LOVERS’ PRAYERS AND DIVINE OPPOSITION

IN CHAUCER’S TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

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Lovers’ Prayers and Divine Opposition in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*

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Introduction

Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* can be a difficult poem because of its complicated network of divine forces. It includes a medieval Christian paradigm layered over a classic Greco-Roman world view. On the surface, it appears that these divine forces act at random, but their motives for exerting influence on the humans’ lives are neither arbitrary nor incomprehensible. The narrator explains what motivates the gods to act, and Troilus and Pandarus frequently discuss what the gods are doing and why. *Troilus* defies a reading that holds one force responsible for the lovers’ fates and encourages a complex understanding of the deities and their relationship with humans. This study aims to present such a complex understanding of the gods at work by exploring Chaucer’s presentation of their motives, and their interactions with humans.

The gods most involved in human lives in *Troilus* are the Greco-Roman gods of love and war, and they will be the central focus of this study. Venus and Cupid are considered the gods of love, and Mars and Minerva the gods of war.¹ When referring to this body of gods as a collective group, I will use the title “Love and War,” but if I am

¹ Minerva is called both Minerva and Pallas in *Troilus*, but because I am using the Roman names of the other three gods, I am going to refer to her as Minerva. I do believe that references to Pallas are significant, and this topic will be discussed further in Chapter 1.
discussing only one god, I will use his or her name. I have chosen to focus on Love and War because they are referred to most often and appear physically in the poem to meddle in Troilus and Criseyde’s affair. These interventions reveal an alliance between Love and War in opposition to the lovers. Both the creation of the affair and its dissolution are punishments: the affair begins as the gods’ way to punish Troilus for teasing lovers, and it ends because Criseyde claims her loyalty is incorruptible. The humans show their varying levels of comprehension of the gods’ actions in their conversations with each other and their prayers to the gods. Troilus and Pandarus both understand why the gods have engineered the affair, but Criseyde has only a partial awareness of Love and War’s influence on her life until she is punished. This thesis will examine how divine action and human conversation demonstrate the union of Love and War in *Troilus*, and it will also offer an account of the power structure that, when challenged by humans, triggers the formation of this alliance.

The relationship between Love and War, on the one hand, and Troilus and Criseyde, on the other, is the core of this analysis, but it would be incomplete if all other divine entities were ignored. I have found that both Fortune and the Christian God are present in *Troilus*, and they are essential to understanding Troilus and Criseyde’s fates and why their story is told. Fortune affects the lovers’ lives, but she is not a part of Love and War’s alliance and does not share their motivations. The separation of the lovers through the prisoner exchange is Fortune’s work, but it is not prompted by one of the lovers’ transgressions: it is simply the turning of Fortune’s wheel, bringing low those
who were previously on top. God, though present in the poem, does not act on the lovers as the pagan gods do. The narrator is undeniably Christian, and he tells Troilus and Criseyde’s story to prove the superiority of Christian divine love over pagan indulgence of earthly desires.

\[\text{Previous Scholarship on War’s Role in the Affair}\]

Chaucer opens *Troilus* by defining it as a poem about love: his purpose is to tell “the double sorwe of Troilus” (I.1).\(^2\) He restates this purpose after he comments on how the upper hand is never consistently held by either the Greeks or Trojans:

\begin{quote}
But how this town com to destruccion
Ne falleth naught to purpos me to telle,
For it were a long digression
Fro my matere, and yow to long to dwelle. (I.141-44)
\end{quote}

This is one of several instances in which discussion of the war bleeds into the love story, and Chaucer feels the need to refocus his work. The Trojan War is supposed to be nothing more than the backdrop for Troilus and Criseyde’s affair, but it seems impossible to tell their story without including parts of the war. The war’s presence in the poem has

been examined by several scholars, and their work forms the foundation for my thinking about the relationship between love and war on the level of the divine.

In *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, Lee Patterson explains that the narrator has to include the war because it is an integral part of the affair: “the events of the war seem to enter the narrative only as occasions for erotic action” (109). Patterson also discusses how Troilus’s love-related emotions compel him to fight: Troilus fights to impress Criseyde when he is happy in love and to express his rage and pain when he discovers her infidelity (105-6). In Patterson’s reading, the narrator brings private, intimate life to the foreground, but cannot keep the war from entering “by the textual back door” (109). The narrator’s inability to separate Troilus’s private love life from work as a soldier has led me to examine the same codependency of love and war as they are embodied by the gods Venus, Cupid, Minerva, and Mars. I have found that, just as Chaucer’s narrator is incapable of telling the story of Troilus’s failed affair without including descriptions of the war, the gods’ involvement in the affair cannot be accounted for without discussing War’s influence along with Love’s.

Carl Grey Martin also discusses the war’s influence on the affair, specifically how the threat of betrayal affects Criseyde. According to Martin, the nature of siege warfare puts the citizens of the attacked city in a unique position; each citizen both is personally at risk and poses a threat as a potential traitor. Martin proposes that Criseyde’s attraction to Troilus is largely fueled by her vulnerable position and her view of Troilus as “an antidote to the siege’s danger” (224). He suggests that even Criseyde’s betrayal is a product of the war, claiming that because she was exchanged by her father, her uncle, and
her city during the course of the war, she easily exchanges her own object of allegiance, be it her city or her lover (230). Martin’s reading of Criseyde as a character highly concerned with the Greeks’ attack is important to my understanding of War’s involvement in developing her attraction to Troilus and affecting her later decisions that end the affair. This thesis will extend Martin’s work by examining how Criseyde’s situation as a citizen of a city under siege makes her particularly concerned with worship and service of Mars and Minerva, and consequently how these gods are able to help generate her attraction to Troilus.

Like Martin, Joseph Gallagher notes that love and war are closely related in the poem and that Criseyde’s attraction for Troilus is rooted in his ability to protect her. Gallagher demonstrates this point through a close reading of Criseyde’s dream about the eagle in Book II. He reads the eagle and its penetration of Criseyde as a symbol for love and war as they are embodied in Troilus (115). Gallagher posits that Criseyde’s dream of the eagle is meant to symbolize that relationship between love and war and to demonstrate how it affects Criseyde. Gallagher writes “the eagle is Troilus as aggressive and explicitly sexual lover but it is also Troilus as warrior” (117). Gallagher notes that Troilus’s roles of lover and warrior are combined in such a way that they become a single role, that of “lover-warrior.” Gallagher demonstrates Criseyde’s awareness of this role, and cites her desire for protection as the reason she is first attracted to Troilus and later Diomede. For Gallagher, the relationship between love and war is at the heart of Troilus, and it is central to understanding Criseyde’s actions. I believe that Troilus’s role as
“lover-warrior” is the manifestation of his correct service to the gods. When he becomes a lover-warrior, he is described as dividing his service between War and Love. This labor is pleasing to both the gods and the servant; when Troilus becomes the respectful, willing servant of the gods, he finds happiness.

Though Patterson, Martin, and Gallagher have all examined the relationship between love and war on the human level in Troilus, there has not yet been a study wholly devoted to investigating this relationship in the gods who embody love and war. This thesis will continue Patterson, Martin, and Gallagher’s work by extending their research to the level of the divine. In my reading, Troilus’s attraction to Criseyde is the result of being struck by both Cupid’s bow and Criseyde’s beauty. Criseyde’s attraction to Troilus is fueled equally by his ability to protect her from the Greeks and by Venus using her power to create love and lust. The prisoner exchange is what causes the lovers to be physically separated, but Criseyde does not waver in her devotion to Troilus until Venus causes her to be attracted to Diomede. In Troilus, love and war rely upon each other, on both the human and divine levels.
Though my work relies mostly on a reading of *Troilus* as a pagan poem, I have chosen to include a chapter on the narrator’s Christian motivations. I have found that the narrator’s religious purpose is essential to understanding why the struggle between humans and pagan gods is included in the poem. The narrator refers to the gods’ sometimes violent subjugating actions in his closing assertion of the superiority of God over pagan gods. The contrast between the pagan gods’ subjugation of humans and God’s defense of humans “from visible and invisible foon” (5.1866) is important to the narrator and, ultimately, the point he wants to demonstrate to his audience of earthly lovers. I address the tension between paganism and Christianity in *Troilus* for several reasons. This study focuses on human prayers, so I would be remiss to ignore the many prayers to God mixed in with prayers to pagan gods. I am also interested in providing an account of which prayers result in divine action and which are ignored. Finally, I have found that the relationship between gods and humans is important to the narrator’s goal of helping lovers, and I aim to show how the presence of both paganism and Christianity in the poem furthers those purposes.

There are many appeals to God in *Troilus*, usually phrased as “for the love of God” or “for Goddes love.” Though these phrases are prevalent, they do not prompt any action from God, as do similar prayers directed toward Love and War. Timothy Arner concludes that Pandarus, Troilus, and Criseyde use the phrases “for the love of God” and
“for Goddes love” rhetorically to manipulate each other, which is why God does not respond to these utterances. Arner believes that the characters’ self-serving use of these phrases is meant to show how they act “in defiance of a governing pagan or Christian theological ideology” (459). There is no expectation that these exhortations will produce divine action, but they may successfully manipulate another human.

Arner’s investigation of the rhetorical use of this phrase does not aim to show that a hierarchy between Christianity and paganism exists in the poem, and I believe Arner is correct in rejecting the establishment of such a power structure. These phrases, and any human discussion of God, are meant to show the distance between their pagan, physical love and the merciful, divine love of God. My thesis will add to Arner’s work by using his method to analyze prayers and phrases directed toward pagan gods. My work supports Arner’s understanding of the system of gods in *Troilus*. Troilus, Pandarus, and Criseyde use “for Goddes love” to manipulate each other because they do not believe these phrases invoke an existing or present God. However, when they use similar constructions regarding pagan gods, such as “for the love of Marte,” they share an understanding that this expression does refer to an existing god, and consequently these phrases are taken seriously and carry more persuasive weight.

