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Fortune and the Troilus and Cressida Story

A Study of the Representations and Functions of Fortune in
Boccaccio’s *Filostrato*, Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* and
Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*

by

Marina Ansaldo

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

*Head of Department and Director of Research:*
Professor Sean Ryder

*Supervisors of Research:*
Professor Daniel Carey
Dr. Clíodhna Carney

Department of English
School of Humanities
College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies
National University of Ireland, Galway

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Abstract

This thesis examines the representations of Fortune in Boccaccio’s *Filostrato*, Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, and Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*. Both in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, Fortune was intrinsically connected to Troy’s fall. This study argues that Fortune is also central to these three versions of the story of Troilus.

The representation of Fortune in Boccaccio’s *Filostrato* has been considered as inconsistent and superficial. This thesis questions this view and argues that the multifaceted portrayal provided in the poem is intentional. What we read on the page is mediated through the characters’ viewpoints. In compliance with Medieval Christian doctrine, there is no such thing as Fortune for Boccaccio. The characters’ contradictory remarks on the subject have the function of showing their theological confusion.

Similarly, in the *Troilus* the characters’ references to Fortune reveal more about their beliefs than about Fortune itself. However, each character has a personally consistent (although erroneous in Boethian terms) understanding of Fortune. Troilus’s passivity, Pandarus’s endless will to act and plot, and Criseyde’s need for a protector can be better appreciated considering their views of Fortune. By examining Chaucer’s emphasis on the connection between Troilus’s and Troy’s predicaments, it will become clear that both are subject to Fortune because of unwise human choices. Thus, Chaucer transcends the determinism latent in the story he inherited.

In Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, the Boethian context appropriate to Boccaccio’s and Chaucer’s poems gives way to a different conception of Fortune. A careful analysis reveals that Shakespeare consistently uses the image of the Renaissance Occasion to deal with agency. Opportunism and brute force are essential to seize Occasion by the forelock, which is the only way to succeed in the
world of the play, where valour, honour and chivalry have become obsolete vestiges of a lost mythical past.
Acknowledgements

My first debt of gratitude is to my supervisors, Professor Daniel Carey and Dr. Clíodhna Carney. Their guidance, kindness and constant support have been invaluable. They have always been there when I needed them, offering precious advice and encouraging me, even when I doubted myself, since the time when I was a B.A. student. A lot has changed since then, but not their passion for literature, which has so inspired me, and their constant presence along the path that finally brought me to complete this thesis.

This thesis would not have been possible without the English Department at NUI Galway, which financed the first two years of my research, and the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences, which funded me during the third and fourth year. Thanks for believing in this project. I am also grateful to Dr. Kenneth Clarke, who provided advice for my chapter on Boccaccio’s Filostrato, and Professor John Douthwaite, who introduced me to Stylistics, many years ago.

My parents and my sister have helped me in countless ways. They have always encouraged me, and accepted my choice of moving to Ireland to carry out my research, even though it significantly affected their lives as well as mine. They have patiently listened to my occasional remarks about Fortune, Troy and Troilus, and have even taken an interest and offered advice. My mother has often provided counsel after listening to my reflections concerning Italian literature or the etymology of Italian or Latin words. She has also brought to my attention references to Fortune in books or plays she was reading or watching at the time. My father has reminded me that I could face the obstacles that presented themselves every time I needed him to. He has also offered much appreciated technical advice about Microsoft Word and image editing. My sister has been a constant source of moral support. I am also grateful to Luisa for her unwavering friendship.
INTRODUCTION

The objective of this thesis is to examine the representations and functions of Fortune in three versions of the Troilus and Cressida story: Boccaccio’s Filostrato, Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde, and Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida, and to explore the ways in which this concept changes in the different versions and why. The notion of Fortune is intrinsically connected to the story of Troilus. Not only does Troilus’s love story represent an exemplary reversal of Fortune – from the happiness of requited love to the misery of separation, betrayal and death, but Troilus’s predicament is also inescapably connected with that of his homonymous city – a literary legacy that goes back as far as the Iliad – and Troy’s fall was, both in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, the most prominent example of Fortune’s fickleness. This thesis argues that Fortune is central to the three versions

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1 In this study, I have chosen to capitalise the word Fortune (and Fortuna). The choice of using the capital ‘F’ is merely conventional, and it has been done in the interest of clarity. It is important to bear in mind that ‘Fortune’ will occur with a wide variety of meanings in the present work, in some cases not necessarily referring to a personified entity. What Fortune means in each case will be made clear by the context in which this term occurs.


