



“Al for Some Conclusioun”: Trinitarian  
Structure and the Final Stanza  
of Chaucer’s *Troilus*

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**ABSTRACT:** Critics have been sharply divided both on whether the ending of *Troilus and Criseyde* is an artistic mishap or a key to the meaning of the larger poem and whether it signals agreement with or a departure from Dante. This article argues that the model of the Trinity employed by Dante also has structural meaning for *Troilus*, but that the ending of *Troilus* clearly signals a worldview that departs from that found in the *Commedia*. It further demonstrates that the structure of the poem is divided into thirds, even as it is divided in half, and even as it is a cohesive whole, a feature that has important implications for interpretative cruxes surrounding the poem.

**KEYWORDS:** Dante, duality, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Trinity

Perhaps no aspect of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* has proven so inconclusive as its conclusion. The final stanza, translated directly from *Paradiso* 14.28–30, is among those features of the ending that have prompted a crowded field of critical debate, ranging from critics who view it as key to the meaning of the whole work, to those who dismiss it as a discordant artistic misstep

at the end of a masterpiece;<sup>1</sup> from those who read the passage as affirming Chaucer's alignment of his poetic project and worldview with Dante's, to those who view it as signaling precisely the opposite.<sup>2</sup> It would be possible to create a substantial bibliography of works devoted to interpreting the ending of *Troilus*, not to mention the numerous moments that such problems feature prominently in studies not devoted solely to the ending. One might be forgiven, then, for wondering whether this particular well is dry. Yet there is a fundamental connection of the final stanza to the structure of *Troilus* as a whole that has not previously been observed. The "oon, and two, and thre" (V, 1863) with which the stanza begins—a reference to the Trinity of clear importance and relevance to the Trinitarian structure and theology of the *Commedia*—has lacked clarity in the context of *Troilus*, where it has instead gained a reputation as something of a Chaucerian cypher.<sup>3</sup> This essay argues that the model of the Trinity that Dante inherits and embellishes—of three in two in one—has structural meaning for *Troilus* itself: the poem is divided into thirds, even as it is divided in half, and even as it is a cohesive whole. This structure, meanwhile, has important implications for some of the interpretative cruxes surrounding the poem that have generated substantial critical interest, including the ending and its artistic coherence, the anxieties about

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1. For a list of sources that discuss the ending, see Phillip Pulsiano, "Redeemed Language and the Ending of *Troilus and Criseyde*," in Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney, eds., *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Syracuse, 1989), 153–74, at 171, as well as the relevant notes by Stephen A. Barney, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston, 1987), 1020–58. Studies of the ending that have appeared since Pulsiano's essay include David Aers, "Re-Reading *Troilus* in Response to Tony Spearing," in Cristina Maria Cervone and D. Vance Smith, eds., *Readings in Medieval Textuality: Essays in Honour of A. C. Spearing* (Cambridge, UK, 2016), 85–95; Clíodhna Carney, "Chaucer's 'litel bok', Plotinus, and the Ending of *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Neophilologus* 93 (2009): 357–68; Helen Cooper, "Four Last Things in Dante and Chaucer: Ugolino in the House of Rumour," *New Medieval Literatures* 3 (1999): 39–66; William Franke, *Secular Scriptures: Modern Theological Poetics in the Wake of Dante* (Columbus, OH, 2016), esp. 42–69; Carol F. Heffernan, "Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* V.1821 and Dante's *Paradiso* XXII.135: Laughter and Smiles," *Notes and Queries* 58 (2011): 358–60; Robert Hollander, "What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*: The Ending of the *Troilus* and Its Italian Sources," *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies* 11 (2011): 1–28; Claudia Rattazzi Papka, "Transgression, the End of *Troilus*, and the Ending of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Chaucer Review* 32 (1998): 267–81; Karen Elaine Smyth, "Reassessing Chaucer's Cosmological Discourse at the End of *Troilus and Criseyde* (c.1385)," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 32 (2007): 150–63; and Karla Taylor, *Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy'* (Stanford, 1989), esp. 173–209.

2. For a summary of such positions and detailed discussions of Chaucer's relationship to Dante, see Cooper, "Four Last Things in Dante and Chaucer"; Taylor, *Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy'*; Winthrop Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets: An Essay on *Troilus and Criseyde** (Ithaca, NY, 1984); and Winthrop Wetherbee, "Dante and the Poetics of *Troilus and Criseyde*," in Thomas C. Stillinger, ed., *Critical Essays on Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York, 1998), 243–66.

3. All quotations of Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*.

the poem's transmission expressed in the closing stanzas, and the poem's theme of *ambage* and oracular duality. Finally, a sensitivity to the Trinitarian underpinnings of *Troilus* provides added meaning and perspective when reading many local moments throughout the poem.

It has been observed that Chaucer appears to be groping about for an ending to *Troilus*, trying first one strategy and then another in what many have viewed as a flawed effort to steer the narrative to a resolution. For example, E. Talbot Donaldson characterized the ending as a "a kind of dramatization of . . . poetic ineptitude" and a performance of a "nervous breakdown in poetry,"<sup>4</sup> while Bonnie Wheeler argues that "Chaucer presents himself as an acutely uncomfortable poet" and that "The audience is left with moral and philosophical cleavage between the body of the poem and its ending."<sup>5</sup> The ending supplies ample grounds for confusion. In the final fifteen stanzas, a span of just over a hundred lines, the narrator informs the reader that the poem might have been different if he "hadde ytaken for to write" (V, 1765) a work focusing on the feats of arms achieved by Troilus, referring readers interested in such matters to Dares; apologetically addresses ladies who may have been betrayed by men; instructs his "litel bok" (V, 1789) to kiss the steps once tread by Virgil, Ovid, Homer, Lucan, and Statius; meditates on the diversity found in contemporary English speech and writing; worries that these features might result in the poem's mismetering during copying; returns to the battlefield, where Troilus is killed and his spirit ascends to the eighth sphere; echoes Arcita's apotheosis in the *Teseida* by having Troilus look down from heaven and laugh at the woes of the world and those who mourn his passing;<sup>6</sup> suggests in the "swich fyn" stanza (V, 1828–34) the ultimate pointlessness of earthly love, reputation, and *estat*; admonishes "yonge, fresshe folkes" (V, 1835) to bear in mind the true Christian God; castigates pagan gods and rites (a sudden turn to a conventional Christian message in a poem set in the classical past and almost scrupulously devoid of such moralizing prior to this point); and addresses Chaucer's friends Gower and Strode, asking them to emend the book as needed.<sup>7</sup>

4. E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (New York, 1970), 84, 91. Donaldson is not suggesting that the ending is either of these things, of course, but rather that the chaos is in fact rather deliberately and artfully constructed and has therefore misled some readers.

5. Bonnie Wheeler, "Dante, Chaucer, and the Ending of *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Philological Quarterly* 61 (1982): 105–23, at 105, 117.

6. Compare also Dante at the end of *Par.* 22.

7. See Murray J. Evans, "Making Strange': The Narrator (?), The Ending (?), And Chaucer's 'Troilus,'" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 87 (1986): 218–28. Evans notes that of fourteen topoi that medieval rhetorical treatises place at the disposal of authors for writing endings, Chaucer employs at least eight.

The lengthy conclusion—and the poem itself—finally comes to rest with the following stanza:

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

(V, 1863–69)

As is clear to any reader of both texts, the first three lines of this stanza are translated almost verbatim from Canto 14 of Dante's *Paradiso*:

Quell' uno e due e tre che sempre vive  
 e regna sempre in tre e 'n due e 'n uno,  
 non circunscriitto, e tutto circunscrive.

That One and Two and Three who ever lives  
 and ever reigns in Three and Two and One,  
 not circumscribed and circumscribing all.

(*Par.*, 14.28–30)<sup>8</sup>

Because Chaucer is quoting *Paradiso* directly and, as I shall argue, engaging directly with the significance given to the Trinity within the *Commedia* more broadly, it will be useful to begin with a brief summary of the role of the Trinity in Dante's work and to define in advance the model that he had in mind, given the long history of (and theological debates surrounding) that doctrine. The whole of the *Commedia* is imbued with Trinitarian design and meaning, from its tripartite structure to the use of *terza rima*.<sup>9</sup> The centrality of Trinitarian theology to Dante's work is announced at the outset in the inscription above the gateway to hell:

8. Quotations from Dante taken from *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: A Verse Translation with Introductions & Commentary*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum, 3 vols. (Berkeley, 1980–82).

9. See Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression* (New York, 1969): "The most obvious expression of the 3 in 1 is in the external form of the *Divine Comedy*, 1 poem including 3 canticles. The verse form is *terza rima*, whereby 3 lines share a single rhyme" (147–48).

Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore;  
 fecemi la divina podestate,  
 la somma sapienza e 'l primo amore.  
 Dinanzi a me non fuor cose create  
 se non etterne, e io eterno duro.

Justice urged on my high artificer;  
 my maker was divine authority,  
 the highest wisdom, and the primal love.  
 Before me nothing but eternal things  
 were made, and I endure eternally.

(*Inf.*, 3.4–8)<sup>10</sup>

As Vittorio Montemaggi notes, there is almost universal agreement among critics that “lines 5 and 6 in this passage are to be understood in Trinitarian terms, ‘podestate’, ‘sapienza’ and ‘amore’ acting as expressions denoting the three persons of the Trinity,”<sup>11</sup> and Dante himself directly states the connection of Power, Wisdom, and Love to the Trinity in *Convivio* 2.5.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, “For the maker to have been moved by justice is simply for the act of creation to have unfolded according to Trinitarian dynamics.”<sup>13</sup>

While the Trinity is a central concern throughout the *Commedia*, it is a particular focal point of Dante’s passage through the Fourth Heaven, which occupies Cantos 10–14 of *Paradiso*. Canto 10 opens with the claim that all of creation is a result of interrelationships between hypostases of the Trinity:

10. Mandelbaum presents this passage in all capitals to indicate its status as a transcription.

11. Vittorio Montemaggi, “E’n la sua volontade è nostra pace: Peace, Justice and the Trinity in the *Commedia*,” in John C. Barnes and Daragh O’Connell, eds., *War and Peace in Dante: Essays Literary, Historical and Theological* (Dublin, 2015), 195–225, at 207.