Sherron Knopp also discusses how the intersection of classical paganism and medieval Christianity furthers the poem’s moral purpose. Knopp argues that the narrator’s mission is to show the misery produced by giving into earthly desires, and, consequently, to turn his audience of lovers to the divine love of God. Knopp writes:
Its [the poem’s] power comes instead from the use which a superbly competent narrator makes of his subject matter to confront his audience with the essential inadequacy of human love. From the very beginning in Book I, his attitude illustrates the perspective which he will advocate in the Epilogue and towards which he propels his audience even as he accepts them on their own terms as devotees of kynde love and its god. (324-45)

Knopp proposes that the pagan nature of the poem is central to the narrator’s purpose. A tension between the eternal, merciful Christ and the cursed pagans underscores the entire poem. Though the narrator fades from prominence in the middle of the poem, he is always working towards the moral delivered in the epilogue: human love is bound to fail, while God’s love is perfect.

This study integrates Arner and Knopp’s propositions in an effort to form an understanding of the relationship between paganism and Christianity in *Troilus*. The narrator’s goal of demonstrating the insufficiency of human love and pagan gods is shown through the depiction of the gods’ subjugation of defiant humans. The narrator includes humans using God’s name for self-serving ends to demonstrate the tragic consequences of indulging physical desires and serving pagan gods. This study situates the alliance of Love and War against humans within the larger context of the medieval Christian narrator’s goal of proving God’s supremacy in mercy and love.
For the most part, this study will treat the poem chronologically. In the first chapter, the development of the affair in Books I and II is discussed. This chapter explores the violent interaction between Cupid and Troilus and how Venus, Minerva, and Mars become involved. After Troilus recognizes his inferiority to the gods, he becomes Love and War’s faithful servant, and, consequently, they help him woo Criseyde in Book II. The second chapter focuses on the relative peace between gods and humans in Book III. At this point, Troilus is able to serve both Love and War without difficulty. This service is pleasing to the gods and the affair reaches its height with their help. The third chapter discusses how in Books IV and V the gods turn from helping the lovers to ending their relationship. Fortune’s role will be discussed here. It is Fortune who causes the lovers’ separation in the prisoner exchange. In response to this event, Criseyde derides her father for his betrayal of Troy and claims she will never betray Troy or Troilus. Because Calkas left Troy at Apollo’s bidding, her words are taken as offensive to the gods, just as Troilus’s teasing of lovers was in Book I. Once Criseyde is in the Greek camp, Love and War make her fall in love with Diomede and thus betray Troilus in order to force her to recognize her inferiority to the gods.

The narrator and the Christian God are the topic of the fourth chapter. I read the narrator’s censure of pagan customs in the epilogue as a response to the antagonistic relationship between the gods and humans, as demonstrated through Troilus and
Criseyde’s story. This chapter will explain how the narrator uses Troilus and Criseyde’s misery to promote Christian divine love, and to establish the narrator and his God’s place outside of the struggle that occurs between pagan gods and their followers.
In Books I and II the affair between Troilus and Criseyde is established as a result of Troilus’s vocal scorn for Love’s servants. Troilus’s jokes about the foolishness of love make him a target for punishment, and he is turned into a lover. Troilus does not know how to react to his love for Criseyde, so he shuts himself in his room and tries to hide his feelings by claiming to be ill. After a great deal of persuasion, Pandarus finds out what really causes Troilus pain, and he helps Troilus embrace his service to Love and begin pursuing Criseyde. Pandarus agrees to help Troilus obtain Criseyde’s affection and orchestrates a cunning plan to bring Troilus and Criseyde together. These first two books include a great deal of dialogue and debate as Pandarus tries to convince Troilus to confide in him and Criseyde to trust him. Troilus, Pandarus, and Criseyde pray to and invoke the gods often in these two books as they ask the gods for help and try to persuade each other to reveal secrets.
Troilus enters the poem at the festival of the Palladion, where he has come with some of his fellow knights and squires to look at Trojan ladies and tease any lovers he sees. The narrator characterizes Troilus as a happily unattached youth:

This Troilus, as he was wont to gide
His yonge knyghtes, lad hem up and down
In thilke large temple on every side,
Byholding ay the ladies of the town,
Now here, now there; for no devocioun
Hadde he to non, to reven hym his reste,
But gan to preise and lakken whom he leste. (I.183-89)

Troilus believes that he is too strong to be affected by something as silly as love: the narrator says Troilus “wende nothing hadde swich myght/ Ayeyns his wille that shuld his herte stere” (I.227-28). His attitude of superiority to love is not limited to his own refusal to commit to a woman. He also teases those who serve Love and calls them fools. Troilus has brought his men to the temple specifically for this purpose. If he sees a knight or squire looking at a certain lady lovingly, he taunts them:

“I have herd told, pardieux, of youre lyvynge,
Ye loveres, and youre lewed obsevaunces,
And which a labour folk han in wynnynge
Of love, and in the kepyng which doutaunces;
And whan youre prey is lost, woo and penaunces.
O veray fooles, nyce and blynde be ye!
The nys nat oon kan war by other be.” (I.197-203)

Troilus not only thinks love is foolish, but also calls it lewd. His jokes aimed at lovers and his belief that he is immune to Love’s power prompt Cupid to make Troilus a lover. Troilus compares love to a hunt, saying that lovers experience woe when their “prey is lost.” This comparison is notable, as Troilus will soon see Love’s hunt in action when Cupid makes Troilus his target.

Troilus’s purpose for being at the festival changes in an instant. While he came to look at beautiful ladies and tease lovers, he now begins to search the temple for his own lady to love. Troilus goes through the temple, “on this lady, and now on that, lokynge,…Til on Criseyde it [his eye] smot, and ther it stente” (I.269, 273). Though Troilus is initially turned into a lover because of his disrespect towards Love, he is also moved to love when he sees Criseyde. The narrator tells us she is more beautiful than any other woman, even though she still wears her black widow’s habit. It is both Cupid’s power and Criseyde’s beauty that make Troilus fall for her.

Troilus leaves the temple and returns to his room. He soon becomes sick with love but tries to hide the reason for his illness from others. Troilus thinks he may be able to recover from love, but soon realizes there is no hope and he must pursue Criseyde. Troilus muses on the seemingly contradictory character of Love. He experiences pain at
Love’s hands, but enjoys the pain and wants it to continue. Finally, he addresses Love directly:

“O Lord, now youres is

My spirit, which that oughte youres be.

Yow thanke I, lord, that han me brought to this.

But wheither goddesse or womman, iwis,

She be, I not, which that ye do me serve;

But as hire man I wol ay lyve and sterve.” (I.422-27)

Troilus understands that he has been turned into a lover by Cupid, but accepts it and thanks Cupid for it. Once Troilus pledges his spirit to service of Love and Criseyde, his seemingly hopeless situation begins to change.

Pandarus comes to visit, mistakes Troilus’s groaning in love for groaning at battle injuries, and asks him “han now thus soone Grekes maad yow leene?” (I.553). After much prodding, Pandarus convinces Troilus to tell him what causes his pain. When Troilus admits he is in love, Pandarus shows that he knows the gods are involved. Pandarus gives a long summary of Troilus’s previous jokes at the expense of lovers, and then guides him through repentance and conversion:

“Now bet thi brest, and sey to God of Love,

‘Thy grace, lord, for now I me repente,

If I mysspak, for now myself I love.’

Thus say with al thyn herte in good entente.” (I.932-35)
Pandarus knows that Troilus needs to appease Cupid’s anger, but he also suggests that Troilus’s repentance needs to be genuine, spoken wholeheartedly and with “good entente.” Troilus follows Pandarus’s advice, and Pandarus tells him that he thinks the gods’ wrath is appeased and they will likely help his cause now. Pandarus also offers to help Troilus pursue his love, who happens to be his niece.

When Troilus gets this news, he makes another shift in his attitude toward Love: Troilus extends his service of Love to Venus, Cupid’s mother. Near the end of Book I, Troilus prays, “‘Now blissful Venus helpe, er that I sterve,/Of the, Pandare, I mowe some thank deserve’” (I.1014-15). Whereas Troilus has been repentant toward Cupid up until this point, he now considers himself a full servant of Love, who has the right to ask for help from Cupid or Venus. The narrator has called Troilus a subject of Love several times before Troilus makes this plea, but this is the first time Troilus has made an appeal to Love asking for something other than forgiveness. When Troilus appeals to Venus, he shows that he has become a willing and humble servant of Love, worthy of Love’s aid.

Troilus experiences a major shift in his attitude towards Love in Book I. By the end of the book, he has started to engage in the lover’s behavior he ridiculed at the book’s opening. His understanding of his relationship with Love has changed as well. While he originally believed that Love could not influence him, he now understands that Love’s power is much stronger than his. Though he knows he must submit to Love, he is unable to do so alone. However, with Pandarus’s help, Troilus undergoes repentance and a full conversion into a lover. His formerly antagonistic relationship with Love is now one of respect, and the gods are now inclined to answer Troilus’s prayers and grant his requests.
In Book II the relationship between the gods and humans is best demonstrated through Pandarbus’s persuasive speeches to the future lovers and the scene in which Criseyde becomes attracted to Troilus. Though Pandarbus is often read as a manipulative character, in my reading he functions as a control for the experiment. Unlike Troilus and Criseyde, Pandarbus does not offend or defy the gods at any point in the poem. Rather than being at odds with the deities, Pandarbus works as their agent. He guides Troilus in his repentance and conversion, and he works with the gods to create Criseyde’s attraction for Troilus. Pandarbus’s relationship with the gods demonstrates that the gods’ actions towards humans are not arbitrary. Pandarbus is never opposed to the gods, so he is never punished and his requests to the gods are granted. There are points when Troilus and Criseyde are in good standing with the gods and their prayers are answered, but when they commit their sins of pride, their prayers are ignored and they are punished.

The narrator explains that “Pandarbus, for al his wise speche,/ Felt ek his part of loves shotes keene,” (II.57-58) and suggests that his empathy for Troilus is what motivates him to speak with Criseyde on Troilus’s behalf. When Pandarbus visits Criseyde, she suspects his motives and is confused by his conversation, so Pandarbus swears his honesty by Minerva and calls himself Venus’s servant:

“For, nece, by the goddesse Mynerve,

And Jupiter, that maketh the thondre rynge,
By the blisful Venus that I serve,
Ye ben the womman in this world lyvynge—
Withouten paramours, to my wyttynge—
That I best love, and lothest am to greve.” (II.232-37)

Pandarus does not swear only by Venus and Cupid, as might be expected in a speech persuading Criseyde to love. He includes other gods, notably Minerva. Though Criseyde is still suspicious of her uncle, after he swears by Minerva and Venus, the conversation assumes a calmer tone. Though this promise does not include an actual prayer or request made to the gods, his self-identification as a servant of the gods holds weight for Criseyde, likely because she believes that if Pandarus is lying and swearing falsely, he will be punished for the transgression.

