COUSIN TO FORTUNE: ON READING CHAUCER'S CRISEYDE

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ABSTRACT

Chaucer's Criseyde is a self-conscious conundrum who simultaneously demands and defies coherent exegesis. This article presents a dry-eyed reading of Criseyde as a type of Boethius's Fortune. It draws attention to verbal parallels in the presentation of Criseyde and Chaucer's version of Boethius's Fortune, as well as to ontological similarities between the two Ladies. In doing so the article offers a corrective to other more sentimental views of Criseyde which Chaucer's narrator would undoubtedly have shared but possibly not Chaucer himself, who was for Thomas Usk "the noble, philosophical poete in Englisshe."

KEY WORDS: Chaucer, Boethius, Criseyde, Fortune, exegesis.

RESUMEN

La Criseyde chauceriana es (y es consciente de ser) un acertijo que exige y a la vez se resiste a una exégesis coherente. El presente trabajo ofrece una interpretación rigurosa que la considera como tipo de la Fortuna boeciana; también identifica algunos paralelismos verbales en la representación de Criseyde y en la versión de Chaucer de la Fortuna boeciana, así como ciertos parecidos ontológicos entre ambas damas. En suma, el trabajo trata de rectificar otras lecturas más sentimentales de Criseyde, lecturas compartidas sin duda por el narrador de *Troilus and Criseyde* pero probablemente no por el propio Chaucer, el cual era, según Thomas Usk, "el noble poeta filosófico en lengua inglesa".

PALABRAS CLAVE: Chaucer, Boecio, Criseyde, Fortuna, exégesis.

I. "GOD WOOT, THE TEXT FUL HARD IS, SOTH, TO FYNDE!"

Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is a self-proliferating and metalingually self-conscious work which relentlessly spins out to increasing lengths the material found in its principal narrative source, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato,* always in spite of the narrator's continual efforts to move the story along; and it is a work that intertextually embeds itself within the realm of literature at the same time as it embeds within itself a great variety of literary productions, ranging from songs and letters through books and book-reading to, finally —spuriously— o its own fictive source Lollius.

The simple plot expands in a great surfeit of words paradoxically at odds with the power of verbal economy Pandarus ascribes to language when he tells Criseyde that with just one word she "may [Troilus's] herte stere" (III. 910).[1]

Throughout the poem language is attributed a whole range of powers quite beyond the straightforward one of merely expressing meaning and, for Criseyde, male linguistic competence attains the status of fetish. Her first question when apprised of Troilus's besottedness is "Kan he wel speke of love?" (II. 503). If we are generous, this question reveals her familiarity with the rhetorical notion of *ethos*, according to which a man's words reflect his nature, and therefore shows her to be interested in getting to know Troilus through his linguistic virtuosity when expounding amorous themes. If we are less generous, the question shows us that she gets her kicks from the tales people tell and may be a shade too prurient for her own good. Either way, Criseyde is a connoiseuse of language, and language has a sexual charge: later, after poring over Troilus's letter, "Avysed word by word in every lyne / and fond no lak, she thoghte he koude good" (I. 1.177-8), so that when Pandarus asks Criseyde what she thinks of Troilus's epistolographic skills, the reader is in no doubt that the blush and the humming with which Criseyde responds betray her assessment not only of Troilus's way with words but also of his amatory skills, to which those words attest (II. 1.195-99). Nor should it be forgotten that what assuaged Criseyde's anxieties when taken off to the Greek camp were precisely Diomede's words: "So wel he for hymselven spak and seyde" (V. 1.033). Not only does linguistic competence reflect potential amatory competence, but language itself is a sign of life, its absence a symptom of death: it is Criseyde's very speechlessness that frightens Troilus into mistaking her faint for death (IV. 1.156-62). Language can also kill, as Troilus warns Pandarus: "thow sleest me with thi speche!" (IV. 455). Furthermore, what survives a temporary parting are, in the first place, words, and only then more carnal recollections: "And in his thought [Troilus] gan up and down to wynde / Hire wordes alle..." (III. 1.541-2); much later Criseyde foresees that "unto the worldes ende" she will survive for posterity as a word "rolled... on many a tonge" (V. 1.054-61).