3 The connection between Fortune and tragedy has often been emphasised in criticism and, more specifically, in connection with Boethius’s and Chaucer’s idea of tragedy, as we will see. Fortune has also been considered at length in relation with the de casibus tradition. Conversely, it has also been suggested that these traditional associations are not necessarily always correct, see Paul Vincent Budra, A Mirror for Magistrates and the De Casibus Tradition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 45. Fortune, however, seems to have a particular bearing on the story arc described by Troilus’s vicissitudes, most notably in Chaucer’s Troilus.


5 In literature, Troy’s ruin often appears as the emblematic fall. Dante states that this catastrophe was caused by Fortune (Dante Alighieri, Inferno, vol. 2, La commedia secondo l’antica vulgata, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi (Firenze: Casa Ed. Le Lettere, 1994), Canto XXX, vv. 13–21). So does Boccaccio in his Amorosa Visione, where the fall of Troy is considered a prominent example of the fact that anyone, or anything, that rises upon Fortune’s wheel will have to fall (Giovanni Boccaccio, Amorosa visione, vol. 3, Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio, ed. Vittore Branca (Milano: Mondadori, 1974), Canto xxxiv). Malcom Andrew has argued that Troy provides a ‘uniquely rich and resonant’ setting which is strongly associated with the succession between ‘bliss and blunder’ in both Troilus and Criseyde and the frame of Sir Gawain (Malcom Andrew, ‘The Fall of Troy in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Troilus and Criseyde’, in The European Tragedy of Troilus, p. 93). And what better represents the cyclical alternation between woe and joy than Fortune’s wheel? As Howard
of the story of Troilus and Cressida here discussed – much more so than has been so far recognised. A careful and detailed analysis of how this figure is represented in each work will provide new and unexpected critical perspectives.

To my knowledge, there is no critical work that analyses and compares the functions and representations of Fortune in various versions of the story of Troilus and Cressida. The most influential exploration of the subject, Piero Boitani’s edited collection *The European Tragedy of Troilus* (1989), provides a keen discussion of the evolution of the story of Troilus from antiquity to contemporary works, but the issue of Fortune (though it receives some attention) is not systematically analysed as it evolves from one version to the other, and it is by no means one of the key interests of the scholars who contributed to the volume. Chiara Lombardi’s study, *Troilo e Criseida nella letteratura occidentale* (2005), offers some considerations about destiny and determinism, but the problem of Fortune and causation remains in the background. While numerous contributions compare Boccaccio’s version to...
Chaucer’s or Chaucer’s to Shakespeare’s, none focuses on the connections in the representation of Fortune.7

One has to look at scholarly works centring on the individual versions to find treatments of Fortune. But criticism has addressed Fortune in an uneven fashion. There are numerous studies discussing this issue, or interrelated causational matters, in Chaucer’s work but, to my knowledge, none that considers the Filostrato and Troilus and Cressida.8 Admittedly, Chaucer’s poem draws more attention to the forces determining the outcome of events than the other two works here under discussion. But I wish to prove that, albeit less apparent, the same concern is present in the other two versions of the story. The Troilus myth itself carries with it a literary legacy in which Fortune is a prominent element. Boccaccio, Chaucer and Shakespeare were inevitably affected by this tradition.

Before proceeding further, I must clarify what is meant by Fortune. This term is used, both in literature and in everyday conversation, with a variety of meanings and it is not always easy to understand what an author intends by it. The concept of Fortune is sometimes associated with chance or luck, and sometimes with


8 Discussion of such scholarly works will be addressed in the following chapters.
destiny or Providence, which can in fact be regarded as rather distinct notions. Throughout the following chapters, we will encounter a variety of meanings and diverse theological and philosophical implications associated with these terms. In order to analyse and understand the exceptional variety of significations the word *Fortune* encompasses, and its relations to the other notions mentioned above, it may be useful to start with some definitions. I consider Fortune, first and foremost, either as a goddess or a personified force that can determine what happens, often whimsically and arbitrarily.\(^9\) She is the goddess of chance, but Fortune and chance are not synonyms. If something happens *by chance*, there is no superior power overseeing events. If something is caused by Fortune, there is a goddess, power or personified entity that is deemed responsible for it, although what occurs is often perceived as unexpected by the people involved, as in the case of a chance event. Fortune may operate randomly but she is also endowed with agency, and this is what separates her from the concept of chance. If what happens is attributed to Providence, it is God, and not Fortune, who is believed to direct events. The concept of Providence refers to the existence of a preordained plan according to which things come to pass. Within a Christian context, Providence is due to God’s foreknowledge: He already knows what will take place and such courses of events cannot be altered. Destiny too involves the idea of a predetermined and fixed pattern in human affairs. The concept of luck has rather different associations. This term refers primarily to the positive nature of what happens, rather than focusing on the causes behind events.\(^10\) Of course, all of these descriptions are simplifications. Such definitions are merely a guide to the primary meaning that will be associated with each term in the present study.