When Pandarus finally reveals his true purpose for visiting Criseyde, she responds with outrage. Pandarus has to prove once again that he is trustworthy and does so by calling upon “dispitouse Marte” (II.435) to prevent him from leaving if he meant any harm. On the surface, this request seems to be made to Mars because he is cruel, but it also indicates that Mars is involved in uniting Troilus and Criseyde. The narrator tells us that Pandarus’s intentions are genuine—he feels a deep sympathy for Troilus—so his calling upon Mars is more than an empty rhetorical tool. Later in the conversation, Pandarus uses an appeal to Mars to support the benevolence of his actions again, crying “What so I spak, I mente naughte but wel,/ By Mars, the god that helmed is of steel!” (II.592-93). Like Cupid’s shifting role in Book I, Mars’s role begins to shift from warrior to lover during Pandarus’s speech. Instead of using brute force to bring about the desired
result, Mars has become a god involved in gentle seduction. Though Mars is presented here as ready for battle, Pandarus’s invocation of Mars is effective in the persuasion of Criseyde to love Troilus, perhaps even more effective than invocations of Cupid or Venus. 

After Pandarus has told Criseyde about Troilus’s feelings, she looks out the window and sees Troilus coming in from the battlefield. The narrator describes the sight of Troilus as he appears to Criseyde:

This Troilus sat on his baye steede
Al armed, save his hed, ful richely;
And wounded was his hors, and gan to blede,
On which he rood a pas ful softly.
But swich a knyghtly sighte trewely
As was on hym, was nought, withouten faille,
To loke on Mars, that god is of bataille. (II.624-30)

Though Mars is not technically present in this moment, this description gives him physicality. He is compared to Troilus, who is described in great detail: how he is sitting, how he is armed, and how he moves. Aside from imbuing Mars with corporality, this comparison also links Mars to Troilus, the newest convert to the religion of Love. Criseyde’s attraction to Troilus is sparked by his image as a fierce and savage warrior, still bloody from the recent battle.

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3 As Martin explains, Criseyde is intensely aware of the fact that she is in danger because of the siege. She desires protection from the Greeks, and she sees Troilus as someone able to provide that protection. She is “moved by the sight of Troilus as an icon of martial chivalry,” and her attraction to him is rooted, at least in part, in his identity as a soldier (223).
When Pandarus returns to Troilus to tell him how Criseyde reacted, there is an oscillation between invocations of Venus and Mars in their conversation. When Troilus discovers that there is hope that Criseyde will return his affection, he immediately expresses thanks: “O Venus deere,/Thi myght, thi grace, yheried be it here!” (II.972-73). Though Troilus does praise Venus’s grace, a quality that is more conventionally associated with her, his first impulse is to praise her might; he believes Venus has used her strength and power to create Criseyde’s attraction to him. Troilus’s praise of Venus suggests that she may be using might to achieve her goals instead of seduction and subtle manipulation as would be typical of her character. The gods’ shifting identities are also shown through Pandarus’s response to Troilus’s exuberant praise. Pandarus thinks Troilus is too eager, and warns him to proceed “al esily, now, for the love of Marte” (II.989). Pandarus appeals to Troilus on his love of Mars rather than his fear of the god’s potential wrath. While Mars was “dispitouse” and cruel just five hundred lines earlier, he has now become a god whom humans love. Even the simple juxtaposition of Mars’s name with the word “love” demonstrates that Love and War are beginning to share the roles of inspiring love and using force to achieve desired outcomes.
Appearances of the Gods

In *Troilus*, there are two types of human action that prompt the appearance of gods: a claim by a defiant human or a prayer from a humble servant. In Book I, Cupid’s appearance and action fit in the first category. Cupid takes offense at Troilus’s jokes because they show that Troilus considers himself immune to Love’s power. In response, Cupid feels compelled to make Troilus his obedient subject. Cupid hits Troilus with his arrow, and plucks him like a peacock:

At which the God of Love gan loken rowe
Right for despit, and shop for ben to wroken.
He kidde anon his bowe nas naught broken;
For sodeynly he hitte hym atte fulle—
And yet as proud a pekok kan he pulle. (I.206-10)

In this passage, Cupid is visibly warlike—angry, rough, and eager to demonstrate the effectiveness of his bow. Though Troilus is later thankful that he has been converted to love, Cupid is here motivated by revenge, not by a desire to benefit Troilus. The narrator compares Cupid’s subjugation of Troilus to the taming of a horse:

As proude Bayard gynneth for to skippe
Out of the weye, so pryketh hym his corn,
Til he a lasshe have of the longe whippe—
Than thynketh he, “Though I praunce al byforn
First in the trays, ful fat and newe shorn,
Yet I am but an hors, and horses lawe
I moot endure, and with my feres drawe.” (I.218-24)

The narrator’s description of Troilus throughout the rest of the book continues to compare Troilus to an animal being tamed in a painful manner. Troilus’s transformation into a lover is intensely physical; the narrator likens Troilus’s love to the feeling of having a pierced body—he is shot with an arrow, pricked with a spur, and beaten with a whip. When Troilus is in love, he feels as if he is “thorugh-shoten and thorugh-darted” (I.325). Troilus’s injuries inflicted by Cupid are the same injuries he risks receiving on the battlefield, in service of Mars.

Though Cupid is the god who strikes Troilus, Minerva is implicitly involved in this punishment. Troilus and Cupid’s altercation takes place in Minerva’s temple. The narrator stresses the importance of religious rites, and this custom in particular, for the Trojans:

But though that Grekes hem of Troie shetten,
And hir cite biseged al aboute,
Hire olde usage nolde they nat letten
As for to honoure hir goddes ful devout;
But aldimost in honour, out of doute,
Thei hadde a relik, heet Palladion,
That was hire trist aboven everichon. (I.148-54)
The narrator says that everyone in the city, regardless of age, class, or gender, attends the festival, but he specifically names “so many a lusty knyght,/So many a lady fressh and mayden bright” (I.165-66) among the worshippers in the temple. The knights present at Minerva’s temple have high stakes in their worship—they risk their lives in war daily—but it is in Minerva’s temple that these knights will also become subjects of Love. Though Minerva is not interested in being a lover herself, she allows Cupid to form attractions in her temple, possibly because, as Troilus will later demonstrate, soldiers are better fighters when they are in love. She also allows Cupid to strike Troilus and punish him in her temple. Perhaps Minerva recognizes that Troilus’s belief that Love cannot affect him poses a threat to all the gods’ power, and she thus lets the striking occur.

The object of the festival, the Palladium, is a subtle symbol for the combination of love and war. Pallas was a beloved friend of Minerva accidentally killed by the goddess while they were play-wrestling; the expression of their love for each other was mock combat. Expressing love through struggle and war is a recurring idea in Troilus. Whenever Troilus experiences strong emotions related to his relationship with Criseyde, he takes to the battlefield. Troilus does not express his love for Criseyde by fighting with her, as Minerva and Pallas did, but he uses the Greek enemy as a surrogate for his expression of love through combat.

In Book II, Venus appears and exerts her influence on Criseyde, but her appearance is prompted by the second type of human action: prayers of servants. Venus increases Criseyde’s attraction to Troilus because she wants to help him:

And after that, his manhod and his pyne
Made love withinne hire for to myne,
For which by proces and by good servyse
He gat hire love, and in no sodeyn wyse.
And also blisful Venus, wel arrayed,
Sat in hire seventhe hous of hevene tho,
Disposed wel, and with aspects payed,
To helpe sely Troilus of his woo. (II.676-83)

This second appearance by a god differs from the first, by Cupid, in two regards. Unlike Troilus’s affection for Criseyde, Criseyde’s attraction to Troilus is not intended to punish her. In fact, the creation of Criseyde’s attraction by the gods has very little to do with Criseyde at all: it is a reward to Troilus for his faithful service rather than a punishment for his defiance.

Conclusions

In Books I and II Love and War unite in order to bring Troilus and Criseyde together, first as punishment of defiant Troilus by Cupid and Minerva, and then to answer the prayers of their repentant servant by Venus and Mars. Pandarus and Troilus understand what Cupid did, and why. Before Troilus reveals his feelings to Pandarus, he
spends time alone, thinking and praying. His prayers indicate that he realizes that his love for Criseyde is the result of his former scorn for lovers. Pandarus also understands that Troilus’s love was created by Cupid, and his guidance of Troilus through repentance shows that he is more in tune with what will offend or please the gods than is Troilus. Criseyde’s declarations of service to the gods are not as enthusiastic as those of Troilus or Pandarus, but she clearly believes that the gods are at work and has a basic understanding of what will please or anger them. Criseyde takes her uncle’s claims of service to the gods as weighty oaths, suggesting that she believes making such oaths falsely would result in the gods’ retribution. However, Pandarus and Troilus never explain exactly how or why Troilus began to love Criseyde, and consequently she does not have a complete understanding of the gods’ involvement in the affair. It is likely that Criseyde’s lesser comprehension of the extent of the gods’ involvement contributes to her own claim of superiority in Book IV, which leads to her punishment at the hands of the gods in Book V.

At the close of Book II, the gods and humans are in a harmonious relationship. Troilus’s repentance for his earlier scorn has appeased Cupid’s anger and he is now a humble servant of both Love and War. However, the peace between humans and gods does not result in ceased communication between them. The humans still have need for the gods’ help and will continue to invoke the gods in their conversations with each other. In Book III Love and War are still at work, but because their goals in Books I and II have largely been achieved, their aid can be delivered through gentle influence rather than direct appearance and action.
In Book III Troilus and Criseyde’s relationship continues to grow as a result of the gods’ work in Books I and II. As Troilus finds happiness with Criseyde, he thanks the gods through vocal praise and service. His life is entirely devoted to godly service, both in battle and in romance. This constant service brings Troilus joy and internal peace, and his joy and gratitude cause him frequently to express an overflow of emotion. Criseyde, though still hesitant at times, is also content in the affair. Her gratitude to the gods is not as exuberant as that of Troilus, but she does feel compelled to express thanks and therefore to serve the gods. The forces of Love and War are here less active than in the previous two books, and the gods are mentioned mostly in appreciative prayers for their help. This quiescence is due to the lack of conflict between gods and humans at this point in the poem; Troilus has been thoroughly converted into a lover and Criseyde has not yet
made her hubristic claim of absolute fidelity in the names of the gods. Book III shows how the events set in motion by the gods’ interventions in Books I and II will unfold. In this book, peace achieved between the lovers, between Criseyde and her uncle, and between the humans and gods.