The question that has troubled many critics is precisely how should posterity remember Criseyde? in what word or words may she be best encapsulated? or how exactly should Criseyde be interpreted —what does "Criseyde" signify beyond being the name of a character in a courtly romance? Such doubts may seem odd in the face of so many words; yet in all that maelstrom of signifiers, Criseyde has all too often seemed strangely unsignified, a blank in this most textual of texts. For all language's apparent powers, it appears strangely incapable of fixing Criseyde for the reader, of giving her a stable identity. Certainly Chaucer's narrator makes it clear that his poem and Criseyde at its centre are up for interpretation, that his readers

[1] All Chaucer quotations from Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*.

must pay their money and make their choice. The narrator has his story to tell, as he found it in his fictive sources, but he is reluctant to accept the obvious truth about Criseyde, namely that she betrayed Troilus:

> And now my penne, allas, with which I write,
> Quaketh for drede of al that I moste endite.
>
> For how Criseyde Troilus forsook—
> Or at the leeste, how that she was unkynde—
> Moot hennesforth ben matere of my book... (IV. 13-17)

Critics have accused the narrator of falling in love with his own creation, even to the absurd extent of suggesting that if we wish to "to understand Criseide properly we should first have to send the narrator to a psychoanalyst for a long series of treatments and then ask him to rewrite the poem on the basis of his own increased self-knowledge" (Donaldson 67). Of course, such critics want to read *Troilus and Criseyde* as a psychological novel; and even those who categorize it more usefully and with greater literary-historical precision as a philosophical romance often fall into the trap of nevertheless trying to make the characters come alive for us as distinct identities in recognisable bodies: so, for example, we are invited to see Troilus as a Battle of Britain fighter pilot, or Calkas as a quisling Archbishop of Canterbury (Brewer *Introduction*, 118). Likewise, on the basis of his representation of characters such as Criseyde, Chaucer has been extolled as "the most notably feminist author in English until Richardson" (Brewer, "Gothic Chaucer" 18); yet too often such a position relies on ironic readings, and irony is too often the panacea for the floundering critic's ills. It has, for instance, been argued that "in order to insert his sympathetic treatment of Criseyde into the predominant antifeminist tradition [Chaucer] had to glaze it with an impenetrable irony" (Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance* 180). Apart from begging the question what precisely "impenetrable irony" means (if "impenetrable," of what use can it be?), such a reading is guilty of generic error in so far as it was precisely the courtly romance which gave fullest, or at least most literary, expression to pro-female ideas and "inspired a positive shift in attitudes toward women" (Fiero et al. 71). More historically attuned readings may also run into difficulties. Alcuin Blamires, for example, identifies the existence of a topic according to which women were conceived of as healers and nurturers. He then proceeds (following David Aers) to demonstrate how Troilus views Criseyde as his only potential healer, commenting, in relation to the single line "How shal he don, and ich also" (IV. 757), on "the altruistic quality of Criseyde's love" (Blamires 93-4; Aers 132-43). This seems a woeful misreading of Chaucer's poem, for the only person Criseyde actually heals is Diomede, wounded in battle by Troilus himself (V. 1.044-50). At this point the psychoanalytically inclined critic will either attempt to integrate such conflicting manifestations of Criseyde's character, or inform us that "[Chaucer] is commenting on the mystery of human motive" (Conrad 50); or turn once again to that help-meet irony. As I shall argue later, the search for pyschological depth and complexity in Chaucer's representation of

Criseyde is a misguided and ultimately abortive endeavour which confuses an interim strategy on Chaucer's part with his ultimate goal.