12. “Ché si può contemplare della potenza somma del Padre: la quale mira la prima gerarzia, cioè quella che è prima per nobilitade e che ultima noi annoveriamo. E puotesi contemplare la somma sapienza del Figlio: e questa mira la seconda gerarzia. E puotesi contemplare la somma e ferventissima caritade dello Spirito Santo: e questa mira l’ultima gerarzia, la quale, più propinqua, a noi porge delli doni che essa riceve.” (For the supreme power of the Father may be contemplated: upon which gazes the first hierarchy, that is, the hierarchy which is first in nobility but which we number last. And the supreme wisdom of the Son may be contemplated: upon which gazes the second hierarchy. And the supreme and most ardent love of the Holy Spirit may be contemplated: upon which gazes the final hierarchy, which, being nearer, offers to share with us from the gifts it receives.) Text and translation are from Dante Alighieri, *Convivio: A Dual-Language Critical Edition*, ed. and trans. Andrew Frisardi (Cambridge, UK, 2018), 74–75. See also Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism*, 154. Note that in some editions of the *Convivio* this passage is found in 2.6 due to differences in numbering chapters.

13. Montemaggi, “E’n la sua volontade è nostra pace,” 207.

Guardando nel suo Figlio con l'Amore  
 che l'uno e l'altro etternalmente spira,  
 lo primo e ineffabile Valore  
     quanto per mente e per loco si gira  
 con tant' ordine fé, ch'esser non puote  
 senza gustar di lui chi ciò rimira.

Gazing upon His Son with that Love which  
 One and the Other breathe eternally,  
 the Power—first and inexpressible—  
     made everything that wheels through mind and space  
 so orderly that one who contemplates  
 that harmony cannot but taste of Him.

(*Par.*, 10.1–6)

Dante draws upon several sources in depicting the Trinity in *Paradiso*. Perhaps the most direct of these is the Athanasian Creed, which is, of the three ecumenical creeds, the one that focuses most directly on Trinitarian theology, and which is echoed directly in Canto 24 when Peter examines Dante's faith.<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere his model is Thomastic, which is unsurprising given the influence of Aquinas on Dante's work more broadly and the fact that in the Fourth Heaven Saint Thomas himself explains the Trinity to Dante (*Par.*, 13.52–57). In addition to the Trinity comprising a division of one into three, we find further subdivisions, and specifically units of two and one, or two within one. The Son and Holy Spirit, for example, might be understood to proceed from the One God, the Father, or the Spirit might be understood as a consequence of the Father/Son duad. Among these subdivisions were the dual hypostases contained within Christ himself, fully human yet fully divine, a duad within the Trinity that embodies the opposition and union of the spiritual and the material. These nested subdivisions are explicitly recognized by Dante in *Paradiso*, 13.26–27, when the spirits in the Fourth Heaven sing of “tre persone in divina natura, / e in una persona essa e l'umana” (three Persons in the divine nature, / and in one Person the divine and human).

The meaning that the Trinity possesses for Dante, then, is relatively clear: we have a Trinitarian design for the *Commedia* as a whole, a focus on the

14. See Mandelbaum's note to *Par.*, 24.139–42, which points out the connection to the Athanasian Creed; these notes are most conveniently accessible in the Bantam paperback editions reprinting the University of California Press translations, e.g., *Paradiso*, Reissue edn. (New York, 2004), 394.

Trinity as a theological and thematic concern at many local moments throughout the three books, and a direct explanation and experience of the Trinity itself in heaven, *inter alia*. But while its centrality to Dante is overt, the Trinitarian quotation that Chaucer borrows from Dante to end *Troilus* has seemed to many readers to be a sudden turn to an unrelated topic, a non sequitur that offers no sort of resolution to what comes before, or perhaps the closing prayer of a palinode that repudiates it. In what follows, I aim to demonstrate that the final stanza is not only relevant, but indeed crucial, for understanding the preceding poem, and that *Troilus* shares important Trinitarian features with the *Commedia*, namely, a tripartite structure and a pattern of groups of three subdivided into units of one and two. While Dante's images of the Trinity uphold the wholeness and unity within the subdivisions prescribed by doctrine, Chaucer juxtaposes the sacred Trinity with a series of very different trinitarian groupings on the level of the human rather than the divine, and in which human unions, whether trios or couples, are continually fracturing, dividing, and reconstituting themselves. The emphasis is upon their impermanence and imperfection as opposed to the lasting unity and perfection of the Trinity itself.

Having established the importance of the Trinity to Dante, Chaucer's immediate source, I will turn now to the prominence of units of two and three in *Troilus*, beginning with the dual structures of the poem. Structure is important not only as an organizational and literary device in *Troilus*, as in most literary works of this scope, but also as a subject of thematic interest and development. In contrast to Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, its most immediate and extensive source, Chaucer's story "reads as if a shape has been discerned in the story which governs the design and structural features of the poem at every level."<sup>15</sup> The poem's architecture is subdivided, often conspicuously so, into a number of overlapping divisions. Rather than following the nine-book organizational scheme of the *Filostrato*, Chaucer opts instead for a five-book structure that has been the subject of substantial critical interest.<sup>16</sup> As Barry Windeatt notes, there are many "classical precedents and associations, not least Horace's prescribed form for five-act tragedy in the

15. Barry Windeatt, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde* (Oxford, 1992), 181 (hereafter cited as "Windeatt, *Troilus*"). Windeatt earlier notes that Boccaccio did add the crucial structure, adapted by Chaucer, of rise and fall to the story of Troilus, which had until then been told only as a story of tragic fall (154).

16. Examples include Thomas Elwood Hart, "Medieval Structuralism: 'Dulcarnoun' and the Five-Book Design of Chaucer's *Troilus*," *Chaucer Review* 16 (1981): 129–70; Noel Harold Kaylor Jr., "The Influence of Boethius and Dante upon Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Medieval English Studies* 5 (1997): 83–105; John P. McCall, "Five-Book Structure in Chaucer's *Troilus*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 23 (1962): 297–308; and William Provost, *The Structure of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde* (Copenhagen, 1974).

*Ars poetica*.<sup>17</sup> Boethius provided another prominent model, and the impact of *De consolacione Philosophiae* upon *Troilus*, as with so much of Chaucer's work, has been amply demonstrated.<sup>18</sup> The poem is also divided into halves. Both Stephen A. Barney and Windeatt observe that the exact center of the poem occurs at III, 1271, the 4,120th of 8,239 lines (as they number the text in their respective editions), a moment that is also the apex of the narrative, falling as it does during the consummation scene in the midst of Troilus's hymn to love.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Troilus himself seems to acknowledge this high point, exclaiming that love has "me bistowed in so heigh a place." Such calculations rely, of course, on the final number of lines that one considers authoritative (and authorial). While an aside to the larger argument, it is worth mentioning that the counting of lines works out more precisely if one omits stanza 128 from Book I, a stanza found only in four manuscripts that Root argued had been canceled by Chaucer and one that "breaks the continuity of the thought" of the surrounding stanzas.<sup>20</sup> Although the fundamental flaws of Root's editorial approach have been made abundantly clear, this is perhaps one that he got right.<sup>21</sup> Both Barney and Windeatt acknowledge the possibility that the stanza should be canceled, and Windeatt goes further in following Root by bracketing the stanza off in his edition. Yet both count the stanza in their total of 8,239 authorial lines. But of course half of this number is 4,119.5, requiring one to round up to reach the desired midpoint. With the questionable stanza removed, however, the poem totals 1,176 seven-line stanzas, with III, 1271, "me bistowed in so heigh a place," occupying the center line of stanza 588, the center stanza of the poem. While not in and of itself a sufficient argument for canceling the stanza, it is of clear relevance and interest both to an analysis of

17. Windeatt, *Troilus*, 181.

18. See Windeatt, *Troilus*, 96–109, for a good overview of Boethius's influence on *Tr*, as well as the discussion (182) of *Boece*, iv, pr. 6, 82–93, a passage explaining how a workman "aperceyeth in his thought the forme of the thing that he wol make." Windeatt notes that Chaucer might have had this passage in mind in addition to Geoffrey of Vinsauf, whom Pandarus paraphrases in *Tr*, I, 1065–71, when he compares planning and building a house to the drawing up of a plot to win Criseyde's heart.

19. *Tr* is not the only medieval poem divided in this fashion. The midpoint of *Saint Erkenwald*, for example, is marked with an "extra-large capital," present elsewhere only at the beginning of the poem, and the main narrative action is clearly divided into two halves; see J. A. Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre, eds., *A Book of Middle English*, 4th edn. (Oxford, 2021), 240 (note on line 177).

20. Robert Kilburn Root, *The Book of Troilus and Criseyde* (Princeton, 1926), 426 (note on I, 890–96).

21. Regarding the problems with Root, see Ralph Hanna III, "Robert K. Root (1877–1950)," in Paul G. Ruggiers, ed., *Editing Chaucer: The Great Tradition* (Norman, OK, 1984), 191–205; and B. A. Windeatt, "The text of the 'Troilus,'" in *Troilus & Criseyde: A New Edition of The Book of Troilus*, ed. B. A. Windeatt (London, 1984), 36–54.



the midpoint of *Troilus*, and thus to this essay, and also to the editorial question of whether Book I, stanza 128 should stand.