*Human Service in Return for Gods’ Aid*

Troilus’s post-conversion service to the gods is prominent in both action and narration in Book III. Troilus’s relationship with the gods has changed, and the narrator shows the contrast between the formerly defiant anti-lover and the now subservient lover when he praises Venus in the proem. First, the narrator refers to those who defy love:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ye folk a lawe han set in universe,} \\
\text{And this knowe I by hem that lovers be,} \\
\text{That whoso stryveth with yow hath the werse (III.36-38)}
\end{align*}
\]

This is an undeniable reference to Troilus and his earlier scorn of love. Troilus struggled against love and lost, receiving piercing wounds in the process. The narrator goes on to allude to Troilus’s new relationship with Love as well:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Now, lady bryght, for thi benignite,} \\
\text{At reverence of hem that serven the,}
\end{align*}
\]
Whos clercl I am, so techeth me devyse
Som joye of that is felt in thi servyse. (III.39-42)

Here, the narrator introduces an idea that is essential to Book III: service of the gods brings joy. Troilus’s worship of the gods as warrior and lover is mentioned several times in this book, but there is no indication that Troilus begrudges this service or finds it painful. Instead, he is happy and often overwhelmed with joy and gratitude. By discussing the difference between those who defy Love and those who serve Love, the narrator distinguishes between Troilus’s former antagonistic relationship with Cupid and his new servant-master relationship with the gods.

The opening scene of Book III becomes a culmination of the efforts to unite Troilus and Criseyde in Books I and II. The scene continues the dinner Pandarus arranged in Book II, and Troilus and Criseyde are about to physically express their affection for each other for the first time. When Troilus and Criseyde kiss, Pandarus dramatically falls to his knees and thanks the gods:

“Immortal god,” quod he, “that mayst nought deyen,
Cupide I mene, of this mayst glorifie;
And Venus, thow mayst maken melodie!
Withouten hond, me semeth that in the towne,
For this merveille ich here ech belle sowne.” (III.185-89)

Pandarus praises Venus and Cupid for having answered his and Troilus’s prayers for help. Notably, Chaucer has deferred this scene from Book II to Book III. The dinner scene ends soon after this moment, with Chaucer choosing to open Book III with the
lovers’ first kiss. By placing the kiss here, Chaucer shows the reader that, while the previous two books were about the affair being created, Book III is about the affair being consummated and the humans’ resulting gratitude. A theme of human gratitude for divine aid is now established. When Pandarus comments that “of this [the kiss] mayst glorifie,” he introduces the standard that acts of love can function as acts of worship.

Now that Troilus has obtained Criseyde’s affection, he devotes himself to demonstrating gratitude to the gods for making him a lover. He balances his time between his work as a soldier and his affair with Criseyde—service to War and to Love:

This was his lif: with all his fulle myght,
By day, he was in Martes heigh servyse—
This is to seyn, in armes as a knight;
And for the more part, the longe nyght
He lay and thoughte how that he myghte serve
His lady best, hire thonk for to deserve. (III.436-41)

Troilus is able to serve both Love and War, and in fact his service to each is bettered by his service to the other. Martin explains that Troilus becomes a finer soldier once he is involved with Criseyde: “While Troilus fights without hesitation, he does so less for the preservation of Troy than to impress the woman he loves” (226). Though Troilus may not be devoted to the war effort simply for the sake of the city, he begins to fight more fiercely because he wants to retain Criseyde’s admiration and serve the gods who helped him achieve his lady’s love.
Although the majority of the prayers in Book III are prayers of thanks, there is one notable exception. Before Troilus approaches Criseyde’s closet, he prays for guidance from nearly all the gods. He begins his supplication with an address to Venus:

“Yet, blissful Venus, this nyght thow me enspire,”
Quod Troilus, “As wys as I the serve,
And evere bet and bet shal, til I sterve.” (III.712-14)

Troilus reminds Venus here that he is her servant and will be until he dies. As one who always strives to serve Venus better, he is worthy of her inspiration and help when bedding Criseyde.

In the same speech, Troilus discusses the dual influences of Venus and Mars, and then he expands his supplication to include many more Olympian gods. Troilus speculates on his birth and his formerly belligerent features:

“And if ich hadde, O Venus ful of myrthe,
Aspectes badde of Mars or of Saturne,
Or thow combust or let were in my birthe,
Thy fader prey al thilke harme disturne.” (III.715-19)

As Troilus relives here his conversion from hostility into love, he also points to the relationship between Venus and Mars. He then continues to cite relationships between various gods and the objects of their affection, addressing several gods and begging them for help in the names of their lovers—in effect turning them all into gods of love:

“O Jove ek, for the love of faire Europe,
The which in forme of bole away thow fette,
Now help! O Mars, thow with thi blody cope,
For love of Cipris, thow me nought ne lette!
O Phebus, thynk whan Dane hireselven shette
Under the bark, and laurer wax for drede;
Yet for hire love, O help now at this need!
Mercurie, for the love of Hierse eke,
For which Pallas was with Aglawros wroth,
Now help! And ek Diane, I the biseke
That this viage be nought to the looth!” (III.722-32)

In this passage, Troilus has turned Jove, Mars, Phoebus Apollo, and Mercury into gods of love by reminding them of the pain or bliss each of them felt while in the throes of lust or romance. Troilus’s reminder to Mars that he was in love with Venus promotes an image of Mars as a war god who is also a lover. Troilus does not completely strip Mars of his military prowess in this address—he still paints him as having a “blody cope.” He is also a lover, willing to betray one of his fellow Olympians for Venus’s sake.

Though Troilus cannot appeal to Minerva in the same way that he appeals to the other gods, his reference to Pallas and Aglawros turns Minerva into as much a goddess of love as is possible. When he invokes the Aglawros myth, he calls upon Vulcan’s attempt to rape Minerva, which resulted in the birth of Ericthonious. Minerva gives the child, hidden in a basket, to Aglawros, who opens the basket and looks at the child despite Minerva’s strict instructions not to do so. This is the closest Minerva comes to sexual intercourse or motherhood, and although Troilus does not address her directly, by
alluding to this myth, he makes Minerva recall the event in her life during which she was closest to feeling what he feels now. When Troilus addresses Minerva and Diana, the goddesses who cannot be made to fall in love, he asks them not to thwart his seduction of Criseyde. He does not expect them to help, but instead asks them to honor his pursuit by not preventing his love for Criseyde from being consummated.

Criseyde is not engaged in constant service to the gods, but she recognizes that she needs to be. When Pandarus tells Criseyde that Troilus is in the house, she is understandably upset. In order to appease Criseyde’s anger and regain her trust, Pandarus assures Criseyde that letting Troilus come into her chamber is the right thing to do. He mentions Troilus’s love pains and subtly reminds Criseyde that, as a soldier, Troilus needs to maintain his health:

“Now have I told what peril he is inne,
And his comynge unwist is to very wight;
Ne, parde, harm may ther be non, ne synne:
I wol myself be with yow al this nyght.
Ye know ek how it is youre owen knyght,
And that bi right ye moste upon him triste,
And I al prest to fecche hym when yow liste.” (III.911-17)

Though Pandarus does not explicitly say it here, by calling Troilus Criseyde’s “owen knyght,” he implies that Criseyde has a duty to soothe Troilus’s pain because his well-being and ability to fight are important to the city’s safety. Pandarus suggests that by easing her knight’s pain, Criseyde helps not only Troilus but Troy as well. Pandarus is
aware of the salience of the siege in Criseyde’s thoughts, and correctly guesses that Troilus’s occupation as soldier will be persuasive to her. Criseyde cannot serve War on the battlefield, but she can serve War by loving Troilus and making him a better soldier.

After Pandarus introduces this concept, Criseyde agrees to let Troilus enter her chamber. Pandarus follows his first idea about service to War with an opportunity to serve Love. Pandarus tells Criseyde that letting Troilus enter, and then engaging in the amorous acts sure to follow, will serve as worship of Venus. He links the act of praising Venus with the act of lying with Troilus:

“But liggeth stille, and taketh hym right here—

It nedeth nought no ferther for hym to sterte.

And ech of yow ese otheres sorwes smerte,

For love of God! And Venus, I the herye;

For soone hope I we shul ben alle merye.” (III.948-52)

Criseyde is moved from initial outrage toward willing participation in the tryst by means of Pandarus’s words, which show her that, by loving Troilus, she will both help her city and worship the gods. She recognizes the importance of glorifying the gods and is willing to do Troilus and Pandarus’s bidding if it will serve as worship.

Throughout Troilus’s pursuit of Criseyde, he is always quick to give credit for his success to the gods. After Criseyde lets Troilus enter her chamber and the dramatic episode of Troilus’s swoon is resolved, the two consummate the affair and spend the night in each other’s arms. Troilus then turns to the gods in thanks:

“O Love, O Charitie!
Thi moder ek, Cithera, the swete,
After thiself next heried be she—
Venus, mene I, the wel-willy planete!—
And next that, Imeneus, I the grete,
For nevere man was to yow goddes holde
As I, which ye han brought fro cares colde.” (III.1254-60)

Troilus acknowledges that his success in wooing Criseyde is Love’s work, and he also intentionally acknowledges that he is in the gods’ debt. Troilus has adopted a submissive attitude toward the gods, and he readily commits to serving them.

Despite the fact that Criseyde questions Pandarus and Troilus’s motives and is often hesitant to engage fully in the affair, she is, ultimately, in love with Troilus and grateful for their relationship. Her expressions of gratitude are rarer than Troilus’s, and they have a distinctly different tone. She tends to praise Troilus’s traits, not the gods’.