I am not denying that Criseyde demands interpretation; but I am certain that our interpretation of her should not be on the same plane as Chaucer's narrator's, should not, to put it simply, be in human terms. Whereas the narrator invites us to read Criseyde as a human being, whether by tempting us into making our own guesses as to her "honour, estat, and womanly noblesse" (I. 286-87), or titillating our imagination to fill in the spaces left by the information he witholds or is ignorant of (whether she had children, how old she was), Chaucer intends us, I believe, to proceed less as psychologists and more as textual exegetes. Indeed, the enigma at the centre of the text, Criseyde herself is mistress of the exegetic process, a process which, as we saw above, she is not unwilling to apply to people as well as texts. To begin with her literateness is evidenced by her taste for stories of Oedipus (II. 81ff) and by her familiarity with the forty-seventh proposition of Euclid's first book ("dulcarnoun," III. 931); her rhetorical self-awareness is on display whenever she speaks "for conclusioun" (eg. V. 765, 1.003); while her skills as exegete give her the confidence to pooh-pooh the mysteries of soothsayers ("For goddes speken in amphibologies, / And for o soth they tellen twenty lyes," IV. 1.406-7). And what is more, she is frequently self-explicating, offering exegesis of her own text in just the same terms as, say, Chaucer's in his translation of Boethius:

> And she answerde, "Of gilt misericorde!
> That is to seyn, that I foryeve al this." (III. 1.177-78)
>
> "Lo, Troilus, men seyn that hard it is
> The wolf ful, and the wether hool to have;
> This is to seyn, that men ful ofte, iwys,
> More spenden part the remenant for to save." (IV. 1.373-76)

Yet she is also mistress of the very double-talk she derides in the soothsayers. The ambiguity of her words to Diomede are coolly non-committal:

> "I say nat therfore that I wol yow love,
> N'y say nat nay; but in conclusioun,
> I mene wel, by God that sit above!" (V. 1.002-04)

Quite possibly such words present no interpretative problem for Diomede who is himself a linguistic adept; but it is no surprise that to the likes of Troilus, hopelessly ensnared in Criseyde's "nettes," his mistress is a text difficult to construe: "Though ther be mercy writen in youre cheere, / God woot, the text ful hard is, soth, to fynde!" (III. 1.356-57).

So Criseyde is a textual crux that invites exegesis at the same time as it resists it; and she is also a textual tease who knowingly shows us what exegesis is and how it should be done, but refuses to let other do it to her. It has been observed how the poem's fictional world and the characters within it are subject to spatial restrictions, both physical (enclosed, unenclosed) and social (private, public) (Spearing,

Medieval Poet 120-36). More to our point is the way in which attempts are made to restrict or confine Criseyde within the paradigms of different discourses: thus Troilus tries to subject her to the ideals of courtly romance while Pandarus more mercantilistically first measures her socio-political worth and then views her as one commodity easily replaceable by another of the same kind (IV. 400-06: "If she be lost, we shal recovere an other"). But these discourses are unable to hold her (and this is no liberation of the female from the constraints of patriarchal discourse either); nor, more obviously, is the narrator's hagiographic presentation adequate to her either (which, on the other hand, is a strong indication that Chaucer's point is precisely Criseyde's uninterpretability in psychological terms). Moreover, Donaldson has shown well how the rhetorical inscription of Criseyde eventually tells us nothing of her, rendering her an evanescent non-entity which only "increases her mystery not our knowledge of her" (55-6), although I disagree that there is any mystery for it is my opinion that there is nothing to know of her. It has been suggested that Chaucer the (supposedly) arch-relativist is also a proto-deconstructionist, giving the reader *carte blanche* to read his texts as he/she will (Brewer, *Introduction*, 133). But this seems terribly anachronistic, and in any case Chaucer's fireworks are of a different order and in a different league from deconstruction's squibs.