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\(^10\) We will return to the meanings, etymological origins and implications of all of these concepts throughout the following chapters.
We will see at length how these notions appear to be intertwined in the literary texts we are about to explore. That is why a primary line of enquiry throughout the present study aims at establishing the precise meaning of all occurrences of the words *Fortuna*, Fortune, and related terms in these works. My methodology is to combine etymological and lexical considerations with a detailed stylistic analysis to establish, on the one hand, the meaning of these words in the context of all relevant passages and, on the other, the functions of such occurrences in the works under scrutiny as a whole. Thus, this study privileges a stylistic approach to the primary texts. This methodology is particularly suitable to a study of Fortune. By giving adequate weight to nuances in meaning of relevant words in these texts, and showing the rhetorical functions of the occurrences of Fortune, this approach will show that Boccaccio, Chaucer and Shakespeare were not merely reproducing a trite literary motif, but were, instead, exploiting this potentially problematic concept to achieve precise stylistic effects in these texts.

The very notion of Fortune tends to pose problems for any religious and philosophical system because this kind of entity – powerful, whimsical, unpredictable and unaffected by human actions – challenges the power of any god. Moreover, Fortune may create moral dilemmas: if she distributes happiness and sorrow according to her whim alone, and with no consideration of merit or desert, often rewarding the wicked and punishing the virtuous, how should one act? As is well known, Fortune was a serious concern of the Church Fathers, who forcefully denied her existence. But this was not only a medieval and Christian problem.

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Even pagan writers often rejected the existence of Fortune.\(^{15}\) This notion has always tended to be challenged by the intellectual and philosophically minded.\(^{16}\) And yet, simultaneously, it appears frequently in literary texts, and, often, is used even by those authors who openly deny Fortune’s existence.\(^{17}\) In Christian times, she is a relic of a pagan past that, although banished in theory, remains as a popular figure. With Boethius, she is transformed into a powerful admonition about the unstable nature of worldly things.\(^{18}\) Thus the pagan goddess becomes a recurrent Christian moral symbol within a theological worldview that forcefully denies her existence.\(^{19}\) This is the paradox of the survival of Fortune in medieval literature. In the Renaissance, Fortune remains a cautionary figure.\(^{20}\) However, she becomes increasingly popular in her guise as Occasion or Opportunity,\(^{21}\) and thus serves as symbol of an entirely different attitude to life, one that promotes action and worldly endeavour as opposed to a Stoic or Boethian detachment from the things of this world.

Thus, the notion of Fortune tends to carry with it ethical and moral implications as to how one should relate to the things of this world. Different iconographic representations usually accompany these different ideologies. This calls for a careful consideration of the recurrence in the *Filostrato*, *Troilus and...
**Criseyde**, and *Troilus and Cressida*, of the imagery traditionally associated with Fortune both in literature and in the visual arts. Reading relevant passages in the light of the iconographic traditions of Fortune and of their moral and philosophical implications is crucial to understanding more fully the way in which Boccaccio, Chaucer and Shakespeare relate to Fortune and its complex artistic inheritance. This is another, fundamental line of inquiry that will characterise the following chapters.

It will become apparent that, from the *Filostrato*, to *Troilus and Criseyde*, to *Troilus and Cressida*, the manner in which Fortune is represented undergoes transformations consistent with the literary, iconographic and historical contexts of these texts. However, the portrayal of Fortune is also influenced by the classical setting of the story. All three works present pagan material to a Christian audience. The characters’ way of thinking about Fortune – although clearly influenced by their authors’ perspectives especially in terms of iconographic elements – is representative of a time and set of beliefs the reader or spectator is not expected to share; it is erroneous or incomplete. The manner in which the characters in these texts speak of Fortune forcefully reveals to us how they understand, or rather misunderstand, causational forces.