Beyond this, the division of the poem into halves is signaled in a variety of other ways. Duality and dual structures are of central thematic importance to the poem. As Windeatt observes, “To be given an overview of the whole poem’s shape in advance has a structuring effect, and the poem’s announcement of a ‘double’ sorrow establishes the expectation of a pattern of balanced repetition, a symmetry to be fulfilled.”<sup>22</sup> Windeatt offers a thorough accounting of such features, so I will simply cite a few pertinent examples. Doubling functions as an essential feature of the “concentric structural pattern of recurring and mirroring features and episodes,”<sup>23</sup> for example, in the laughing of Troilus at lovers in Book I and his laughter at the folly of the world as he ascends into heaven in Book V. Likewise the song of love found in I, 400–420 is echoed by the song of longing found in V, 638–44. The fictive author Lollius is mentioned twice, once early on at I, 394 and again late in the poem at V, 1653. The despondent lover twice rides past Criseyde’s house, once in Book II and again in Book V, and Criseyde’s dream of the eagle in II, 925–31 is mirrored by Troilus’s dream of the boar in V, 1233–43. There are two courtships, one between Troilus and Criseyde, and the other between Diomedes and Criseyde.<sup>24</sup> These doublings are just a sampling from what is a much broader pattern in the poem. As Windeatt argues, the main action of the plot turns on interlinked sets of doubling, many involving additions to the versions of the story Chaucer inherited from Benoît de Sainte-Maure and Boccaccio.<sup>25</sup> In addition to doubling being an important structural and organizational tactic within the poem, duality operates at a more global level, with Troy a double for Thebes, and Chaucer’s work a doubling of numerous sources and antecedents of the narrative. The alert reader is continually reminded of the connection of Troy to Thebes via what John V. Fleming characterizes as the

22. Windeatt, *Troilus*, 181.

23. Windeatt, *Troilus*, 186.

24. Although the number of lines in which Diomedes is present is fairly small, we may find in him a microcosm of this theme of doubling. The Greek counterpart to his Trojan rival, he is both stand-in and replacement for Troilus late in the poem. In addition to this broad parallel, we also find moments of specific doubling, such as when Criseyde’s promise to love Troilus “while I may dure” (IV, 1680) is soon echoed by Diomedes promising similar fidelity to her “while that my lyf may dure” (V, 153); see John V. Fleming, *Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer’s Troilus* (Lincoln, NE, 1990), 229n76. Diomedes also evokes and furthers central thematic concerns such as prophecy, as discussed later in the essay.

25. The above examples are all mentioned by Windeatt in his section on “Structure” (*Troilus*, 180–211; see esp. the chart on 187).

“explicit, clever, and repeated appearance” of the *Thebaid* “at the surface of Chaucer’s Text.”<sup>26</sup>

Finally, duality appears not only in the guise of an internal structuring scheme and at the global level of intertextual reference, but frequently at the level of local language, of individual terms, ambiguous speech, and an exploration of the potential of language to carry multiple competing meanings, which seems to elicit in Chaucer an admixture of poetic unease and intrigue, prompting both earnest reservation and playful experimentation with the potentials of ambiguity in language. Two words in particular, *amphibologies* and *ambages*, illustrate this tendency. Each term is a Chaucerian neologism, occurring once in *Troilus* and with the *MED* offering no other instances for either, although their Latin cognates were more common. *Amphibologies* occurs at IV, 1406 towards the end of Criseyde’s lengthy reassurances to Troilus that her trip to the Greek camp will be brief and that she will be able to deceive her father Calkas into sending her back within a few days. Speaking of the prophecies of the gods that Calkas was supposedly adept at interpreting, Criseyde emphasizes the ease with which oracular proclamations may be interpreted in more than one way due to the inherent ambiguity of the language in which they are characteristically couched: “For goddes spoken in amphibologies, / And for o soth they tellen twenty lyes” (IV, 1406–7). While this is the first recorded use of *amphibologies* in English, the Latin *amphibolia* was a common technical term found in grammatical and rhetorical texts, “part of the stable critical vocabulary of medieval rhetoricians,”<sup>27</sup> and *amphibologia* was a common form of the word in medieval Latin.<sup>28</sup> Roughly synonymous with the Latin *ambiguitas*, the term held a more “distinctly literary” semantic range, which might include oracular pronouncements, but was generally put forth by theoreticians as “a shortcoming that serious writers should avoid in so far as is possible.”<sup>29</sup> Identified in Aristotle’s *Sophistici elenchi* as the second of six *fallaciae in dictione*, the concept spread via medieval treatises and prominent exponents such as Thomas Aquinas, and eventually

26. Fleming, *Classical Imitation and Interpretation*, 47–48. For a thoughtful consideration of Statius as both source and literary model in *Tr*, see Elizaveta Strakhov, “And kis the steppes where as thow seest pace’: Reconstructing the Spectral Canon in Statius and Chaucer,” in Isabel Davis and Catherine Nall, eds., *Chaucer and Fame: Reputation and Reception* (Cambridge, UK, 2015), 57–74; Strakhov offers a concise encapsulation of the many echoes of the *Thebaid* found in *Tr* (58–59).

27. Fleming, *Classical Imitation and Interpretation*, 51.

28. Alastair J. Minnis, “Goddes Spoken in Amphibologies’: The Ambiguous Future of Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*,” *Poetica* 55 (2001): 23–37, at 24.

29. Fleming, *Classical Imitation and Interpretation*, 51.

made its way into vernacular literature.<sup>30</sup> The etymology of the term is discussed by Vincent of Beauvais, who claims that the combination of *amphi* with *biologia* equates to *dubium* and *sententia*, and “hence *dubia sententia*, ‘dubious meaning.’”<sup>31</sup> Thus while the term was novel in Middle English, the idea itself was quite familiar, and it was one that Chaucer would revisit in the *Canterbury Tales* in moments such as the story of Croesus in the *Monk’s Tale*, and in the *Knight’s Tale* when Mercury instructs Arcite to return to Athens to “shapen of thy wo an ende” (I 1392); the end to his woe that Arcite receives is not, of course, the one he had hoped for.<sup>32</sup>

*Ambages* occurs at V, 897 as Diomedes attempts to woo Criseyde, reasoning that any love she has for a Trojan is doomed anyhow given the impending demise of the city and the scorched earth policy the avenging Greeks intend to implement once the city falls. He, too, uses this term to cast aspersions on Calkas, partly we might assume because Calkas is liked by no one, and partly because divination itself, a subset of “payens corsed olde rites,” is generally met with suspicion and low regard in the poem. In this case, Chaucer, via Diomedes, offers some help with the unfamiliar term by building in a gloss:

“And but if Calkas lede us with ambages—  
That is to seyn, with double wordes slye,  
Swiche as men clepen a word with two visages—  
Ye shal wel knowen that I naught ne lie.”

(V, 897–900)

Unlike *amphibologies*, which occurs in a scene wholly invented by Chaucer, there is a proximate source for *ambages* in Boccaccio, which here reads “se Calcas per ambage e per errori.”<sup>33</sup> As Fleming discusses, this term would also have been familiar to Chaucer from Latin poets. It is used six times by Virgil and, tellingly, by Statius in a passage towards the end of the third book of the *Thebaid* in which Capaneus denounces the seer Amphiaraus, and prophecy

30. Roy J. Percy, “Chaucer’s Amphibologies and ‘The Old Man’ in *The Pardoner’s Tale*,” *English Language Notes* 41 (2004): 1–10, at 1. Percy cites an example from Aquinas’s *De fallaciis ad quosdam nobiles artistas*: “To plough the shore means literally to cut through the earth, but metaphorically to waste one’s labor, and thus is formed a parallogism” (note 1).

31. Minnis, “Goddes Speken in Amphibologies,” 24. Minnis here cites *Speculum doctrinale*, iii.92, in Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum maius* (Venice, 1591), II, fol. 51r.

32. For additional examples of amphibologies in *CT*, see Minnis, “Goddes Speken in Amphibologies”; and Percy, “Chaucer’s Amphibologies.”

33. *Troilus & Criseyde*, ed. Windeatt, prints the facing text at 494; the source is *Il Filostrato*, VI.17. Fleming discusses this line with respect to Chaucer’s understanding of Italian and Latin (*Classical Imitation and Interpretation*, 56).

more generally.<sup>34</sup> Both terms point to Chaucer's interest in linguistic duality—in the “Janus-like” potential for language to point in two opposing directions at once, a subject of philosophical exploration throughout *Troilus* and Chaucer's oeuvre more broadly.<sup>35</sup> Jeff Espie and Sarah Star observe that the “two faces” implicit in *ambages* represent “the multiple conflicting meanings that a single lexeme encodes, and through them, Diomede points towards the instability of all language in general and of Calkas's claims in particular.”<sup>36</sup> They also point to the importance of duality to the poem more broadly, operating as it does simultaneously at multiple levels and registers, from the overarching structure to intertextual relationships to individual words. Christopher Cannon draws a similarly broad conclusion, noting that “Chaucer's *whole* style is characterized by the discovery, in language—by means of language—of the two in the one.”<sup>37</sup> Thus duality operates on many levels in *Troilus*: the poem is divided into halves; its organization derives in large part from carefully repeated dual structures; duality is a thematic concern; the neologisms *amphibologies* and *ambages* feature in discussions of the inherent duality of language itself; and there is the global duality of Thebes and Troy as well as Chaucer's source texts.

As with doublings, triplicates are featured in internal patterns, the organization of characters into trios, cultural references, relationships to sources, measurements of time, and the overarching structure of the poem. This pattern may be seen, for example, in the lyric setpieces with which *Troilus* abounds, many of which take their cue from *Il Filostrato* by expanding upon unrealized opportunities for lyric genres found there. Whereas Boccaccio might simply mention the presence of a letter or that Troilus sang a song, Chaucer fills the gap with the full text of songs, letters, and aubades.<sup>38</sup> These lyric additions are most often added in groups of three stanzas, including “the Petrarch sonnet that becomes the first Canticus Troili (i. 400–20), Troilus's petition to Criseyde (iii. 127–47), her reply (iii. 159–82), his two addresses to love

34. See Fleming, *Classical Imitation and Interpretation*, 56–61, for a detailed discussion of the Latin sources.

35. Windeatt, *Troilus*, 325.

36. Jeff Espie and Sarah Star, “Reading Chaucer's Calkas: Prophecy and Authority in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *Chaucer Review* 51 (2016): 382–401, at 396. Espie and Star here cite Windeatt, *Troilus*, 325; and Christopher Cannon, “Chaucer's Style,” in Piero Boitani and Jill Mann, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer* (Cambridge, UK, 2003), 233–50.

37. Cannon, “Chaucer's Style,” 247.

38. For a fuller discussion, see Ingrid Nelson, *Lyric Tactics: Poetry, Genre, and Practice in Later Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2017), 88–116.