Chaucer, I believe, does present his poem —and at its centre Criseyde— to the reader for interpretation, but not for any interpretation. Chaucer knows what he wants his work to signify and is at great pains to ensure that that significance should not be impaired in any way. The words from Chaucer's *envoi* to his "litel bok" are familiar:

> So prey I God that non myswrite the,
> Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge;
> And red whereso thow be, or elles songe,
> That thow be understonde, God I biseche! (V. 1.795-8)

Let us eschew irony for a moment; let us assume that Chaucer is genuinely concerned that the reader make no mistake over his meaning. Let us assume too that there is no joke in the dedication to "moral Gower" and "philosophical Strode" (for the seriousness and significance of this double address see Gaylord 37-41) and that the ghostly presences of Cicero and Dante invoked by the nearby allusions lurk in the shadows of the text as august sponsors of the poetic and philosophical aspirations of the writer whom Thomas Usk called "the noble philosophical poete in Englissh" (qtd. Windeatt 11). Let us, in short, be reactionary readers for a time and accept that Chaucer might be stranger, less modern, than generations of critics have persuaded us to believe. Let us take all those words at face value.

II. "FOR WEL FYNDE I THAT FORTUNE IS MY FO"

Chaucer expresses a similar anxiety that his work be not miswritten in his words to Adam, his copyist ("Chaucers Wordes unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn"). It is interesting that the works he wishes to protect from any possible "negligence and rape" are his translation of Boethius and *Troilus and Criseyde*:

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

This concern would appear to indicate an especially proprietorial attitude towards the two works on Chaucer's part, as well as some sort of connection between them: they are true enough as they stand and require no tampering, whether deliberate or the result of ineptitude. The two works were written at about the same period, and the influence of Boethius is plain in long passages of *Troilus and Criseyde*, such as Troilus's song on a universal love that might bind all men together (III. 1.744-1.771) or his speech on predestination and free will (IV. 958-1.079), to cite only two of the most obvious instances. Not only is that influence clear, but Windeatt's textual scholarship has demonstrated that, far from being afterthoughts, "it is very unlikely that Chaucer ever intended the poem to have any completed 'published' existence" without the Boethian passages (10). Despite this, the usual critical line on the Boethian elements in the poem is that while they demonstrate Chaucer's admiration or fondness for Boethius's philosophy, the poem itself "adds up to a more complex assertion of the joy of human love, even if it is transient" (Brewer, *Introduction*, 150). Even Minnis, after a particularly erudite sketch of the sort of dry-eyed, moralizing reading some biblical exegete such as Robert Holcot might have offered, according to which Criseyde might be "an idol of incontinence and enticing disposition" (86) and the poem a tract against "inordinate affection" (85), finally backs off to a kinder, Donaldsonian position, whereby the poem becomes "a tragical history of human love" (107). Few critics would now argue that Chaucer's poem is a full-blown and coherent application of Boethian philosophy which ends in comedy as Troilus rises above the world and all its imperfections; the tendency to look for novelistic psychodrama and/or irony and/or intertextual subversion has wrested priority from such interpretations, made them, even, unfashionable. However, I think the key to reading Criseyde is still to be found in Boethius.

In a nutshell, Boethius identified Fortune with the world and all mundane concerns, and recommended that the vicissitudes of this earth, for all their immediate attractions, be shunned and transcended in favour of the stable certainties of God, the "soveryne good." In Chaucer's translation, Boethius's *lubrica fortuna* becomes "slydynge Fortune" (*Boece* I, metrum 5, l.34); it is difficult not to recall those few spare words with which Chaucer's narrator inadvertently brings home to the reader Criseyde's defining attribute: "tendre-herted, slydynge of corage" (V. 825). Elsewhere in Chaucer's Boethius, we are told that the chief characteristic of the "devyne substance" is "that it ne slideth [*dilabatur*] nat into uttreste foreyne thinges, ne ne resceyveth noone straunge thinges in hym" (*Boece* III, prosa 12, 190-2). "Slydynge" is quite clearly, therefore, a word Chaucer associates with Fortune; when

