

[5. 1765–69]

The fifth line of this stanza, surely as weak and halting a line as Chaucer ever wrote, tells its own story. The narrator’s farewell to Venus and the Muses at the end of Book 3 had marked a turning point in his attitude toward his story, and now, after the long, slow decline of the love affair has finally ended, this line represents the exhaustion, the last gasp of the narrator’s original inspiration. The energy that moves the poem forward beyond this point is Troilus’s desire to compensate his loss on the battlefield. As Troilus breaks through the various rhetorical barriers by which the narrator attempts to impose a formal closure on this story, the narrator is forced to come to terms with his urgent demand for fulfillment and with a growing awareness that he himself has also been left unfulfilled by his experience of Troilus’s woe, weal, and loss of joy.