When Troilus leaves, Criseyde offers her own version of thanks for the affair:

Criseyde also, right in the same wyse,
Of Troilus gan in hire herte shette
His worthynesse, his lust, his dedes wise,
His gentilnesse, and how she with hym mette,
Thonking Love he so wel hire bisette. (III.1548-52)

Criseyde seems to have forgotten that it was not Troilus’s lust or gentleness that first caught her eye. It was his appearance as Mars, still bloody from the battlefield. She does not realize that their meeting was a result of Troilus’s punishment for disrespect of a god.
Her ignorance of the origin of her affair contributes to the stark difference between her expression of thanks and those of Troilus or Pandarus. She mostly praises Troilus’s traits instead of listing the gods’ favorable qualities asTroilus and Pandarus usually do in their prayers. Criseyde acknowledges that she should thank the gods for her relationship with Troilus, but because she did not cause the affair with her insolence towards Love, she does not offer a claim of service or humility along with her thanks.

Troilus’s Boethian song at the end of Book III stresses once again that he is a servant to Love. Troilus describes Love’s extensive dominion, and then praises Love for maintaining his power over any being that loves:

“Al this doth Love, ay heried be his myghtes!—
That, that the se, that greedy is to flowen,
Constreyneth to a certeyn ende so
His flodes that so fiersly they ne grownen
To drenchen erthe and al for evere mo;
And if that Love aught lete his bridel go,
Al that now loveth asondre sholde lepe,
And lost were al that Love halt now to-hepe.” (III.1757-64)

Love’s control has caused Troilus pain, but he now sees Love’s power as essential to the maintenance of the world’s current state. He thanks Love for the strict control it holds over lovers through “lawe of compaignie” (III. 1748). Immediately after offering this praise of Love, Troilus becomes aware that the city needs his prowess on the battlefield, and he goes out to fight. The narrator explains that Troilus’s increased combat abilities
are due to his newfound love: “And this encrees of hardynesse and myght/ Com hym of love, his ladies thank to wynne” (III.1776-77). For Troilus, praise of Love and demonstration of might in battle are closely connected.

The narrator’s closing comments reassert that the focus of Book III is Troilus’s happiness and service. The narrator thanks Venus and Cupid for their help in telling this part of the story, and tells these gods “thorough yow have I seyde fully in my song/ Th’effect and joie of Troilus servise” (III. 1814-15). This book has demonstrated that because Troilus accepted his inferiority to the gods and became their humble servant, his desires were fulfilled. His service to the gods is ongoing, but it is not a source of pain for him. His service to Love and War bring him joy. The book ends on a happy note: “Troilus in lust and in quiete/ is with Criseyde, his owen herte swete” (III. 1819-20).

Love and War’s Absence in Book III

There are no appearances of Love or War in Book III, but they still hold influence over the human characters. Examining the absence of Venus in Book III, Sumner Ferris asserts that it does not mean she has stopped being involved in the affair. Ferris writes: “Venus does not appear in her own right in Book III of Troilus (though she is spoken of more often there than in any other book), but it is through her power that Troilus and
Criseyde are able to consummate their love” (253). According to Ferris, the proem is designed to indicate that all that happens in Book III is Venus’s work. I propose that the same is true of the other gods who have been involved in the affair up to this point. Though they do not appear or take direct action on the lovers, they still have influence and power over the situation.

The narrator devotes the proem entirely to praising Venus, which establishes her essential yet subtle role in this book. The narrator emphasizes that Venus is still powerful even though her influence is now less noticeable:

In hevene and helle, in erthe and salte and see
Is felt thi might, if that I wel descerne,
As man, brid, best, fissh, herbe, and grene tree
Thee fele in tymes with vapour eterne. (III.8-11)

This description mirrors Troilus’s description of Love’s domain in the *Canticus Troili*. Both humans and beasts feel Love’s power in the earth and on sea. The narrator’s characterization of Love’s power has shifted considerably from Books I and II, where Love was visible and active. Now Love’s influence is felt rather than seen.

Troilus and Criseyde are still receiving aid from the gods, though it is much gentler and subtler than earlier divine interventions. When Troilus and Criseyde first start to see each other regularly, the narrator details their efforts to keep their relationship secret. Keeping their affair private is their first priority:

But it was spoken in so short a wise,
In swich await alwey, and in swich feere,
Lest any wight devynen or devyse
Wolde of hem two, or to it laye an ere,
That al this world so leef to hem ne were
As that Cupide wolde hem grace sende
To maken of hire speche aright an ende. (III.456-62)

Despite the gods’ seeming absence, their influence continues. Though Cupid is not acting here, as he did in Book I, he helps Troilus and Criseyde know when to end their conversations. His help is subtle but effective. They are successful in keeping their affair from being discovered.

The gods’ approval of the affair is also shown by how they neglect to interfere. Troilus begs that the gods not prevent his success in his prayer before he enters Criseyde’s closet. In Books I and II it was made clear that if a human acts in defiance of the gods’ desires, the gods will appear and force the human to do their bidding. Because the humans are allowed to continue in their patterns of behavior and attitudes, it is implied that their actions and behaviors are acceptable or pleasing to the gods.
In Book III the gods’ interventions in the previous two books are still being played out. Because Troilus has repented for his disrespect and Criseyde has agreed to become Troilus’s lover, the gods have no need to act in the dramatic ways they did earlier. At this point, Pandarus can manage any orchestration or manipulation needed to arrange meetings between the lovers. In Books I and II Troilus’s desires would have likely been impossible to attain without divine help. In Book III, however, his goals are humanly attainable, so his requests to the gods are minor. He now asks only for inspiration and for the gods not to prevent his success. His prayers are answered and the gods’ influence events, but their presence is not as noticeable as were their earlier acts. The gods have fulfilled their servants’ requests and the humans are in their debt, which is why service to the gods is so prevalent a topic in Book III. Love and War are at peace with Troilus and Criseyde for now, but when Fortune turns her wheel, Criseyde will make her own scornful comments, and the lovers will be in conflict with the gods once again.
Chapter 3

Criseyde’s Punishment and the End of the Affair

In Book IV a new divine force becomes involved in Troilus and Criseyde’s lives. Fortune, acting independently of Love and War, causes the lovers to be physically separated. Many scholars such as J. Allan Mitchell and Joseph Salemi read both the development and dissolution of the affair as Fortune’s work. Salemi presents Fortune as a playful force, and claims that it is Fortuna “who brings lover, beloved and opportunity together for her own purposes” (212) when Troilus falls in love with Criseyde. According to Mitchell, Fortune “gives shape not only to the outcome of the affair but also to its ethical and political meanings” (101). Though Fortune is undeniably present and at work in Troilus, in my reading of the poem, Fortune’s only major intervention into the affair is to separate Troilus and Criseyde physically through the prisoner exchange. This reading is supported by the high concentration of references to Fortune surrounding the Trojans’ decision to trade Criseyde for Antenor. There are very few prayers made to the Love and
War in Book IV, but there is an extensive discussion of Fortune’s involvement in the lovers’ separation. There is a consensus among the characters that the trade of Criseyde to the Greeks is caused by the turning of Fortune’s wheel, bringing low those who were previously high. Though Fortune causes the physical separation of the lovers, the end of the affair through Criseyde’s betrayal is the work of Love and War. In response to Troilus’s doubts about Criseyde, she asserts her loyalty with a scornful condemnation of traitors. Criseyde claims that nothing could make her betray her lover, and this statement offends the gods who hold absolute power over humans. Criseyde’s pride puts her in opposition to the gods, and consequently, Love and War abandon their efforts to keep Troilus and Criseyde together. Instead, they work to drive them apart and show Criseyde the limits of her willpower.

Fortune’s Separation of the Lovers

In Book IV Troilus and Pandarus’s discussion of the impending trade mostly focuses on Fortune’s responsibility rather than on Love and War’s involvement. Troilus and Pandarus once again demonstrate that they understand how supernatural forces are at work. Troilus directs his rage at Fortune:

“Fortune, alas the while!”
What have I don? What have I thus agylt?
How myghtestow for rowthe me bygile?
Is ther no grace, and shal I thus be spilt?
Shal thus Criseyde awey for that thow wilt?
Allas, how maistow in thyn herte fynde
To ben to me thus cruwel and unkynde?” (IV.260-66)

This address parallels Troilus’s address of Cupid in Book I. Both follow a significant event in Troilus’s love life: his initial attraction to Criseyde in Book I and the decision to trade Criseyde in Book IV. In both scenes, Troilus suppresses his emotion until he returns to his room, and then he expresses his pain. These scenes also both include a consideration of the nature of the divine force that has caused the event. While in Book I Troilus had understood that Cupid caused him to fall in love with Criseyde because of the jokes he had made at Love’s expense, in Book IV Troilus rightly asserts that he has done nothing to incur Fortune’s wrath. He describes how Fortune treats lovers:

“O ye loveris, that heigh upon the whiel
Ben set of Fortune, in good aventure,
God leve that ye fynde ay love of stiel,
And longe mote youre lif in joie endure!
But whan ye comen by my sepulture,
Remembreth that youre felawe resteth there;
For I loved ek, though ich unworthy were.” (IV.323-29)
Troilus knows that Fortune turns her wheel arbitrarily rather than punishing bad behavior or rewarding good behavior. He articulates the idea that his situation as an estranged lover is random; he could just as easily be one of those happy lovers passing by the sepulcher of an unworthy, dead lover.