(iii. 1254–74; v. 582–602), and the two dawn-songs (iii. 1422–42, 1450–70).<sup>39</sup> In his study of the structure of the poem, Windeatt makes other observations of patterns of three. On three occasions, the lovers spend time together until their departure is prompted by the arrival either of other people or of the dawn: their first meeting at the beginning of Book III; the consummation scene at center of Book III, which lasts until dawn and closes with regret and the lovers' aubades; and their final night together at the end of Book IV, where the passage of time is marked "by the mortar, which that I se brenne" (IV, 1245).<sup>40</sup> Similarly, in Book V, where Troilus spends an agonizing ten days waiting for Criseyde's return, the passing of the night is observed by the narrator three times.<sup>41</sup>

The number three appears in several other prominent contexts. Book II opens with a lovesick Pandarus in bed on "Mayes day the thrydde" (II, 56), a date also mentioned by Chaucer in the *Knight's Tale*, I 1462–63, as the night that Palamon escapes from his prison, and in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, VII 3187–90, as the date when Chauntecleer has his encounter with the fox.<sup>42</sup> A few lines later, Pandarus awakens from his half-sleep to the "sorrowful lay" of the swallow Procne (II, 64), one-half of the mythological pair with the nightingale that later sings Criseyde to sleep (II, 918–24), prompting the dream of the eagle that rends out her heart. Although separated by a span of almost 900 lines, these three birds form an intentional evocation of a single passage from *Purgatorio*:

Ne l'ora che comincia i tristi lai  
 la rondinella presso a la mattina,  
 forse a memoria de' suo' primi guai,  
     e che la mente nostra, peregrina  
 più da la carne e men da' pensier presa,  
 a le sue vision quasi è divina,  
     in sogno mi pareva veder sospesa  
 un'aguglia nel ciel con penne d'oro,  
 con l'ali aperte e a calare intesa.

39. Windeatt, *Troilus*, 165. Some of these lyric additions are wholly Chaucer's invention, while others, such as the two aubades, are significant revisions of parallel moments in Boccaccio. Troilus's second address to love at V, 582–602, is the only one of these three-stanza lyric set-pieces that follows Boccaccio fairly closely.

40. See Windeatt, *Troilus*, 201–2.

41. Windeatt, *Troilus*, 202. These occur at V, 232–80; V, 320; and V, 512–20.

42. A wide variety of theories have been put forth explaining the significance of the date to Chaucer, ranging from it having personal value to potential alignment with Christian feasts, classical allusions, or astrological influences. See Vincent J. DiMarco's note to *KnT*, I 1462–64, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 832.

At that hour close to morning when the swallow  
 begins her melancholy songs, perhaps  
 in memory of her ancient sufferings,  
     when, free to wander farther from the flesh  
 and less held fast by cares, our intellect's  
 envisionings become almost divine—  
     in dream I seemed to see an eagle poised,  
 with golden pinions, in the sky: its wings  
 were open; it was ready to swoop down.  
(*Purg.*, 9.13–21)

This trio of birds is notable not only for the connection to Dante, but also because the three birds may be grouped into units of two against one. Procne and Philomela, the swallow and nightingale, clearly function as a pair, but so too do the nightingale and eagle, which are found together in *Troilus*, a modification of the grouping of the swallow and eagle found in *Paradiso*.<sup>43</sup> While the evidence is too tentative to claim that this is a reference to a Trinitarian model of a trio composed of two plus one, the regrouping of units of three into two plus one nevertheless seems quite intentional elsewhere, and in total the many examples call for closer attention.

Perhaps most significant is the way that the narrative action of the poem turns on the creation and dissolution of groupings of three people. The first half of the story centers on three characters—Pandarus, Troilus, and Criseyde—and the complex interrelationships between them. As with other trios throughout the poem, this central one is recomposed as the narrative develops. Early on, Pandarus and Troilus form a pair in their joint effort to seduce and deceive Criseyde, while Pandarus eventually becomes the odd man out during the lovers' union in the third book. There is the invented love triangle involving Horaste as well as the actual love triangle featuring Diomedes. And there are a number of other minor trios. One such example occurs immediately after Pandarus's dream: he arises and goes to Criseyde's house, where he "fond two othere ladys sete and she," and "they thre" were

43. See Michael Raby, "Sleep and the Transformation of Sense in Late Medieval Literature," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 39 (2017): 191–224. Raby examines both the dream in *Par.* and its connection to Pandarus's dream, arguing that the "abrupt termination" of Pandarus's dream "reenacts the traumatic silencing at the heart of the Procne–Philomela myth" referenced in Dante (210).

reading of the siege of Thebes (II, 81–82). The group of ladies is not only a trio, but one composed of two plus one. (Note, too, that here the source text is one of the doubles to *Troilus* itself mentioned above, or perhaps a triple if Criseyde and the other ladies are reading the twelfth-century *Roman de Thèbes* rather than Statius.<sup>44</sup>) Immediately following Pandarus's entry, Criseyde announces that she had dreamt of Pandarus thrice the night before (II, 89–90).

To these we may add mythological triads. The three Furies are mentioned several times in the poem. Tisiphone appears prominently in the first stanza of the poem when the narrator calls upon her guidance “for t'endite / These woful vers” (I, 6–7). The three sisters appear as a unit at II, 436, when Pandarus melodramatically invokes “O Furies thre of helle” after Criseyde expresses reservations about accepting Troilus as her lover, and again in the Proem to Book IV, when “ye Herynes, Nyghtes doughtren thre” (IV, 22) are invoked as Muses. Another classical trio, the three Fates, also makes several appearances. From his hiding place in the *stewe* in Book III, Troilus anxiously calls upon a catalog of deities and evokes the “fatal sustren which, er any cloth / Me shapen was, my destine me sponne” (III, 733–34). Book V, meanwhile, opens with mention of “angry Parcas, sustren thre,” whom the narrator claims that “Joves” (i.e., Jupiter) has entrusted with carrying out the “fatal destyne” that will unfold in the final book (V, 1–3). And Atropos, cutter of the thread of life, is mentioned without reference to the other two sisters (IV, 1208, 1546). When Criseyde looks back on Troy from the Greek camp, wishing that she had taken Troilus's suggestion to steal away with him, she laments “Prudence, allas, oon of thyne eyen thre / Me lakked alwey” (V, 744–45). And Chaucer borrows the three portraits of Diomedes, Criseyde, and Troilus

44. See Barney, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1031 (note to II, 84, 100–108); and also the note in Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Stephen A. Barney (New York, 2006), where Barney suggests that Chaucer might want us “to imagine (all with implicit and playful anachronism) Criseyde as hearing the French poem, as an aristocratic London lady might, and Pandarus as referring to Statius's epic, implying the knowledge of Latin more often reserved to European educated males” (7011). This, like most points in *Tr*, has bifurcated critics. Paul M. Clogon, “The Theban Scenes in Chaucer's *Troilus*,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 12 (1984): 168–85, argues that the description provided by Criseyde “clearly reveals that she and her ladies are reading the *Roman de Thèbes*” (178). Catherine Sanok, “Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*: Women and the Theban Subtext of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 20 (1998): 41–71, and Andrew James Johnston, “Gendered Books: Reading, Space and Intimacy in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*,” in Andrew James Johnston, Russell West-Pavlov, and Elisabeth Kempf, eds., *Love, History and Emotion in Chaucer and Shakespeare: Troilus and Criseyde and Troilus and Cressida* (Manchester, UK, 2016), 172–88, argue conversely that there is little to suggest that Criseyde is not reading Statius itself. Leah Schwebel, “What's in Criseyde's Book?,” *Chaucer Review* 54 (2019): 91–115, addresses this interpretative dichotomy directly, arguing that the potential dual identities of the text are intentional and are meant to spur the reader to think about the uncertainties inherent in textual transmission.

(V, 799–840) from Joseph of Exeter's *Frigii Daretis Ilias*, an expanded version of Dares.<sup>45</sup> Several things are telling about this accumulation of triads. First, the significant majority of these passages featuring groupings of three occur in extended passages with no parallel to Boccaccio's text, such as the intricate machinations of Pandarus that bridge the end of Book II and the beginning of Book III, as well as those that occupy the center of Book III (both of which are Chaucerian inventions). Second, even in those moments when Chaucer otherwise follows Boccaccio closely, such as around V, 744, minor modifications introduce new images emphasizing the number three. In the parallel Boccaccian passage (*Il Filostrato*, VI.6), for example, Criseyde laments her lack of judgment, but makes no mention of three-eyed Prudence.

It is certain that some of these additions are imported from Dante, and we have reason to suspect that others are. As discussed above, Criseyde's dream of the eagle and its connection to Procne and Philomela is one such example. The "resemblance between the rhymes on *tristi lai* and *sorrowful lay*," found respectively at *Purgatorio*, 9.13 and *Troilus*, II, 64, and "the common setting of a mortal sleeping in the morning and hearing the noise of the swallow's lamenting its transformation, are strong connections between Chaucer and Dante."<sup>46</sup> Dante is also the likely source of the image of three-eyed Prudence:

Da la sinistra quattro facean festa,  
in porpore vestite, dietro al modo  
d'una di lor ch'avea tre occhi in testa.

Upon the left, four other women, dressed  
in crimson, danced, depending on the cadence  
of one of them, with three eyes in her head.

(*Purg.*, 29.130–32)

The three eyes were commonly associated with the capacity to see past, present, and future, and it is the lack of the third eye, which governs foresight, that Criseyde laments, neatly blending Chaucer's interests in units of three with the theme of divination. Early commentaries, as well as some manuscript

45. Windeatt, *Troilus*, 75.

46. Windeatt, *Troilus*, 129–30. See also Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets*, 154–59.



illustrations, identify this figure from the *Purgatorio* with Prudence.<sup>47</sup> Less certain are the references to the Furies; Windeatt and others see the references at I, 6 and IV, 22 to be clear evocations of *Inferno*, 9.37–51, although Howard H. Schless argues that this may not be the case.<sup>48</sup> The Fates, too, feature in the *Commedia*, with Atropos mentioned by name at *Inferno*, 33.126, Clotho at *Purgatorio*, 21.27, and Lachesis at *Purgatorio*, 25.79, although such references are commonplace enough that Chaucer may have had in mind any of a number of sources. It is also worth observing that it is at these same moments when we may think of Chaucer's sources as not only doubles, but also as triplicates. The "double sorwe" (I, 1) with which the poem opens harkens to the "doppia trestizia di Giocasta" (twin sorrows of Jocasta) of *Purgatorio*, 22.56, where Dante references Statius; this Chaucer adds to Boccaccio, himself an avid reader and interpreter of Statian and Dantean material. To read *Troilus* is to read Chaucer reading, and frequently the sources are stacked two and three deep.