Fortune is thus intrinsically connected to a character’s perception of reality, and this is not surprising. As we will see, medieval authors tended to consider Fortune as a matter of perspective. Petrarch, for instance, argues that we often ascribe what happens to Fortune when we fail to perceive the true causes of events. From this point of view, believing in the existence of Fortune can be a sign of one’s failure to comprehend the true workings of causational forces. It is only fitting that a character’s statements about Fortune should similarly betray his or her beliefs, and that is why the following analysis systematically privileges considerations connected with character and characterisation.

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What a character believes in also affects how he or she acts. Thus, Fortune is inherently related to the problem of agency. The characters’ perceptions of causational forces often determine the extent to which they believe themselves capable of influencing events themselves. And their ability to affect what takes place is a crucial preoccupation in the Troilus and Cressida story. Troilus has to die, and Troy has to fall; this is the literary legacy of the story that Boccaccio, Chaucer and Shakespeare inherited. This is Troilus’s literary destiny. And in literary tradition both Troilus’s death and Troy’s fall were associated with the fulfilment of the decree of the Fates. But if Troilus has to die due to an inescapable destiny, then one could question the extent to which he can exercise agency. This may complicate things for an author wishing to tell his story, especially in Christian times. Arguably, retelling the vicissitudes of characters who have no influence over events, and hence no responsibility, could make for a less engaging narrative. Moreover, denying free will to these characters would be profoundly unchristian. The issue of Fortune is used by Boccaccio, Chaucer and Shakespeare to tackle the problem of agency in a story where events tended to be perceived as inescapable and pre-determined. Ultimately, the manner in which each author represents Fortune is central to the way in which he relates to Troilus’s literary legacy and how he goes about retelling and transforming myth.

The first chapter of this thesis analyses the manner in which Fortune is portrayed in the Filostrato (1339) – the first literary work to be centred on the love story between Troilus and Cressida. In Boccaccio’s poem, Fortune appears in a

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23For a discussion of the connection between Troilus’s death and the fall of Troy see Boitani, ‘Antiquity and Beyond’, pp. 2–5.
25For Aristotle, with no responsibility there can be no tragedy. Poetics, ed. Stepen Halliwell (London: Duckworth, 1987), 13, 1452b29–1453a39. Of course saying that the Filostrato, Troilus and Criseyde and Troilus and Cressida are tragedies is a simplification, and the problem of genre has been debated at length, especially so for Chaucer’s and Shakespeare’s versions of the story. However, we are supposed to engage with Troilus’s predicament in all three texts, and if he was merely a victim of an inescapable fate his story would probably be less involving (in Aristotelian terms, it would not inspire fear).
multitude of often contradictory aspects. In this chapter I proceed by categorizing the various representations of Fortune and considering their moral and philosophical implications. Sometimes Fortune is described as a pagan goddess, capricious, malicious and envious. Elsewhere she appears as destiny, whereas in other passages she can be construed, in line with the famous description provided by Dante in the seventh canto of the *Divine Comedy*, as a minister of worldly possessions. This variety of forms and representations has been considered by critics as a sign of the lack of attention on the part of the author to the issue of Fortune at the time of composition of the *Filostrato*. A close stylistic and lexical examination will reveal that this is not the case. The multifaceted portrayal of Fortune in this poem, as well as the sometimes contradictory or even illogical statements on the topic, are to be attributed not to the author’s lack of attention to Fortune, but rather to the characters’ faulty perceptions of this concept. In other words, this is part of Boccaccio’s design. By looking at how each character speaks of Fortune, we will understand a great deal about his or her beliefs and way of acting. Troiolo reveals his passivity in the way he blames the goddess; Criseida believes that patience is the right approach to resist the contrary action of Fortune, thus showing her will to adapt to the circumstances she finds herself in; Pandaro thinks that Fortune aids the brave, in line with his proactive attitude to life. The narrator, Filostrato, has an understanding of Fortune that shows his familiarity with Boethius and Dante. However, it is his ambiguous relationship to Boethian and Dantean principles that betrays how much he has in common with the protagonist of his poem. Both Filostrato and Troiolo commit the crucial error of choosing a worldly and sensual kind of love as opposed to a Dantean, salvific love, that elevates the soul to God. It is precisely this choice on the part of Troiolo that, by binding him to the worldly and transient, inevitably makes him a slave to Fortune, in accordance with Boethian thought.