Criseyde is characterized thus, we may well start to suspect an identification. Indeed, even a critic so enamoured as Donaldson of what he considers to be "Chaucer's supreme achievement in the creation of human character" (67) comes close to unearthing what I consider to be the true significance of Criseyde. Discussing the proemium to Book IV, Donaldson writes as follows:

> Like any good medieval man the narrator sets out to blame what is to come on Fortune, at whom he rails, for a stanza or more, in good set terms, apparently trying to postpone for as long as he can the fact —unmentioned for more than 4,600 lines— that regardless of the part played by Fortune, it was Criseide who was the immediate cause of Troilus's unhappiness. Indeed, his phrasing is unlucky, for when he says that Fortune cast Troilus '...clene out of his lady grace / And on her wheel she sette up Diomede,' the distinction between the two women, Fortune and Criseide, tends to blur, and the goddess's fickleness rubs off on the mortal lady. (69)

However, Donaldson steadfastly refuses to elide Fortune and Criseyde, whereas what may well be Chaucer's narrator's "unlucky phrasing" is a deliberate elision on Chaucer's part: Chaucer wants the distinction between Criseyde and Fortune to be so blurred as to make them indistinguishable. In other words, Criseyde is to be read as Fortune in person; one step beyond allegory, *Troilus and Criseyde* fleshes out the philosophy of Boethius, giving human habitation and name to that philosophy's fundamental figure of a sliding Fortune at the centre of the terrestrial field of action. In this light, Troilus's comment early on —before even he has mentioned to Pandarus the source of his troubles, let alone breathed Criseyde's name— that "wel fynde I that Fortune is my wo" (I. 837) suddenly becomes doubly forboding.

The transmutation of Boethius's Fortune into Chaucer's Criseyde should not come as too great a surprise. Ever since Virgil's Dido, it had been a commonplace of misogyny to view the female beloved as changeable and mutable ("varium et mutabile semper femina," *Aeneid* IV. 569-70). Such a view is to be found, for example, in the late-thirteenth-century *dit*, "Le Blasme des Femmes," the wording of which finds an echo in Chaucer's "slydynge of corage": "Femme est baude de curage eschange" (Fiero et al. 126, l.103). Thus it was easy to ascribe to Fortune, eminently changeable ("statu variabilis" in the *Carmina Burana*), the characteristics of such a woman. Furthermore, on the grounds of grammatical gender, abstract concepts in Latin had been rhetorically personified in female figures, and on translation into the vernacular languages, though gender inflections might disappear, the sexing remained. Therefore the figure of Fortune was doubly suitable for personification as a treacherous woman; and indeed, Fortune for Chaucer's Boece is as much his "lady" as she was Boethius's *domina*, and the degree of personification is very strong: "Sche, that yit covereth and wympleth hir to other folk, hath schewyd hir every del to the" (*Boece* II, prosa 1, 59-61). Taken in conjunction with these Boethian terms, Pandarus's advice to Criseyde to "do wey youre barbe, and shew youre face bare" (II. 110) might be interpreted as an invitation to Fortune to reveal her true self. Throughout Boethius Fortune is every ounce the typical lady/potential *femme fatale* of courtly romance:

> Yif thou approvest here (*and thynkest that sche is good*), use her maneris and pleyne the nat; and yif thou agrisest hir false trecherie, despise and cast awey her that pleyeth so harmfully. (*Boece* II, prosa 1, 61-5)

Here another key word is "pleyeth" which occurs time and again in relation to Chaucer's Criseyde, who is constantly represented not only as a player, but as a knowing player: "It nedeth me ful sleighly for to pleie" (II. 462). She regards her relationship with Troilus as a game, and it is she who knows the rules. This is especially striking in the closet scene when, after Troilus faints, Criseyde rebukes him,