In addition to *ambages* and *amphibologies*, we also encounter *dulcarnoun*, a Chaucerian addition to the English vocabulary that pertains to the number three. In the course of engineering the encounter between Troilus and Criseyde that forms the apex of Book III, Pandarus entices Criseyde to his house for dinner, where she is forced to spend the night due to a downpour that the narrator attributes to "goddes wil" (III, 623). Pandarus has secreted Troilus in a small room in the house and invented a love triangle with the fictitious Horaste (III, 797), explaining to Criseyde that a distraught Troilus has made the trek through the storm and a secret entrance to unburden his

47. Lloyd J. Matthews, "Chaucer's Personification of Prudence in *Troilus* (V.743–749): Sources in the Visual Arts and Manuscript Scholia," *English Language Notes* 13 (1976): 249–55. Using Holkham Hall MS 514 and New York, Morgan Library MS 676 as examples, Matthews argues that Chaucer might have in mind manuscript illustrations depicting Prudence with three eyes and/or textual commentary describing her thus. These would supplement Dante's poem, which is less concrete regarding the identification of Prudence. John Burrow offers a helpful overview of Chaucer's use of the image in both *Tr* and *Mel*, as well the tradition of this figure in both classical and medieval literature ("The Third Eye of Prudence," in J. A. Burrow and Ian P. Wei, eds., *Medieval Futures: Attitudes to the Future in the Middle Ages* [Woodbridge, 2000], 37–48). David Williams considers the relationship of the metaphor to the concept of intention and Augustine's theory of time, arguing that the three combine to show Chaucer's Christian Neoplatonism ("Distentio, Intentio, Attentio: Intentionality and Chaucer's Third Eye," *Florilegium* 15 [1998]: 37–60). See also Barney, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1052 (note to V, 744–49). Russell A. Peck sees a connection between this passage and the repeated mention of "eyen two" in the poem, noting the worldly dilemma that "we see with 'eyen two,' when we should see with 'eyen thre'" ("Numerology and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Mosaic* 5 [1972]: 1–29, at 27).

48. See Windeatt, *Troilus*, 126–27; and Howard H. Schless, *Chaucer and Dante: A Reevaluation* (Norman, OK, 1984), 103–5. See also Barney, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1025 (note to I, 1–14), 1044 (note to IV, 22–24).

woes to Pandarus and insisting that she reassure her paramour in person. Thus Criseyde is manipulated between the Scylla and Charybdis of letting Troilus languish in lover's agony or potentially losing her honor through a nighttime rendezvous:

Criseyde answerde, "As wisly God at reste  
 My soule brynge, as me is for hym wo!  
 And em, iwis, fayn wolde I don the beste,  
 If that ich hadde grace to do so;  
 But whether that ye dwelle or for hym go,  
 I am, til God me bettre mynde sende,  
 At dulcarnoun, right at my wittes ende."

(III, 925–31)

As with *ambages* and *amphibologies*, this is the sole recorded usage of *dulcarnoun* in the *MED*, and once again the term has been imported from a technical Latin context to be used in English verse. The word, "a *terminus technicus* of the high medieval mathematical curriculum, which Chaucer used only here and then twice in rapid succession, is a Persian and Arabic expression (*dhu'lqarnayn*) meaning 'two-horned.'"<sup>49</sup> The reference is to Book I, Proposition 47 of Euclid's *Elements*, an exposition of the Pythagorean Theorem that "revealed that if a square is constructed on each of the three sides of any right triangle, the largest of the three squares will equal in area the sum of the smaller two"<sup>50</sup> (Fig. 1). The term stands out not only due to its status as a *hapax legomenon* and the seemingly casual way Criseyde deploys it at an emotionally fraught moment, but also because it features in miniature the subject of this essay, and the Trinity itself: a subdivision of a single unit composed of three parts, the triangle, into units of two and one.

The passage of time is also frequently measured in units of three within the poem; William Provost notes that the reader forms an impression of a "dual time scheme: an objective or total time scheme involving the whole time span of the poem and, within it, an implied or emphatic time scheme

49. Hart, "Medieval Structuralism," 137. Hart argues, intriguingly, that Books I and III of *Tr*, which have, respectively, 1092 and 1820 lines, form the ratio of three to five, and thus map directly to "sides 3 and 5 of the 3–4–5 'dulcarnoun' triangle" (141); these numbers rely upon the inclusion of Book I, stanza 128, however, and as such may provide a counterargument to my suggestion above for canceling the stanza.

50. Hart, "Medieval Structuralism," 137.

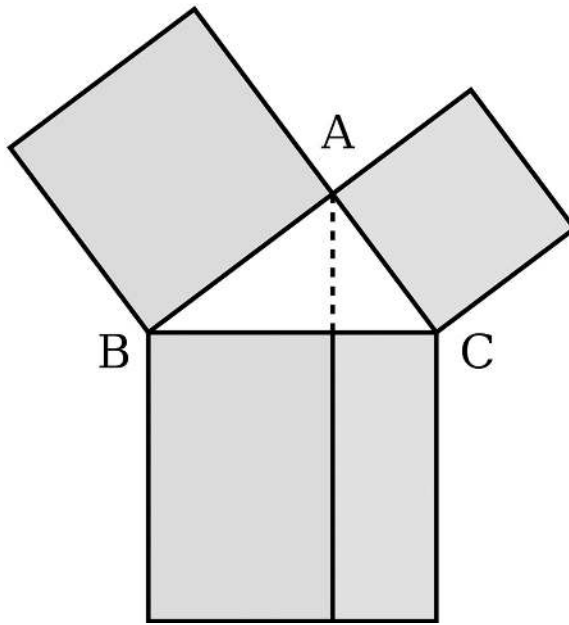


FIG. 1 *Diagram of Euclid's Proposition 1.47 with the smaller two squares forming the two "horns" above the triangle. Note that the area of the bottom square is equal to that of the two smaller squares, thus subdividing the triangle into units of two and one.*

involving certain crucial units and durations.”<sup>51</sup> Perhaps most significant among these is the series of three three-day spans found across Books II and III: the period spanning May 3, 4, and 5 covers 183 stanzas at the beginning of Book II; the days before, during, and after the scene at Deiphebus's house occupy 112 stanzas spanning Books II and III; and the days before, of, and after the consummation scene occupy 164 stanzas at the center of Book III (and indeed of the poem itself).<sup>52</sup> Provost further suggests that “with the subjective unit comprising May 3, 4, and 5, Chaucer has established a sort of

51. Provost, *The Structure of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, 35. Windeatt makes a similar observation when he states that “Although the unfolding of the whole story in *Troilus* is understood to take place over some years, the narrative focus is concentrated with sharp definition on the action occurring during a small number of particular days, while the intervals between those days or series of days are accounted for more vaguely and may be left open to differing interpretations” (*Troilus*, 198).

52. See the table entitled “Time Units” in Provost, *The Structure of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, 112–13.

‘three in one counterpoint’ in the reader’s sensibility,” an idea to which he returns later in his study:

Throughout Books II and III, therefore, the prevailing formal pattern among the time units is a ‘three-day pattern.’ At each occurrence of the pattern, three consecutive days are covered in three consecutive objective time units, a long one surrounded by a short and a medium length one. Each group of three corresponds to a single long subjective time unit. The pattern recurs three times. Two short units, each covering a period of several months, separate the three recurrences. A rather different grouping of three short units, covering respectively two consecutive days and a period of about a year, brings Book III and the period of bliss to a close.<sup>53</sup>

Although Provost never mentions Trinitarian overtones or structures, he is here observing with respect to time precisely that which I am arguing is a significant organizational feature of the poem, that is, that structures of three subdivided into two and one are a repeated, intentional, and significant feature of *Troilus’s* design. Furthermore, the “long one surrounded by a short and a medium length one” mentioned in Provost’s discussion of time bears marked resemblance to the structure of the *dulcarnoun* triangle itself.

Other, more localized mentions of time in groups of three may be found throughout the poem as well. The second stanza of Book V, for example, features an ornate description of the passing of three years:

The gold-tressed Phebus heighe on-lofte  
 Thries hadde alle with his bemes cleene  
 The snowes molte, and Zepherus as ofte  
 Ibrought ayeyn the tendre leves grene,  
 Syn that the sone of Ecuba the queene  
 Bigan to love hire first for whom his sorwe  
 Was al, that she departe sholde a-morwe.

(V, 8–14)

53. Provost, *The Structure of Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde*, 49, 84.

Here, as in other moments of chronographia throughout his corpus, Chaucer reaches to Boccaccio and the *Thebaid*.<sup>54</sup> The most direct model for this passage is the opening of the second book of the *Teseida*:

Il sole avea due volte dissolute  
 le nevi en gli alti poggi, et altrectante  
 Zeffiro avea le frondi rendute  
 et i be' fiori alle spogliate piante,  
 poi che d'Actena s'eran dipartute  
 le greche navi, Africo spirante,  
 da cui Theseo co' suoi furon portati  
 nelli scitichi porti conquistati

Twice the sun had melted the snows on the lofty peaks and Zephyrus had re clothed the naked plants with their leaves and lovely flowers, since the Grecian ships had set forth from Athens under the breath of Africus, by which Theseus and his men were borne into the vanquished Scythian harbors.

(*Teseida*, II.1)<sup>55</sup>

Thus Boccaccio is employed to amplify Boccaccio, with a passage from the *Teseida* serving as literary lead-in to a section in which Chaucer closely follows the fifth book of *Il Filostrato*. Significant for our purposes is the change from two years in the *Teseida* to three in *Troilus*, a modification occasioned not only by the timeline Chaucer has constructed within *Troilus*, but perhaps also because the opening to Book IV of the *Thebaid* (“Three shivering seasons had Phoebus eased with zephyrs”) provided a second model for this passage.<sup>56</sup> Finally, it is useful to recall that while we may list these features of the passage of time as individual items in a sequence, their occurrences within the poem are in fact often simultaneous or overlapping. Russell A. Peck, for example, observes that the apotheosis of the erotic love between Troilus and

54. See Barney, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1026 (note to I, 155–58); Robert A. Pratt, “Chaucer’s Use of the *Teseida*,” *PMLA* 62 (1947): 598–621; and Provost, *The Structure of Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde*, 103–6.