When Pandarus joins Troilus, he affirms Troilus’s conclusion that Fortune is to blame for the parting of the lovers. Troilus asks Pandarus if he has heard about the trade, and Pandarus responds:

“As wisly were it fals as it is trewe,
That I have herd, and woot al how it is.
O mercy, God, who wolde have trowed this?
Who wolde have wend that in so litel a throwe
Fortune our joie wold han overthrowe?” (IV.381-85)

Pandarus is aware of the trade and immediately assigns responsibility to Fortune. Pandarus’s surprise at Fortune’s action is somewhat ironic, considering that in a similar conversation in Book I, Pandarus had described Fortune’s nature and the turning of her wheel:

“Woost thow nat wel that Fortune is comune
To everi manere wight in som degree?
And yet thow hast this comfort, lo, parde,
That, as hire joies moten overgon,
So mote hire sorwes passen everechon.” (I.843-47)
These scenes are similar in tone and content, but there is one notable distinction between the two. In Book I Troilus does mention Fortune and he and Pandarus discuss her influence briefly, but their discourse lands on Cupid’s anger as the main cause for Troilus’s love pains. Pandarus reminds Troilus of the jokes he has made at Love’s expense, and suggests that if Troilus repents and changes his attitude, Love will help him. In Book IV, however, Pandarus and Troilus conclude that Fortune is wholly to blame for the trade. They conclude that Love was not involved and cannot intervene to stop the trade. Troilus prays to Love:

“O verrey lord, O Love! O god, allas!
That knowest best myn herte and al my thought,
What shal my sorwful lif don in this cas,
If I forgo that I so deere have bought?
Syn ye Criseyde and me han fully brought
Into youre grace, and bothe our hertes seled,
How may ye suffre, allas, it be repeled?” (IV.288-94)

Troilus still considers himself Love’s servant and still believes that Love supports him. Though Love and War’s purpose has been interrupted by Fortune, they are still in a peaceful, benevolent relationship with the lovers. This will soon change, as Criseyde’s pride makes her a target for the gods’ punishment and subjugation.
Criseyde’s Transgression of Pride

When Troilus and Criseyde meet to discuss how they will handle their separation from each other, Criseyde assures Troilus that, although their physical separation will be painful, it will be temporary. Criseyde implies that because she and Troilus are Love’s servants, Love will help them be reunited:

“The soth is this: the twynning of us tweyne
Wol us disese and cruelich anoye,
But hym byhoveth somtyme han a peyne
That serveth Love, if that he wol have joye.
And syn I shal no ferther out of Troie
Than I may ride aeyyn on half a morwe,
It oughte lesse causen us to sorwe.” (IV.1303-09)

By identifying herself and Troilus as people “that serveth Love,” Criseyde suggests that she and Troilus are still under Love’s protection, and that Love will help them find a way to overcome the trade. She sees the trade as nothing more than an inconvenience that will easily be overcome with Love’s help. Her plan to reunite seems feasible, especially if the gods are helping. However, as Criseyde continues with her assurances, she takes her promises too far and eventually defies and disrespects the gods.

As Criseyde lists more reasons as to how she will be sure to return to Troy, she introduces the topic of her father to the conversation. Though the first mention of Calkas
seems an offhand comment, it clearly inspires Criseyde to make a claim of loyalty, so as not to be compared to her father. Criseyde tells Troilus:

“Ye know ek how that al my kyn is heere,
But if that onliche it my fader be,
And ek myn othere thynges alle yfeere,
And nameliche, my deere herte, ye,
Whome that I nolde leven for to se
For al this world, as wyd as it hath space,
Or ellis se ich nevere Joves face!” (IV.1331-37)

Criseyde’s first claim of loyalty is that she would not leave Troilus for everything in the world. This is a fairly bold claim, but Criseyde has not yet said anything offensive to the gods. As she goes on in her promises of loyalty and tells Troilus the details of her plan to return to Troy, she reveals a deep contempt for her father. She condemns his betrayal, and also characterizes him as greedy and easily beguiled. Criseyde explains that she will tell her father that she needs to return to Troy to bring back treasure. She tells Troilus that Calkas’s greed will overcome his duty to Apollo, and if it does not, she will disparage the gods to convince him:

“And yf he wolde ought by hys sort it preve
If that I lye, in certayn I shal fonde
Distorben hym and plukke hym by the sleve,
Makynge his sort, and beren hym on honde
He hath not wel the goddes understonde;
For goddes spoken in amphibologies,
And for o soth they tellen twenty lyes.
Ek, ‘Drede fond first goddes, I suppose’—
Thus shal I seyn—and that his coward herte
Made hym amys the goddes text to glose,
What he for fered out of Delphos sterte.” (IV.1401-11)

Criseyde plans to use any means necessary, including criticizing the gods and preventing her father’s service to them, in order to return to Troilus. She even plans to claim, if she must, that the gods do not exist. This would certainly offend and anger the gods, but her scorn for her father contributes to the offense as well. The fall of Troy was revealed to Calkas by Apollo, and Calkas is still serving the gods through prophecy. Criseyde derides his work as a seer and servant of Apollo, and believes he is entirely motivated by greed, cowardice, and self-preservation.

Up until this point, Criseyde’s speech to Troilus and her assertions of loyalty were unprompted by any doubt voiced by Troilus. Criseyde either anticipates that Troilus will question her fidelity or is worried about her own capacity to be loyal, and preemptively asserts that she will not abandon her lover. Troilus seems to believe that Criseyde is loyal, but worries about how her father’s influence might affect their relationship. Troilus asks Criseyde what she will do if her father encourages or forces her to marry one of the Greeks (IV.1471-75). He also worries that Criseyde, motivated by fear, may commit the same betrayal her father did:

“And over al this, youre fader shal despise
Us alle, and seyn this cite nys but lorn,
And that th’assege nevere shal aryse,
For-whi the Grekis han it alle sworn,
Til we be slayn and down oure walles torn.
And thus he shal yow with his wordes fere,
That ay drede I that ye wol bleven there.” (IV.1478-84)

Troilus suggests that Criseyde will believe her father’s prediction that Troy will fall and, just as he did, abandon Troy in fear. The suspicion that Criseyde is a traitor like her father has plagued her ever since her father left the city. When Troilus expresses this suspicion, it prompts Criseyde to claim that her loyalty is incorruptible:

“For thilke day that I for cherisyng
Or drede of fader, or for other wight,
Or for estat, delit, or for weddyng,
Be fals to yow, my Troilus, my knyght,
Saturnes doughter, Juno, thorugh hire myght,
As wood as Athamente do me dwelle
Eternalich in Stix, the put of helle!
And this on every god celestial
I swere it yow, end ek on ech goddesse.” (IV.1534-42)

Criseyde swears that nothing could cause her to be false, and she worsens her transgression by swearing it “on every god celestial...and ek on ech goddess.” Criseyde puts herself in opposition to the gods by planning to defame them and claiming no power
could make her false. From this moment on, the gods no longer help Troilus and Criseyde in their relationship. Instead, they begin working to make Criseyde abandon Troilus and recognize her limitations.

_Criseyde’s Abandonment of Troilus_

In Book V, the gods begin to work on their new efforts: definitively ending the affair between Troilus and Criseyde, bringing Criseyde and Diomede together, and making Criseyde a traitor. Diomede invokes Love and War in his effort to make Criseyde his lover, while Troilus now curses the deities whom he used to praise. Criseyde is punished for her offense and finally fully understands the extent of the gods’ power and their role in her life. The gods punish both Troilus and Criseyde by forcing them to take roles they despise, but these punishments are carried out in drastically different ways. While Troilus is punished violently and made to be a lover, Criseyde is made to abandon Troilus by Venus’s gentle influence. Despite the difference in mode of punishment, both Troilus and Criseyde experience emotional misery as a result.

While pursuing Criseyde, Diomede employs Cupid and Venus in the same way that Troilus and Pandarus had done in Books I and II: presenting himself as a servant of
Love. Diomede tries to soften Criseyde’s aversion towards the Greeks by telling her that they serve Love just like the Trojans:

“For though ye Troians with us Grekes wrothe
Han many a day ben, alwey yet, parde,
O god of Love in soth we serven bothe.” (V.141-43)

Diomede identifies himself as a servant of Love, but also assures that his role as soldier is salient in Criseyde’s mind. He makes a pointed reference to the ongoing war while also asserting that Greeks and Trojans are the same when it comes to Love. He characterizes himself as an obedient servant of Love:

“Ek I am nat of power for to stryve
Ayens the god of Love, but hym obeye
I wole alwey, and mercy I yow preye.” (V.166-68)

Diomede’s claims of service to Love are important in his wooing Criseyde, but they also serve to reinforce the universality of the gods’ power in this poem. Love has power over both Trojan and Greek characters. Diomede is eventually successful in persuading Criseyde to be his lover, and here Love’s involvement is twofold. Love is inclined to help Diomede because this will turn Criseyde into the traitor she swore she would never become, and because it will also reward Diomede for his faithful service of Love.

As Diomede steps into the role of warrior-lover, Troilus’s role as servant of the gods changes drastically. Troilus still considers himself a servant of Love and War, but he no longer believes the gods are benevolent towards him. Troilus returns to Troy after
Criseyde has been sent to the Greek camp, where he goes to his room and expresses his despair:

He yaf an issue large, and “Deth!” he criede;
And in his throwes frenetik and madde
He corseth Jove, Apollo, and ek Cupide;
He corseth Ceres, Bacus, and Cirpride (V.205-08)

He curses many gods in this passage, and each phrase ends with one of the Gods of Love. By ending the first line of curses with “and ek Cupide” and the second with “and Cipride,” the narrator emphasizes these curses, stressing that Troilus is now in opposition to those gods whom he praised fervently in the first four books.

Troilus is in so much emotional turmoil over his separation from Criseyde that he believes he will die. He begins to parcel off his possessions, and in doing so, reveals a final surrender of control. He instructs Pandarus to do the following upon his death:

“At my vigile, I prey the, tak good hede
That that be wel; and offre Mars my steede
My swerd, myn helm; and leve brother deere,
My sheld to Pallas yef, that shyneth cleere.” (V.305-08)

Troilus bequeaths his sword and helmet to Mars and his shield to Minerva, all of which makes sense: Troilus used his sword, shield, and helmet in their service. However, his request that Mars also receive his horse is puzzling. Mars had no connection to horses other than the tangential connection that they were used in battle. A more appropriate recipient of his steed would have been Neptune. However, this gift makes sense if it is
meant to refer to Troilus’s violent transformation into a lover by Cupid. In Book I, the narrator compares Cupid’s attack of Troilus to the taming of a horse with spurs and a whip. When Troilus offers Mars his own tamed horse, he surrenders his last object of dominance and wholly acknowledges his status as subject of Love and War, despite his anger at the gods for their refusal to bring Criseyde back to him.

When the gods’ attention shifts from Troilus to Criseyde, Troilus loses his insight into the gods’ motivations and actions. After the trade, Troilus makes one of his frequent addresses to Cupid:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thanne thoughte he thus: } & \text{“O blisful lord Cupide,} \\
& \text{Whan I the proces have in my memorie} \\
& \text{How thow me hast wereyed on every syde,} \\
& \text{Men myght a book make of it, lik a storie.} \\
& \text{What nede is the to seke on me victorie,} \\
& \text{Syn I am thyn an holly at thi wille?} \\
& \text{What joie hastow thyn owen folk to spille?” (V.582-88)}
\end{align*}
\]

Troilus’s questioning of Cupid shows that, while he understood his own relationship with the gods, particularly Cupid, he is unaware that Criseyde is now being punished. Troilus has been a faithful servant of both Love and War since his conversion, so his outrage at the gods’ sudden revocation of their favor is reasonable. Troilus does not comprehend that the misery he is experiencing is not a result of any offense he committed; rather, it is a collateral effect of the gods’ retribution against Criseyde. Troilus remains a servant of Love and War until the end of his life, even though he does not understand why they have
revoked their favor. His conversion into a lover and servant of the gods was absolute, and even when faced with what he believes to be unfounded punishment, he remains faithful.