Chapter Two examines Chaucer’s modifications of Boccaccio’s portrayal of Fortune in *Troilus and Criseyde* (1380s). That his representation of this concept relies on Boethius is a well-attested notion, as we will see. Less often has it been recognised that this was also the case in his source, the *Filostrato*. Chaucer, like Boccaccio, uses Fortune to aid character portrayal. However, he perfects this method by providing a more unified and coherent description of Fortune on the part of each character. Troilus constantly blames Fortune in a manner that reveals his chronic paralysis: he is unwilling to take action, as he believes that he can have no control over his life. With his frequent complaints, he constantly seeks the reader’s sympathy, but also reveals the extent of his passivity. Pandarus often speaks of the motion of Fortune’s wheel, which he believes cannot rest. He tries to use this knowledge to advise his young friend on how to make the most of whatever circumstances present themselves. His marked opportunism is dependent upon his understanding of Fortune. Criseyde, unlike Boccaccio’s Criseida, seldom mentions Fortune: she speaks of the vanity of worldly joy instead, which is a sign of her greater awareness of the frailty of happiness in comparison with the male protagonists of the poem, as well as with her literary predecessor. However, in Boethian terms, her understanding is still limited. Unaware of the existence of a higher good, she is unable to find any happiness within herself. Her lack of self-sufficiency ultimately explains her tendency to look for external protection and submit her will to patriarchal authority. She may not believe in Fortune but, ironically, she is still subject to her actions, as her happiness, like Troiolo’s, is based on fleeting, worldly things. Fortune in the *Troilus* also becomes crucial to the very plot of the poem. Chaucer emphasises to great effect the connection between her turning wheel and Troilus’s vicissitudes, as well as those of his city. Ultimately, both Troy’s fall and Troilus’s loss of Criseyde are due to Fortune. However, as we will see, both are dependent upon unwise human choices rather than uncontrollable external forces. In the *Troilus* there is no inescapable doom at work; the characters are free until they submit themselves to Fortune’s yoke. In the poem, the wheel of Fortune ultimately becomes a wheel of torture. It is Troilus’s worldly punishment

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29For the date of composition see Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 471.
for basing his happiness on something as fleeting as human love and, simultaneously, Fortune’s wheel functions as a powerful admonition to the reader about the price to be paid for following in Troilus’s footsteps. Ultimately, the poem is not a stern condemnation of lust, but rather a touching recognition of the limits of human love: for all its appeal we must be aware of the fact that this type of love is inevitably frail, as are all things subjected to fickle Fortune.

As we will see in Chapter Three, Shakespeare’s play moves away from Boethius. If one looks for the Lady of the wheel in Troilus and Cressida (1598–1602), she is scarcely to be found. This is hardly surprising. Although the wheel was Fortune’s most prominent feature after Boethius and throughout the Middle Ages, in the Renaissance, by contrast, it was the emblem of Fortune as Opportunity, usually represented as a naked woman with a forelock, standing on a boat afloat a stormy sea, that gradually became more prominent. It is in this guise that Fortune can be found in Troilus and Cressida. The characters of the play often speak of Fortune in terms that remind us of the notion of Opportunity, and very frequently refer to the imagery connected with it. Some figures appear more ready to seize Opportunity by the forelock, while others constantly fail to do so. This is, ultimately, what determines who wins and who is defeated in the world of the play, which is one characterised by chaos and disorder and by the conspicuous absence of any stable value or principle. In a play dominated by chaos and set in a world far removed from any religious certainty, the figure of Opportunity is decidedly more appropriate than Boethius’s Fortune. In Shakespeare’s play, the sheer opportunism associated with the notion of Fortune as it is represented here becomes a symptom of a world quite ‘out of joint’, where there is no Hamlet who tries to set things right.

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31 Frakes, The Fate of Fortune in the Early Middle Ages, p. 36; Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Medieaval Literature, pp. 151–177.
The three works that I discuss have a multifaceted critical history. The *Filostrato* has received relatively little attention in comparison with Chaucer’s and Shakespeare’s versions, and it is fair to say that it is probably more often mentioned by Chaucerians considering the sources of the *Troilus* rather than by critics of Boccaccio, who are usually attracted to other, more famous works by the Italian author. The history of the critical reception of this ‘minor’ poem, as it is usually labelled, has been varied. There was a widespread tendency among earlier critics to read the *Filostrato* in biographical terms, making no distinction between the figure of the narrator and Boccaccio himself, and assuming that his comments about love were a direct expression of his own romantic experiences. This was the common fate of Boccaccio’s early works. Many studies have been devoted to biographical considerations, and many have attempted to establish a date for the composition of the *Filostrato*, often based on these assumptions.  