> "Why do ye with youreselven thus amys?"
> Quod tho Criseyde, "Is this a mannes game?
> What, Troilus, wol ye do thus for shame?" (III. 1.125-27)

A little later, after they have been bedded together, Criseyde declares herself as follows:

> And with a sik she seyde, "O herte deere,
> The game, ywys, so ferforth now is gone,
> That first shal Phebus fallen fro his speere,
> And everich egle ben the dowves feere,
> And everich roche out of his place sterte,
> Er Troilus oute of Criseydes herte. (III. 1.493-98)

What is noticeable here, besides the hyperbolic string of rhetorical *impossibilia*, is how knowingly once more Criseyde is able to recognize herself, referred to in the self-conscious third person, as a player in a game. In short, Criseyde, "slydynge of corage," Criseyde the player, is Fortune's human alias.

What is more, Boethius divides Fortune into two, or rather considers her as having two aspects, Janus-like: she can show herself as "contrarious Fortune" or as "Fortune debonayre" (or "amyable"):

> For I deme that contrarious Fortune profiteth more to men than Fortune debonayre. For alwey, whan Fortune semeth debonayre, thanne sche lieth, falsly byhetynge the hoope of welefulnesse; but forsothe contraryous Fortune is alwey sothfast, whan sche scheweth hirself unstable thurw hir chaungynge. (*Boece* II, prosa 8, 11-17)

There is no mistaking Fortune in her "contrarious" aspect because her very instability, her sliding, make her easily recognizable. More deceitful and treacherous is her "debonayre" aspect, because it is this that puts men in her thrall and separates them from the "sovereyne good." In this connection it is worth pointing out that when Chaucer describes Criseyde shortly before Troilus first sets eyes on her he uses the very adjective "debonaire": "Simple of atir and debonaire of chere, / With ful assured lokyng and manere" (I. 181-82). It is under her "debonayre" aspect that Criseyde ensnares Troilus, fastens his attention on mundanity in the

shape of human lust; and it is essential for Chaucer that the representation of Criseyde is attractive enough if the reader is to appreciate what, in a passage whose invocation through allusion of Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* and Dante's *Divina Comedia* is a plea to be taken seriously, Troilus must give up in order to achieve his final apotheosis, ascend from "this wrecched world" and gain access to "the pleyn felicite / That is in hevene above" (V. 1.817-19). This is the mission Chaucer commends to his narrator. Every reader knows the truth about Criseyde, is familiar with her "contrarious" nature, but the narrator must persuade us that she might be otherwise and accordingly lavishes on her his misguided and counterfactual sympathies. The narrator's loving, idolotrous presentation of "debonayre" Criseyde is nothing more than a strategy on Chaucer's part to show, first, how easy it is to fall, victims to "blynde lust," into the "nettes" of Fortune "debonayre" who "with her flaterynges draweth myswandrynge men from the sovereyne good" (*Boece* II, prosa 8, 28-30); and, second, how great is the sacrifice necessary in human terms to "caste" again "oure herte on heven" (V. 1.825). Those critics and readers who remain enamoured of Criseyde have, like Troilus, been similarly beguiled, unaware of, or wilfully forgetting, the fact that the "debonayre" Criseyde in whose thrall they languish, is only one aspect of Fortune who is ever ready to turn her other contrarious face. The victory is for Troilus who recognizes Criseyde for what she is —"Fortune my fo"— and regains "hevene above."