Venus’s Appearance and Punishment of Criseyde

Venus makes an appearance in Book V, and though it is nearly identical to her appearance in Book II, it has a different motivation. Just as Venus helped to create Criseyde’s feelings for Troilus, she now does the same for Diomede. However, this action is motivated mostly by a desire to show Criseyde the limits of her loyalty. The main object of Venus’s influence is to force Criseyde to realize that her willpower is not strong enough to resist the gods, but it also functions as a reward for Diomede’s service. As Criseyde begins to give in to Diomede’s advances, Venus interferes to increase her affection, as she did in Criseyde’s affair with Troilus. Criseyde mulls over her prospective lover’s propositions. The narrator describes the scene as supervised by Venus:

The brighte Venus folwede and ay taughte
The wey ther brode Phebus down alighte;
…Whan that Criseyde unto hire bedde wente
Inwith hire fadres faire brighte tente,
Though Venus’s meddling is not as overt and visible as it was in the development of Criseyde’s first affair, Venus’s presence suggests that she is deeply involved in this affair. Venus is in the same location as she was when she inspired Criseyde’s love for Troilus: her heavenly perch. Criseyde bends to Venus’s influence and accepts Diomede as her new lover. With this one action, Venus demonstrates the gods’ position in regards to humans: the obedient humans are rewarded while the proud are humbled. Diomede is rewarded for his service by being granted the affection of the woman he desires, while Criseyde is punished for her pride by being forced to become what she despises—a traitor.

Although Criseyde betrays Troilus, she does not do so apathetically; her intense grief at her own betrayal shows that she does it against her will. She is attracted to Diomede, but she is embarrassed and ashamed of her betrayal of Troilus and Troy. Fame and honor are important to her, and knowing that she will be famous as an unfaithful lover and lose her honor as a Trojan is a harsh punishment. When Criseyde gives her heart to Diomede, she says to herself:

“Allas, for now is clene ago
My name of trouthe in love, for evermo!
For I have falsed oon the gentileste
That evere was, and oon the worthieste!
Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,
Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.” (V.1054-60)

Criseyde mourns her betrayal of Troilus, but feels she has no choice: she sees “ther is no bettre way” (V. 1069). The narrator asserts that she is so pained by her betrayal that he feels as if she should be forgiven: “For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,/Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe” (V.1098-99).

Conclusions

Neither lover reaches the end of the poem in a happy state, but Criseyde’s fate seems preferable to Troilus’s. She remains alive, is on the side of the victors, and is with her lover and her father. However, it is clear from her remorse over her betrayal and remark about how she will be remembered that Criseyde is far from happy. At the close of the poem, Criseyde is steeped in self-loathing and guilt—a penance she will likely endure for years to come. Unlike Troilus, who dies and then looks down upon the pettiness of human interaction, Criseyde is forced to continue to bear the weight of her failings.

In Books IV and V it becomes clear that not all of the deities are united. Fortune intervenes in Troilus and Criseyde’s lives, but she is not concerned with punishing and
rewarding them in the same way that Love and War are. Her separation of the lovers does not ensure that their affair is over—it is still possible for them to be reunited. Love and War do not devote themselves to separating the lovers until Criseyde claims her loyalty is absolute. Although both Fortune and Love and War contribute to the end of Troilus and Criseyde’s relationship, they neither work together nor have the same motivations. This tangle of supernatural forces is a snare for Troilus and Criseyde, making it nearly impossible for them to please each deity and avoid all divine punishment while living in the world governed by these gods. The inevitability of the lovers’ downfall because of their paganism furthers the narrator’s moral purpose. Troilus and Criseyde suffer at the hands of the gods even when they actively try to serve and please their divine lords. The narrator compares the lovers’ painful experience with Love and War to his own happiness in divine love in order to demonstrate God’s superiority over the pagan gods.
Chapter 4

The Narrator’s Moral Purpose

Though the vicissitudes of the lovers’ relationship with the gods are important to understanding Troilus and Criseyde’s fates and their world, a portrayal of the human-divine antagonism is essential to the narrator’s purpose as well. The narrator tells “the double sorwe of Troilus” because he wants to demonstrate the insufficiency of paganism and earthly love, and, consequently to turn his audience of lovers to the eternal love of God. His story is directed towards lovers because it is meant to be didactic, and the intended moral of the poem is most relevant to those engaged in earthly love.

Most interpretations of the narrator in Troilus agree that his character is inconsistent and undergoes a significant shift in the second half of the poem. Critics usually cite the epilogue as proof that the narrator has changed from his opening profession of being a servant of lovers to rejecting earthly love as immoral. Sherron Knopp disagrees with these readings, suggesting that the narrator’s attitude towards love and his purpose in telling Troilus and Criseyde’s story is continuous throughout the entire
Knopp proposes that the narrator’s intent is to turn Troilus and Criseyde’s story into a “profound illustration of the mortal things which touch the mind and move it to tears” (340). Knopp reads the prologue as a clear declaration of the narrator’s attitude toward earthly love, and she demonstrates that this attitude is maintained throughout the poem, even while the lovers are in a happy state.

Because the narrator aims to convince his audience to abandon earthly love for divine love, the struggle between pagan humans and gods is an ideal contrast to God’s benevolence. The misery Troilus and Criseyde experience at the hands of the gods leads the narrator to pity them, but he is careful to distance himself from them and their indulgence in physical desires. The narrator often praises the pagan gods and invokes them at some points, but he ultimately finds them unable to provide lasting felicity for humans and undeniably inferior to God.

The Narrator States His Intent

In Book I the narrator makes it clear that this poem is designed to show pain and sorrow in love in the prologue. He says the poem will describe how Troilus “in loyynge,
how his aventure fell/Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie” (I.3-4). The narrator asks for help from the “cruwel Furie” Thesiphone, and calls himself “the sorwful instrument/that helpeth loveres” (I.10-11). At this early point, it is still unclear how the narrator plans to help lovers, but he goes on to explain that he wants to remind happy lovers of former pain:

But ye loveres, that bathen in gladnesse,
If any drope of pyte in yow be,
Remembreth yow on passed hevynesse
That ye han felt, and on the adversite
Of othere folk, and thynketh how that ye
Han felt that Love dorste yow displese,
Or ye han wonne hym with to gret an ese. (I.22-28)

Though the narrator’s design is to help lovers, it does not seem that he aims to help them in their earthly love. The narrator links earthly love to pain, and he believes that the only way to help lovers is to pray for them to pass into heaven. The narrator creates a contrast between pagan Love and God:

And ek for me preieth to God so dere
That I have myght to shewe, in som manere,
Swich peyne and wo as Loves folk endure,
In Troilus unsely aventure.
And biddeth ek for hem that ben despeired
In love, that nevere nyl recovered be,
And ek for hem that falsly ben apeired
Through wikked tonges, be it he or she,
Thus biddeth God, for his benigne,
So graunte hem soone owt of this world to pace,
That ben deseired out of Loves grace (I.32-42)

The narrator has nothing positive to say about earthly love. He suggests that this poem will function as something of an exposé, revealing the pain and suffering Love causes his followers. He presents death and the passage to heaven as the only remedy to Love’s pain, and goes so far as to pray that lovers will be granted a quick exit from this world.

Though the prologue is mostly devoted to creating a contrast between earthly love and God’s love, the narrator does express a desire to help earthly lovers in their amorous pursuits:

And biddeth ek for hem that ben at ese,
That God hem graunte ay good perseveraunce,
And send hem myght hire ladies so to plese
That it to Love be worship and plesaunce.
For so I hope my sowle best avaunce,
To prey for hem that Loves servauntz be,
And write hire wo, and lyve in charitie. (I.43-49)

The narrator hopes his endeavor might help some lovers please their ladies, but his language here suggests that this idea is distasteful to him. He believes that lovers will need “good perseveraunce” to be successful in love. Even when love is not painful, it is
still something that must be endured and requires supernatural strength. By ending the
prologue with the hope that his work will advance his soul, he shows that his purpose is a
moral one. He hopes to help lovers by praying for them, and he is doing this in part
because it will help him in the afterlife. Though he briefly mentions those “at ese” in
love, he quickly returns to the idea of woeful lovers and asserts that his goal is to
adequately demonstrate that pain.

*The Narrator’s Distance from Earthly Love and Paganism*

The narrator often expresses dismay at the lovers’ suffering, but he is also careful
to separate himself emotionally and temporally from Troilus and Criseyde and their
pagan world. He distances himself from the subjects of his work by repeatedly stating
that he is not a lover himself, by emphasizing his use of sources, and by decreasing his
commentary at the center of the poem when the lovers are happiest.

In Book I’s prologue the narrator creates two degrees of separation between
himself and Love, while also creating an emotional distance by claiming he has no
experience in love:

*For I, that God of Loves servantz serve,*

*Ne dar to Love, for myn unliklynesse,*
Preyen for speed, al sholde I therefore sterve,

So fer am I from his help in derrknesse. (I.15-18)

He is careful to say that he serves Love’s servants, but not Love directly. When he says that he has never dared to love, he distances himself emotionally from both the subjects of his poem and his audience. He needs help from God and Thesiphone to portray Troilus’s woe because he has had no similar personal experience.