55. Italian text from Giovanni Boccaccio, *Teseida delle Nozze d’Emilia*, ed. Edvige Agostinelli and William Coleman (Florence, 2015), 46; translation from Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Book of Theseus: Teseida delle Nozze d’Emilia*, trans. Bernadette Marie McCoy (New York, 1974), 53. See also Barney, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1050 (note to V, 8–11).

56. Statius, *Thebaid: A Song of Thebes*, trans. Jane Wilson Joyce (Ithaca, NY, 2008), 85.

Criseyde occurs in Book III, and that “for 3 years the lovers enjoyed near bliss under the blessing of Venus in her 3rd heaven.”<sup>57</sup>

In order to show how the above features combine in the poem, I will turn now to a moment where a number of these converge: one third of the way through the poem, during the scene at the house of Deiphebus that bridges Books II and III, we encounter a sequence of trios of characters constantly being recomposed; repeated subdivisions of groups of three into two and one; and overt references to the numbers one and two within groups of three. At this point, Pandarus has orchestrated the dinner for the announced purpose of rallying support for Criseyde due to invented threats to her from Poliphete, a character who never actually appears in the poem—the real purpose being to arrange a brief face-to-face meeting between Troilus and Criseyde. To achieve this end, Troilus has gone to his brother’s house in advance, feigned an illness, and sequestered himself in a bedroom prior to the dinner. The dinner guests, following Pandarus’s lead, conclude that it would be good for Criseyde to secure Troilus’s support, and thus that a brief interview between the two would be helpful. Pandarus makes a quick trip to the bedroom to inform Troilus that the game is afoot and that visitors, including Criseyde, will soon arrive. Following this, the reader witnesses a parade of trios (or proposed trios) that dissolve into subgroups of two and one. First, Pandarus suggests that Troilus be visited by the trio of Helen, Deiphebus, and Criseyde:

And Pandarus, withouten rekenyng,  
 Out wente anon to Eleyne and Deiphebus,  
 And seyde hem, “So ther be no taryng,  
 Ne moore prees, he wol wel that ye brynge  
 Criseda, my lady, that is here.”

(II, 1640–44)

The irony here, of course, is that Pandarus is indeed “rekenyng” in every sense of the word.<sup>58</sup> No sooner has this trio been proposed than it is subdivided into smaller groups of two and one. Observing that “the chaumbre is but lite, / And fewe folk may lightly make it warm” (II, 1646–47), Pandarus suggests that instead it would be best “That no wight in ne wente but ye tweye

57. Peck, “Numerology and Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” 20.

58. The semantic range of *MED*, s.v. *rekenen* (v.) includes “enumerate,” “name one by one,” “narrate,” “make calculations,” and “include in a certain group or class.”

/ . . . / And after this she may hym ones preye / To ben good lord” (II, 1654, 1657–58). The duo of Helen and Deiphebus is soon split off when they go to the garden to read a letter from Hector “fond, as hap was” (II, 1696) at the head of Troilus’s bed. Thus the initial suggested trio that would visit Troilus—that of Helen, Deiphebus, and Criseyde—is subdivided into two and one even before it takes form, while the trio that does make the visit—that of Pandarus, Helen, and Deiphebus—is similarly subdivided. Pandarus then returns to the dinner party to suggest to Criseyde that she should now visit Troilus:

“Rys, take with yow youre nece Antigone,  
Or whom yow list; or no fors; hardyly  
The lesse prees, the bet; com forth with me,  
And loke that ye thonken humbly  
Hem alle thre, and whan ye may goodly  
Youre tyme se, taketh of hem youre leeve,  
Lest we to longe his restes hym byreeve.”

(II, 1716–22)

This one stanza contains multiple groups of three, both actual and implied, all of which are, or will be, subdivided into twos and ones. Criseyde had arrived at the dinner as part of a trio, accompanied by her nieces Antigone and Tarbe (II, 1562–63), a group that Pandarus proposes subdividing by taking only Antigone to visit Troilus, presumably with a new trio comprising Pandarus, Criseyde, and Antigone. No sooner has this new group been proposed, however, than it is dissolved, with Pandarus suggesting instead that only he and Criseyde should visit Troilus. He next reminds Criseyde to thank the trio of Troilus, Helen, and Deiphebus for their support in the fabricated conflict with Poliphete; this trio, of course, has already been separated into the duo of Helen and Deiphebus, who are in the garden reading Hector’s letter, and Troilus, who waits alone. Criseyde and Pandarus next join Troilus for the first in-person meeting of the trio whose movements are the main subject of the first half of the poem, a group that, as discussed above, implies a variety of subdivisions of two against one.

As with much of the text throughout this passage, and indeed the poem, the numbers one, two, and three not only form the movements of the characters, but also appear at the surface of the text. This is the case, for example, in the stanza near the end of Book II, when Pandarus is speaking to Criseyde just before entering the room wherein Troilus is on his sickbed:

“Fy on the devel! Thynk which oon he is,  
 And in what plit he lith; com of anon!  
 Thynk al swich taried tyde, but lost it nys.  
 That wol ye bothe seyn, whan ye ben oon.  
 Secoundely, ther yet devyneth noon  
 Upon yow two; come of now, if ye konne!  
 While folk is blent,<sup>59</sup> lo, al the tyme is wonne.”  
 (II, 1737–43)

These seven lines feature three words each connoting singularity (*oon* twice, *noon*) and duality (*bothe*, *secoundely*, *two*). There is also emphasis on the future sexual union of Troilus and Criseyde in the phrase “whan ye ben oon,” which looks ahead to III, 1405, when, after their consummation, the lovers “were oon.”<sup>60</sup> This is, of course, a conventional expression for both love and sexual union, but one that has added force here due to the poem's emphasis on units of one, two, and three, and the typical inclusion of duads in Trinitarian formulae.

Book II ends with a cliffhanger: Criseyde and Pandarus are just outside the room in which Troilus lies, rehearsing what he will say when he at last finds himself face to face with his “lady dere” (III, 53). The bridge to Book III begins with a seven-stanza proem addressed to Venus before returning to the action. After a fairly standard chivalric exchange in which Troilus pledges his service and devotion and Criseyde accepts, provided that he not “don amys” (III, 173), the meeting is interrupted by the return of Helen and Deiphebus from the garden. Pandarus reminds Criseyde to take her “leve at alle thre” (i.e., Troilus, Helen, and Deiphebus; III, 209) and leaves with her while the newly recomposed group of three converse regarding Hector's

59. While such references to blindness are often idiomatic, *Tr* is “studded with images of blindness and light which culminate in the analogy Troilus draws between himself and Oedipus in Book IV, line 300” (Julia Ebel, “Troilus and Oedipus: The Genealogy of an Image,” *English Studies* 55 [1974]: 15–21, at 15). Ebel observes further that although depictions of blind Fortune and blind Love are commonplace in the medieval era and beyond, “Chaucer reinvigorates the trite by fusing it to the Oedipus analogue” (21). As such, this may be read as an example of the “explicit, clever, and repeated appearance” of the *Thebaid* “at the surface of Chaucer's Text,” mentioned by Fleming (see note 27 above). For further context, see Chauncey Wood, *The Elements of Chaucer's Troilus* (Durham, NC, 1984), who offers extensive discussion of blindness in the poem (153–63).

60. Critics have long recognized parallels between the encounter at Deiphebus's house and the consummation scene; Provost, for example, observes that “at the Deiphebus meeting Pandarus leads Criseyde into Troilus' room ‘by the lappe’ (III 59), and on the night of the consummation he leads Troilus into Criseyde's room ‘by the lappe’ (III 742). Criseyde sits on Troilus' bed at Deiphebus' house, and he sits on hers at Pandarus' house” (*The Structure of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, 86, 86n14).



letter. Throughout this long passage, then, we witness many configurations of ones, twos, and threes, constantly shifting and reforming. That such recompositions of trios matters to the larger meaning of the poem is borne out by several things, including the variety of ways in which twos and threes are emphasized, as has already been laid out above, and the presence of the final stanza of the poem. And while this is the longest such section of the poem in which trios of characters are conspicuously reconfigured, it is by no means the only one. Other examples include Pandarus's reassurances after Troilus reveals his love for Criseyde (I, 990–94);<sup>61</sup> the scene early in Book II when Pandarus visits Criseyde's house and interrupts the group of ladies reading, already discussed above; the consummation scene at the center of Book III when Pandarus brings together Troilus and Criseyde and recedes into the background as the two lovers become one (III, 1405); and the scene at the beginning of Book V when Troilus hands Criseyde over to Diomedes.

Finally, there is significance to the point at which the scene at Deiphobus's house occurs. It is notable that this scene not only bridges Books II and III, but also that it is the only scene of continuous action that bridges two books. While the proem addressed to Venus that begins Book III is appropriate to the coming events, its placement squarely in the middle of the action as Troilus lies expectantly, waiting in bed as Criseyde and Pandarus approach, stands out, as, elsewhere in the poem, breaks between books correspond to clean breaks in the action. Additionally, as discussed above, this scene comprises the middle of three three-day groups, and it alone splits those three-day units across a break between books, with day two bisected by the proem to Book III. It is telling that this continuous scene featuring continually reconfigured groups of ones, twos, and threes is conspicuously bisected by an address to Venus in her "thridde heven" (III, 2), as we move from the second to the third books. The movement of people within this scene, the division of time, and the way that the poem is organized into large-scale units all reinforce the pattern of one and two within three. Windeatt, who recognizes this as the "most striking of transitions in the narrative structure of *Troilus*," concludes that the transition "is managed to give just as much emphasis to the formal structure of division into books as to the powerfully continuous narrative impetus

61. "For bothe yow to plesse thus hope I / . . . / And so we may be gladd alle thre." Dyani Johns Taff observes that Pandarus "handily turns the two of 'yow' into 'thre,' indicating the need for a go-between in the love affair and foreshadowing the uncomfortable 'thre' in the consummation scene" ("Love that oughte ben secree": Secrecy and Alternate Endings," *Studies in Philology* 116 [2019]: 617–39, at 625–26).

that bridges the books, drawing attention to the relation between the poem's action and its structural design."<sup>62</sup>

This structural organization of *Troilus* has, of course, been the subject of considerable critical attention. The structure of the poem is conspicuous in its differences from its primary source, in its self-referentiality via the attention the narrator pays to this structure by marking transitions, and to the thematic connections of the structure to the poem's actions and philosophical preoccupations. The difference is seen, for example, at the end of Book I when the narrator compares Pandarus's industrious machinations on behalf of Troilus to a builder who "hath an hous to founde" (I, 1065), in a passage borrowed from Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* (43–45), which compares architectural forethought and organization to literary structure and composition.<sup>63</sup> Here we find a transitional moment in the text marked by intrusion of a narratorial voice that utilizes intertextual allusion to contemplate the interconnectedness of architectural and literary modes of creation and the amatory plots of Pandarus, himself the proxy architect and author of much the poem's actions, particularly across the first three books.