This, I think, is how Chaucer intends us to read Criseyde. Criseyde is (to use Diomede's term for her father Calkas's doublespeak) an "ambage," "a word with two visages," a lady with two faces, Fortune; Chaucer's narrator guides the unwitting reader into seeing only one visage, whereas Chaucer intends us to see them both and to know in Criseyde "the doutous or double visage of thilke blynde goddesse Fortune" (*Boece* II, prosa 1, 58-9). Accordingly, like Fortune, Criseyde is intrinsically, essentially unstable, an "ambage," whose two faces mutually contradict, but put together make sense, have meaning, even if that meaning constantly slides as each face temporarily puts the other into the shade. Criseyde and Fortune are signifiers that slide between two contrary signifieds; they can only be pinned down and have their identity stabilised through qualification as either "good" or "bad" —but such qualification tells only half the story and the flip side remains elusive and sniggers away in the wings. It is foolish to seek a stable identity for Criseyde or to impose upon her some integrating psychological profile for Criseyde is radically split and simply jerks back and forth between her negative and positive poles. Like Fortune, Criseyede is oxymoronically both good and bad, debonaire and contrarious; the attempt to find some integrating psychological motivation that will reconcile those mutually contradictory faces is futile. As Fortune personified, Criseyde is in constant flight of stability, her natural state is that of flux: "Yif Fortune bygan to duelle stable, she cessede than to ben Fortune" (113-4), and the same is true of Criseyde; if Criseyde ceased to "slyde," she would no longer be Criseyde. Chaucer's Philosophie cites Plato to remind Boece that "nedes the wordis moot be cosynes to the thinges of whiche thei speken" (*Boece* III, prosa 12, 206-7). The word as which Criseyde will be rolled on people's tongue is "Criseyde," "cosyne" to Fortune.

III. CONCLUSION

This interpretation of Criseyde as signifiying Fortune *sub specie temporis* requires that a strong reading be imposed on the Boethian philosophy contained in the text. I think the end of Book V may perfectly well bear the unironic conclusion that the poet means what he says, and that we are to apportion due value to Troilus's victory over worldly vanity. Chaucer is rewriting Boethius for his contemporaries, splicing him to the venerated *Somnium Scipionis* and commending him sincerely to Gower and Strode, to whom not psychological interpretation but textual exegesis of the kind I have proposed and to which, as I have suggested, Criseyde herself invites the reader, was a habit of mind. And there is one last piece of circumstantial evidence that may strengthen my case. When it has become inevitable that she will be exchanged for Antenor, Criseyde offers Troilus the following morsel of (literary) consolation:

> For though in erthe ytwynned be we tweyne,
> Yet in the field of pite, out of peyne,
> That highte Elisos, shal we ben yfeere,
> As Orpheus and Erudice, his feere. (IV. 788-91)

What might be a Boethian reading of Troilus as Orpheus? We need look no further than Book III of the *Consolatio*:

> Allas! Whanne Orpheus and his wif weren almest at the termes of the nyght *(that is to seyn, at the laste boundes of helle)*, Orpheus lokede abakward on Erudyce his wif, and lost hire, and was deed.
> This fable apertenith to yow alle, whosoevere desireth or seketh to lede his thought into the sovereyn day *(that is to seyn, into cleernesse of sovereyn good)*. For whoso that evere be so overcomen that he ficche his eien into the put of helle *(that is to seyn, whoso sette his thoughtes in erthly thinges)*, al that evere he hath drawen of the noble good celestial he lesith it, whanne he looketh the helles, that is to seyn, into lowe thinges of the erthe. (III, metrum 12, 55-69)

Chaucer's parenthetical gloss of Boethius's *superum diem* ("sovereyn day") as "sovereyn good" reinforces the reading of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice as an allegory for the bitter cost of being tempted away from the "sovereyn good" by "erthly thinges" (once more, Chaucer's own gloss). If Chaucer here is at pains to direct us to the correct exegesis of the text he is translating, is it not reasonable to infer that Orpheus has the same force in *Troilus and Criseyde*? Criseyde predicts that Troilus will be unable to unfix his gaze from her and will remain helplessly subject to love's jurisdiction, as was Orpheus whose folly proved that "Love is a grettere lawe and a strengere to hymself thanne any lawe that men mai yyven" (l53-5). But Chaucer gainsays Criseyde and the best will of his narrator, and allows Troilus to rise victoriously above the "lowe things" of Fortune's terrestrial domain which sealed Orpheus's doom.

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