The narrator often mentions his sources to promote the idea that he is retelling an already retold story, making himself several times removed from the amorous action of the poem. He tries to absolve himself of the responsibility for the content of the story, asking the reader:

    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 my auctour sedye, so sey I. (II.15-18)

When the narrator claims he wants neither praise nor blame, he represents himself as nothing more than the vessel delivering the story to the reader. The narrator’s emphasis on his use of sources is especially interesting because his sources are either fictional, such as Lollius, or they do not actually contain material about Troilus and Criseyde. In Book

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5 Who Lollius may have been has been the topic of several studies, but for the sake of my purposes here I am going to accept the note in Benson’s text identifying Lollius as a fictional source created by Chaucer. The narrator also cites Dares and Dictys as his sources, but as Stephen Barney points out in his introduction to the poem, neither source includes an affair between Troilus and Briseida. Of course, Chaucer’s actual sources for the poem are Benoit de Sainte-Maure’s Roman de Troie and Boccaccio’s Il Filostrato, but neither is explicitly noted as a source in Troilus.
I the narrator uses his Lollius source to claim that the *Canticus Troili* is a direct quote of the original speech:

And of his song naught only the sentence,

As writ myn auctour called Lollius,

But pleinly, save oure tonges difference,

I dar wel seyn, in al, that Troilus

Seyde in his song, loo, every word right thus

As I shal seyn; and whoso list it here,

Loo, next this vers he may it fynden here. (I.393-99)

Troilus makes many speeches and writes many letters throughout the poem, but the narrator is insistent about tracing this song and its exact wording to a source. His compulsion to emphasize his use of sources, especially in this case, may be rooted in his desire to support his claim that he is not a lover. The first *Canticus Troili* is a contemplation of the nature of Love and Troilus’s feelings as a new lover. The narrator may feel that if he takes credit for writing this speech, it may draw his claim that he has never loved into question. By giving a source credit, he also promotes the credibility of his poem as a true representation of the woes of love because it comes directly from a lover.

As the affair develops towards its height, the narrator gradually removes himself from the text. Knopp suggests that, in doing so, the narrator “strengthens his audience’s identification with Troilus by withdrawing as commentator while he recounts the winning of love” (329). Of course, the narrator does not disappear entirely from the text, but he
does allow himself to fade from the audience’s attention. In both the prologue and epilogue, the narrator nearly fills the reader’s view, leaving only a small space for the titular characters to occupy. The prologue is devoted to explaining his goals in writing the poem. The narrator refers to himself at least eight times, while Troilus is mentioned only twice and Criseyde is not mentioned at all. No major plot points are discussed, aside from the fact that Troilus is in love and feels pain because of it. The narrator uses the poem’s opening to introduce himself and his goals rather than the poem’s subject.

As the poem progresses towards its center, the narrator becomes less prominent and his responsibility for the poem lessens as well. In Book I the narrator says that

But natheles, if this [the poem] my don gladnesse
Unto any love, and his cause availle,
Have he my thonk, and myn be this travaille! (I.19-21)

Here, he hopes he will be thanked for helping lovers, but at the start of Book II he no longer wants any recognition for the work: “Wherefore I nyl have neither thank ne blame/Of al this werke” (II.15-16). By Book III the topic of the narrator’s role is mostly ignored. The opening of Book III praises Venus extensively, while the narrator mentions himself only twice to remind the reader that he is writing in “reverence of hem that serven the,/ Whos clerke I am” (III.39-40). As the affair advances towards its height, the narrator occupies less and less of the text. The narrator becomes less intrusively present in this section of the poem, entering the reader’s view only to beg for help in portraying happiness in love because he is a stranger to the sensation.
As the poem continues from Book III to Book V, the narrator steadily re-enters the text until he reaches the epilogue, where he once again fills the audience’s view and makes all other characters peripheral. He now delivers his moral with force, addressing lovers directly and advising them:

Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte,
And of youre herte up casteth the visage
To thilke God that after his ymage
Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire,
This world that passeth soone as floures faire.
And loveth hym the which that right for love
Upon a crois, oure soules for to beye
First starf, and roos, and sit in hevene above. (V.1837-44)

The narrator now explicitly addresses the contrast between earthly and divine love that has been implied throughout the poem. The self-centeredness of both the human lovers and their gods clashes with the image of selfless Christ upon the cross. He asserts the superiority of God’s love, and then goes on to denounce paganism:

Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites!
Lo here, what alle hire goddes may availle!
Lo here, thise wrecched worldes appetites!
Lo here, the fyn and guerdoun for travaille
Of Jove, Appollo, of Mars, of swich rascaille! (V.1849-53)

Though the narrator sometimes praised the pagan gods during the poem, he makes clear here his true feelings about these gods. The narrator links the pagan gods with worldly appetites, and as he has just demonstrated, indulgence in worldly appetites ends in destruction. While the lovers’ gods failed them and their story ended in tragedy, his God is eternal, merciful, and protective:

Thow oon, and two, and thre, eterne on lyve,
That regnest ay in thre, and two, and oon,
Uncircumspect, and al maist circumscribe,
Us from visible and invisible foon
Defende, and to thy mercy, everichon,
So make us, Jesus, for thi mercy, digne,
For love of mayde and moder thyn benigne.
Amen. (V.1864-70)

While the lovers were alternately targets of the gods’ wrath and rewarded servants, the narrator and his Christian fellows are continually protected from all foes by God, or so does the narrator pray. The narrator, having never experienced earthly kynde love, has not had to endure the suffering that the pagan lovers did due to their gods’ anger. The gods worshipped by pagans are the very “invisible foon” from whom God protects his followers.
Conclusions

The narrator’s attitude towards the subject of his poem is consistent throughout the entire work. There are some points in which he praises the pagan gods or expresses delight in Troilus and Criseyde’s happiness, but his ultimate purpose is to demonstrate the insufficiency of human love. He presents himself as inexperienced in love, and his ignorance in this area shows as he distances himself from the lovers when they come together. The narrator removes himself emotionally from the lovers when they are joyfully united, but is comfortable with being more involved in their story when their love causes them pain. His distance from his subject allows him to feel pity for Troilus and Criseyde, rather than blaming Criseyde for betraying Troilus.

Because the narrator hopes to turn earthly lovers to God, the tension between the lovers and their pagan gods is essential to his work. He shows that the gods who rule over earthly love are not consistently benevolent towards humans. While they may alternate between protecting and attacking humans, God always guards his people from their foes. The final images of the poem create his desired contrast between paganism and Christianity: Troilus has died, mostly because of his affair with Criseyde, and Criseyde is miserable, both of which are products of the gods’ actions in their lives. The pagan gods are triumphant at the end of the poem, having subjugated both Troilus and Criseyde. In contrast, the narrator portrays Jesus on the cross, sacrificing for his people despite their
sins, and God offering his divine protection. The narrator has presented undeniable proof of the superiority of God’s divine love over pagan indulgence in earthly desires.
Conclusion

Though my thesis has focused heavily on the interactions between humans and deities in *Troilus*, the poem is, ultimately, a love story. My reading is not designed to overshadow the lovers’ story or rewrite it, but to offer a deeper understanding of what motivates the lovers, how they perceived their world, and how much control they each had over what happened during the course of their relationship. The gods’ influence in *Troilus* is significant, but not solely for the effect it has on the plot—it also affects how the lovers are perceived. Troilus’s love for Criseyde is more meaningful because of his conversion. Falling in love with Criseyde was not an everyday occurrence, and each moment in his relationship with her is an experience he has only once. The gods’ actions towards Troilus also keep him from being a guiltless victim of Criseyde’s betrayal because the affair began with Troilus’s transgressions against the gods. Likewise, Criseyde is not a wholly despicable character, as her abandonment of Troilus is caused in part by the gods’ exertion of power.

Though the gods manipulate Troilus and Criseyde’s lives, I do not intend to portray the lovers as puppets of the gods, lacking any agency or choice. Troilus’s love for Criseyde is partially created by Cupid, but he does not fall in love with the first woman he sees after he is struck with Cupid’s bow. Cupid certainly contributes to making Troilus
a lover, but he is genuinely attracted to Criseyde. Criseyde, too, falls in love with Troilus because of both her attraction to him as a fierce soldier and Venus’s inspiration. The gods do not force the lovers to their tragic ends, but they do place the lovers in the situations that lead them to their downfall. Troilus and Criseyde could have reacted differently to the stimuli the gods place before them, but their character flaws and self-doubt lead them to make the errors they do. They are not totally innocent, but their flaws and errors are understandable.

The gods’ interventions in the lovers’ lives function as more than the driving force between Troilus and Criseyde’s union and then separation. Their actions also provide a model for human interaction with the pagan gods. Though it is not the case in all portrayals of the Trojan War, in Chaucer’s telling, the gods’ deepest loyalty is to each other. If one god is challenged by a human, the other gods feel compelled to help subdue the human, or at the very least not thwart the other gods’ efforts. The pagan gods, and Love and War in particular, do not help or harm the humans without cause. Each of the gods’ actions, both beneficial and destructive, is a response to either good behavior or defiance. This system holds for the other characters as well. Both Pandarus and Diomede are examples of humans who have submitted to the gods and are wholeheartedly committed to serving the gods. When Pandarus and Diomede make a request to Love and War, it is granted. Their understanding of the relationship between themselves and the gods leads them to consistently act properly towards the gods, and consequently, they are never harmed by the gods.
Though Love and War do not act randomly upon the humans, Fortune does. Fortune’s role in the affair is important, but her motivation is entirely different from Love and War’s. While Love and War’s acts on humans are responses to human action, Fortune is driven by the need to turn her wheel—not by praise or insult. She separates Troilus and Criseyde through the prisoner trade for the sole reason that, upon their having achieved happiness, her nature requires her to change their state. Fortune provides the stimulus for Criseyde’s transgression, but also contributes to the network of deities at work in the poem.

The tension between gods and humans is also part of what prompts the narrator to tell this story. The narrator’s immediate purpose is to convincingly portray Troilus’s sorrow in an effort to demonstrate the superiority of God’s love. To the narrator, the best way to help lovers is to convince them to turn their love towards heaven. By including the pagan gods in the story and showing how they contribute to the lovers’ pain, the narrator creates an inverse of God. While his God is eternal and protective of humans, the pagan gods are limited and willing to strike out at humans if need be. The narrator uses Troilus and Criseyde’s story to prove his claim that indulgence of earthly desires invariably ends in anguish. Troilus is a dedicated servant of Love, but in the end, it is more important to the gods that they punish Criseyde than that they reward Troilus. All of his efforts to be a good lover, soldier, and servant of the gods come to nothing. When Troilus died, he “dampned al oure werk that foloweth so/The blynde lust” and realized humans “shoulden al oure herte on heven caste” (V.1823-35). Troilus, released
from his earthly love and consequent suffering, models the shift the narrator has suggested to his audience of lovers.
Primary Text


Works Cited


Other Works Consulted