As mentioned previously, the organization of the poem into five books is the most conspicuous structuring device, a departure from Boccaccio's organization of the narrative of *Il Filostrato* into nine books (and one that was certainly even more conspicuous to medieval English readers, given that it was the first English poem to be divided into books).<sup>64</sup> While one obvious solution to creating a Trinitarian three-in-one structure would be to divide the poem into three books, Chaucer's use of a five-book structure provides an ingenious frame that accommodates a variety of "three in two and one" subdivisions. The five-book scheme is paired from the outset with the "double sorwe" that forecasts a basic shape to the plot to come. The turning of Fortune's Wheel, which constitutes both a thematic focus and a structurally organizing metaphor for the rising and falling halves of the action, is yet

62. Windeatt, *Troilus*, 183.

63. For a discussion of this passage and its relationship to the structure of *Tr*, see Windeatt, *Troilus*, 180–83.

64. For an engaging discussion of this innovation and its effect on scribal habits, see Ralph Hanna III, "The Manuscripts and Transmission of Chaucer's *Troilus*," in James M. Dean and Christian K. Zacher, eds., *The Idea of Medieval Literature: New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honor of Donald R. Howard* (Newark, DE, 1992), 173–88.

another organizational structure.<sup>65</sup> A focused contemplation—and condemnation—of Fortune occurs in the proem to Book IV, where she is depicted as a “traitour comune” (IV, 5) who has cast Troilus down from the blissful perch he enjoyed at the apex of Book III and in his place “sette up Diomedé” (IV, 11). Fortune is never far from the surface of the text, whether as allegorical entity, philosophical subject, or quotidian reality, and serves as well to provide a structure to the events of the story. The reader encounters Troilus in a relatively lofty position at the outset of the poem and witnesses the bliss of Book III and the enlightened clarity of his apotheosis at the close of the poem. These heights are punctuated, however, by the low points of the double sorrows occasioned by the circular turning of Fortune’s Wheel to form what Kemp Malone characterizes as a plot in “the form of the letter W,” a pattern enabled by the division of the poem into five books.<sup>66</sup> Thus we have in the very structure of the poem the by-now familiar pattern of three against two, as represented by the letter W with its three peaks and two valleys. The poem has two clear halves, each on either side of the highpoint at its center, just as Troilus experiences three peaks and readers tend to experience the relationship between the poem’s central characters in three clear stages: Troilus’s love-sickness and the wooing of Criseyde; the account of their love affair and its consummation; and the loss of Criseyde to the Greek camp and her betrayal of Troilus. As Peck argues, the five-book structure is ideally suited to a three-part narrative organized on the turning of Fortune’s wheel, for it allows two books ascending to the apex in the third book followed by two descending books.<sup>67</sup> Thus in the conspicuously organized structure of *Troilus* we find a Trinitarian model: the poem is a whole composed of duads and triads.

My final goal in this section of the essay is to add one small but important observation about the structure of the poem. As mentioned previously, the

65. Thomas B. Hanson observes that the stairs in *Tr*, I, 215–16 are a second such figure, although they are less well developed throughout the poem as a thematic metaphor (“The Center of *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *Chaucer Review* 9 [1975]: 297–302, at 297). See also Samuel Schuman, “The Circle of Nature: Patterns of Imagery in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *Chaucer Review* 10 (1975): 99–112, who identifies five circular motifs in the poem—the ring and the ruby, the city walls, the cycle of the seasons, the Wheel of Fortune, and astrological and cosmological spheres—and sees the poem itself as not only circular, but a spiral, noting the symmetry between the beginning and end when Troilus mocks love. Schuman argues that the “action of the poem’s conclusion parallels that of its beginnings, but on a higher level” (111).

66. Kemp Malone, *Chapters on Chaucer* (Baltimore, 1951), 107.

67. Peck, “Numerology and Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” 14–15. Peck, citing a number of classical sources, makes a further intriguing argument that 5 was arithmetically considered a circular number because “its form (pentagon) is the first to suggest a circle, its angles being greater than 90°” and that it had a historical association with justice because “it occupies the middle point among the nine primary numbers” (9). Thus, “as a circular number and number of Justice, 5 is superbly adaptable to a poem dealing with the turning of Fortune’s wheel” (14).

exact center of the poem occurs at III, 1271 and is, depending upon how one counts, either the 4,120th of 8,239 lines or (more satisfactorily), the central line of the center stanza if stanza 128 in Book I is canceled. If we divide the poem into thirds, we may spot a similar moment, for we find the following stanza (spoken by Pandarus) one third of the way into the poem:

“I sey for me, best is, as I kan knowe,  
 That no wight in ne wente but ye tweye,  
 But it were I, for I kan in a throwe  
 Reherce hire cas unlik that she kan seye;  
 And after this she may hym ones preye  
 To ben good lord, in short, and take hire leve.  
 This may nought muchel of his ese hym reve.”

(II, 1653–59)

Line II, 1654, “That no wight in ne wente but ye tweye,” falls exactly one third of the way through the poem in the passage discussed at length above that features a conspicuous, continuous subdivision of groups of three into twos and ones. And that is precisely what is being put forward by Pandarus here, where the proposed trio of Helen, Deiphebus, and Criseyde is being subdivided into “ye tweye” and Criseyde alone. As with our calculations for the central line, we should account for the possibility of a canceled stanza 128 in Book I as well, and once again the calculation works either way. If stanza 128 stands, meaning that there are 8,239 lines in the poem, then one third of this total is 2,746.33, and line II, 1654 falls in that spot. If Book I, stanza 128 is canceled, on the other hand, the above stanza would be the 392nd of the poem, which is exactly one third of the way through (or, to be more precise, 392.33, as there are 1,177 stanzas). Taken alone, any of the features discussed regarding this moment in the text—the continuous recombination of trios into units of two and one; the repeated mentions of the variants of the words “one” and “two”; the fact that the formal division between Books II and III is muddled by the action continuing across them; the fact that we are in the central group of three three-day blocks of time; and the fact that all of this comes one third of the way through the poem—might be unremarkable. But taken together, there is simply too much here to ignore, and the combination of these features demands an explanation. And that explanation is that there is an intentional thematic and structural connection to the “oon, and two, and thre . . . / . . . in thre, and two, and one” with which the poem concludes.

Thus far I have documented that both duads and duality and triads and triplings recur throughout the poem, often at key moments. The task now is to argue *why* they are there and *what* they mean. *Troilus* exhibits a remarkable capacity to divide even careful readers into fairly even camps holding diametrically opposed positions on major interpretive points, a situation bearing humorous symmetry to the historical subject matter of warring Greeks and Trojans, but certainly owing more to Chaucer's characteristic tendency to explore and leave unresolved such dualities. As critics, we at least find ourselves in good company, for when we encounter the great authorities on Troy in the *House of Fame*, we learn that "Betwex hem was a litil enyve" (1476); they, too, seem destined to squabble for eternity.<sup>68</sup> As Helen Cooper perceptively notes, Chaucer tends to rework Dante so that the univocal becomes the "explicitly ambiguous—a single Dantean absolute becoming a Chaucerian duality."<sup>69</sup> I should be happy if the foregoing analysis permitted me to escape the gravitational pull of such bifurcation, but that is not the case; instead I am able to offer readings that lend weight to particular positions in a few interpretively crucial disagreements. I wish to address three of these in conclusion.

First, there is the debate concerning whether *Troilus* represents a rejection or affirmation, perhaps even celebration, of Dante's view of the cosmos. Many critics follow Lydgate in viewing Chaucer as "Daunt in Inglissh."<sup>70</sup> Others, such as Cooper, Karla Taylor, and William Franke, view Chaucer as deeply influenced and impressed by Dante but with a different set of answers to the important questions he raises. Chaucer's use of the Trinity as organizing structure and theme lends weight to this latter group. *Troilus* grapples with many of the same questions found in the *Commedia* and elsewhere in Dante's oeuvre, such as the limits of language (including its capacity to convey the ineffable),<sup>71</sup> the uses of the classical past in Christian contexts, and the limitations of human love and love poetry. If anything, Chaucer's debts to Dante have been underrecognized by many critics, some of whom appear aware of only moments of overt borrowing. Instead, Chaucer's encounters with Dante seemed to have been formative on a much deeper level, supplying

68. Cooper, "Four Last Things in Dante and Chaucer," discusses the allegations and shortcomings of this group (58).

69. Cooper, "Four Last Things in Dante and Chaucer," 49.

70. The phrase is from Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, Prol. 303, and has been believed by many scholars to refer to *HF*, which Lydgate does not include elsewhere in his list of works by Chaucer; see John M. Fyler, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 977. See also Taylor, *Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy'*, 1, 213n1, who lists critics exemplifying this approach.

71. See Franke, *Secular Scriptures*, 46–47, on the genealogy of the idea that language can reflect divine truths.

him with “an exalted sense of what it meant to be a poet, a confidence in the potential for writing in the vernacular, and a keener historical interest in the pagan past of classical antiquity and the challenge of representing it.”<sup>72</sup> But important distinctions between their respective cosmological views emerge.

This distinction may be seen clearly at two of the most important moments in *Troilus*, its midpoint and its ending. Near the center of the *Purgatorio*, and thus the center of the *Commedia* itself, Virgil instructs Dante that love is both natural and ubiquitous, and that it comes with the capacity for misdirection:

“Né creator né creatura mai,”  
 cominciò el, “figliuol, fu senza amore,  
 o naturale o d’animo; e tu ’l sai.  
 Lo naturale è sempre senza errore,  
 ma l’altro puote errar per malo obietto  
 o per troppo o per poco di vigore.”

“My son, there’s no Creator and creature  
 who ever was without love—natural  
 or mental; and you know that,” he began.  
 “The natural is always without error,  
 but mental love may choose an evil object  
 or err through too much or too little vigor.”

(*Purg.*, 17.91–96)

Troilus, who is burdened with Pandarus as a guide in lieu of Dante’s Virgil,<sup>73</sup> could have benefitted from this advice, as his love is misdirected in its idolatry of Criseyde who, while far from evil in Chaucer’s account, is depicted from the outset as an inappropriate target for Troilus’s devotion. And while it is hard to think of another literary lover better representing the perils (and humor) of “too little vigor” than Troilus, who needs Pandarus to undress him and toss him into bed, the real point here is, of course, that Troilus has too little vigor in pursuing those things that he ought to pursue. Christianity and its proper goals are unavailable to him in the poem’s pre-Christian setting, as they were to Virgil, and he also clearly misses the mark according to classical standards due to his lovesickness, a convention imported from medieval

72. Windeatt, *Troilus*, 9. Along with Dante, Windeatt lists Petrarch and Boccaccio as poets who had such influence on Chaucer.

73. Wetherbee discusses this passage from *Purg.* and its relation to Pandarus (*Chaucer and the Poets*, 145–46).

poetry. All of this is made even clearer by comparison to the midpoint of *Troilus*. In III, 1254–74, which encompasses the exact center of the poem, Chaucer reworks Saint Bernard's prayer to the Virgin Mary from *Paradiso* 33, the concluding canto of the *Commedia*, in a futile effort "to transform brief, mutable earthly love into something divine, stable, and eternal."<sup>74</sup> The ending, meanwhile, translates directly a passage that in Dante presents a model of the Trinity as the greatest conceivable model of unity. The "oon, and two, and thre" in its various configurations of hypostases is both paradox and fundamental truth; it persists eternally, and is simultaneously unity and trinity. In *Troilus* however, no such reading is possible. Troilus, the narrator, and the reader look back over the poem from a vantage point in which all individuals, pairs, and trinitarian groupings inevitably lack unity, are incapable of recognizing truth, and are fleeting even on a human scale of time, as shown by my lengthy analysis of the passage spanning Books II and III. Dante is ultimately concerned with eschatology and those things beyond and outside of this world. Chaucer, conversely, "might fairly be regarded as the medieval poet most consistently concerned with this world, just as Dante is the poet most deeply concerned with the next."<sup>75</sup>

The second major critical question on which this analysis has bearing is that of whether the ending of the poem is disjointed, and whether there is a cleavage between the poem's ending and what comes before, or whether there is, as Donaldson suggested, an artistic purpose to the seemingly manic movement from subject to subject in the final stanzas. While there is indeed quite a lot happening in a compressed space in the closing of the poem, more thematic unity exists than might appear at first glance, much of it directly related to distinctions between the Trinity and human trinitarian groupings to which the final stanza calls attention. Earlier in this essay I cataloged the diversity of topics found in the final fifteen stanzas of the poem (V, 1765–1869). Returning to these, we may see that two overarching themes unite the seemingly disparate topics they comprise. The first of these themes pertains to books, language, and authorship. The first stanza in this section refers the reader to Dares, another account of the Trojan war. The next two stanzas apologize to "every gentil womman" (V, 1773) for the depiction of Criseyde before redirecting attention to "other bokes" (V, 1776) and drawing a comparison with the stories of Penelope and Alceste. The fourth, the famous *envoi* instructing the "litel bok" to kiss the steps of other great poets, could not be more

74. Taylor, *Chaucer Reads 'The Divine Comedy'*, 69.

75. Cooper, "Four Last Things in Dante and Chaucer," 40.

bookish or intertextual. The fifth concerns the “gret diversite / In English and in writyng of oure tonge” (V, 1793–94), an anxiety that Chaucer seems to have experienced firsthand, but that is itself an intertextual comment, deriving from the *Convivio* and likely ultimately from Horace’s *Ars poetica*.<sup>76</sup> The second overarching theme is that all worldly things are transient and decay. This theme picks up with the sixth stanza in this group, which provides the most overt example with the death of Troilus on the battlefield. The next three stanzas continue with the fate of Troilus, reworking Arcita’s apotheosis from the *Teseida* to describe Troilus’s ascension. This event is followed by the “swich fyn” stanza, which suggests the pointlessness of all of the main aims of the poem thus far—earthly love, *estat*, pleasure, nobility—and by extension worldly stories that celebrate such values.

The three stanzas that follow, reproving worldly vanity, earthly love, and pagan religion, and urging young lovers to look elsewhere, blend these two themes (which are never in fact fully separate), focusing both on the “world that passeth soone as floures faire” (V, 1841) and on books of “olde clerkis,” that is, of ancient learned authors (V, 1854). Religiosity and bookishness are twin features of the next stanza as well, which dedicates the book to Gower and Strode and invites their editorial judgment before announcing the prayer to Christ that forms the last stanza. Taken together, these stanzas are not a cacophony of disparate themes and false starts, but part of the same consistent message, namely, that unlike the Trinity, all things on this worldly plane—books, texts, language, love, human bodies, reputation—are subject to corruption, decay, and misunderstanding. The contents of these stanzas have direct pertinence to one another as they reinforce the message of the entire poem. Chaucer’s fictive and problematic fidelity to texts and poets that come before him—whether Dante, the invented Lollius, or the uncited Petrarch—and the argument that words cannot be relied upon to match or convey reality (even when they have the power to alter it), reveal a symmetry between love and poetry, perhaps the highest of human endeavors, revealing both to be transitory and well short of eternity, divine perfection, and completion. Both are fated to fracture and dissolve. Here again we witness

76. Barney, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1031 (note to II, 22–28). See also the discussion in Carney, “Chaucer’s ‘littel bok,’” 362. Chaucer’s anxiety is attested by differences among manuscript copies of his works (and virtually all other medieval authors’ works). It is perhaps most famously expressed in the humorous scolding of Adam in *Adam*, but the attestation of this poem to Chaucer is increasingly in doubt; see A. S. G. Edwards, “Chaucer and ‘Adam Scriveyn,’” *Medium Ævum* 81 (2012): 136–38; and Eric Weiskott, “Adam Scriveyn and Chaucer’s Metrical Practice,” *Medium Ævum* 86 (2017): 147–51.



Chaucer borrowing from and echoing Dante while reaching a very different answer to an important question, in this case the capacity of language and poetry to convey truth. At first blush, Dante might seem to agree on the inadequacy of language at the end of the *Paradiso*. When attempting to describe the Trinity, he exclaims “Oh quanto è corto il dire e come fioco / al mio concetto!” (How incomplete is speech, how weak, when set against my thought!; 33.121–22). As he discusses in the *Epistle to Cangrande*, however, Dante finds himself in good company among others who struggled with writing about ultimately ineffable spiritual experiences, including Paul in 2 Corinthians, who was snatched away to heaven and “heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter,” and Plato, about whom Dante says “multa enim per lumen intellectuale vidit quae sermone proprio nequivit exprimere” (for he perceived many things by the light of the intellect which his everyday language was inadequate to express).<sup>77</sup> Thus Dante’s Trinity is perfection itself, and, while it may eclipse the capacity of language adequately to represent such perfection, he positions himself alongside Paul and Plato, fountainheads of sacred and secular scriptures, in what Taylor memorably terms “a unique authenticating strategy.”<sup>78</sup> Chaucer ultimately makes humbler claims for literary language, his own included. Language and poetry not only lack the capacity to capture the highest truths fully, but also possess the capacity to distort truths significantly, a capacity that the denizens of *Troilus* utilize throughout the poem.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, we may take up the question of whether the ending is a palindrome. It is perfectly clear why readers might perceive it as such, for there is both the sudden appearance of overt Christian moralizing at the end of a long poem heretofore lacking such sentiment and a clear denouncement of the worldly love that has been the poem’s most salient topic. As Clíodhna Carney argues, readers cannot reach consensus on the question

because the poem does seem to be devoted to the humane telling  
of a human dilemma, and yet it clearly does have this Boethian

77. 2 Cor. 12:4; and *Dantis Alagherii Epistolae, The Letters of Dante*, ed. and trans. Paget Toynbee (Oxford, 1966), 193 (Latin text), 209–10 (English translation).

78. Taylor, *Chaucer Reads ‘The Divine Comedy’*, 177.

79. Julian N. Wasserman makes the observation that of all the characters in *Tr*, Troilus himself seems least adept at deliberately using the inherent ambiguity and duplicity of language to further his own ends (“Both Fixed and Free: Language and Destiny in Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde*,” in Wasserman and Roney, eds., *Sign, Sentence, Discourse*, 194–222, at 210–11).

undercurrent, and this Christian ending, in which one is directly advised to learn from the story of Troilus that one should set one's sights, not on this world, but the next.<sup>80</sup>

The final stanza is in fact a repudiation of Dante, for the reasons discussed above, even as on the surface the text is closer to Dante than at any other point.<sup>81</sup> But, by definition, the ending may not properly be termed a palinode because it articulates rather than retracts the very message that has been conveyed all along, namely, that the human love that is the subject of the poem—like the human strife of war and state that, in an inversion of epic conventions, form the poem's background—is fruitless and unharmonious. The Trinitarian formulation with which the poem ends is not a sudden turn to Christian moralizing, but a nod to both the structure of *Troilus* and many of its thematic preoccupations, even as it is a wry acknowledgment both of Chaucer's admiration for Dante as guiding light and his disagreement with him regarding the limits of all things human, whether poetry or love.

Early in Book II, when Pandarus reveals Troilus's feelings to Criseyde and exhorts reciprocation on her part, he employs a metaphor of authorship:

“How so it be that som men hem delite  
With subtyl art hire tales for to endite,  
Yet for al that, in hire entencioun  
Hire tale is al for some conclusioun.”

(II, 256–59)

In the following line, Pandarus observes that “th'ende is every tales strengthe” (II, 260) in an indication that he plans to forego embellishment and skip straight to the point. It has until now not been fully appreciated that the final stanza of *Troilus*, after much embellishment and “subtyl art,” is indeed “al for some conclusion,” for it announces a structurally organizing principle of the poem, unites a number of the most important thematic concerns, including uses of pagan contexts in Christian poetry and the limits of language, and cleverly deploys Dante most overtly where the two poets' views most diverge.

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80. Carney, “Chaucer's 'litel bok,’” 366.

81. Carney, “Chaucer's 'litel bok,’” 366.