Giuseppe Billanovich was among the first to move away from a biographical reading of Boccaccio’s works, and to recognise that his narrators did not necessarily correspond to the author. Vittore Branca, the first commentator to provide an annotated version of the *Filostrato* in 1964, also shows a departure from earlier strictly biographical interpretations, although he still regards the poem as somewhat unsatisfactory – an early experiment far from the quality of later works. The belief in the univocal correspondence between Boccaccio and his narrator had generally been overcome, but there was still a marked tendency to underestimate this early work. 

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Another widespread attitude of critics, and one which survives in part to the present day, has been to perceive the poem as a candid praise of worldly love.\textsuperscript{36} Only later, mostly thanks to the famous work of Hollander, this arguably simplistic view of the \textit{Filostrato} began to be challenged,\textsuperscript{37} and Boccaccio’s use of irony even at the beginning of his writing career began to be fully appreciated. The characters and the narrator do not necessarily speak for the author. This acknowledgement significantly changed the reception of the \textit{Filostrato}. No longer a spontaneous and direct praise of worldly love, this text was perceived as engaging in a complex dialogue with the works of other authors, Dante’s in particular.\textsuperscript{38} But the relationship of Boccaccio with the work of Dante was and remains far from straightforward. That in the \textit{Filostrato} there are many Dantean references has been recognised for some time.\textsuperscript{39} The function of such references is still in question. Hollander was amongst the first to argue in favour of Boccaccio’s compliance with Dante, and remains one of the few to this day. According to him, the reader is supposed to see that both characters and narrator are wrong to trust in worldly love. The tragic ending of the story is itself proof of this. The narrator is, clearly, unable to learn from the story he narrates, but the reader is supposed to perceive his mistake.\textsuperscript{40} Although Hollander’s work has been well received, more recent critics tend to find positions of compromise that mitigate Hollander’s assumption, or simply continue to see in the poem a reaction (albeit respectful) against a Dantean vision of love. Carlo Muscetta perceives the \textit{Filostrato} as a parody of Dante’s \textit{Vita Nuova} on the part of an author who understands Dante’s message, but also sympathises with Troiolo’s predicament.\textsuperscript{41} Fabian Alfie brings this argument to more extreme conclusions. According to him, Boccaccio acknowledges Dante’s message and refutes it through

\textsuperscript{36}For a discussion of this critical stance see Robert Hollander, \textit{Boccaccio’s Two Venuses} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 5.
\textsuperscript{37}Hollander, \textit{Boccaccio’s Two Venuses}.
\textsuperscript{38}See Hollander, \textit{Boccaccio’s Two Venuses}, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{40}Hollander, \textit{Boccaccio’s Two Venuses}, pp. 49–53.
\textsuperscript{41}Muscetta, ‘Il Filostrato romanzo comico-elegiaco’. 
Troiolo’s oblique references to Stilnovistic poetry and the narrator’s choice to pursue worldly love. Luigi Surdich and Lucia Battaglia Ricci seem to agree that Boccaccio was experimenting with literary genres and motifs even in the early years of his career, and perceive the Filostrato as deliberately inverting the rejection of worldly love expressed in the Filocolo. Thus, more recent critics have tended to move away from Hollander’s moral reading in favour of a different line of enquiry.

Paradoxically, Hollander’s position has more often been transferred to readings of Chaucer’s Troilus than adapted to the Filostrato. I would argue that this is probably due to the far greater attention that has been devoted to the Chaucerian poem. Recent critics agree that, even though the biographical outlook has gradually been abandoned, the tendency to discuss matters that are peripheral to the Filostrato (such as the date of composition, the sources of the work, and whether or not it is the first example of ottava rima) has generally been privileged over the analysis of the poem itself. Hollander’s reading of the poem remains to date one of the most accomplished, but his suggestions have yet to be fully developed.

While a careful consideration of the representations of Fortune in the Filostrato confirms Hollander’s theories about Boccaccio’s critique of worldly love and upholding of the Dantean vision, the present study also proposes a reading of the poem that is reliant on Boethius. Hollander himself suggested that “there is probably a good deal more Boethius in Boccaccio’s opere minori in volgare than has generally been supposed”, and that in the Filostrato passages related to Fortune in particular bring to mind Boethius’s Consolation as a corrective model. It is precisely by analysing passages related to Fortune in the Filostrato, and juxtaposing

42 Alfie, ‘Love and Poetry’.
45 As McGregor puts it, “the most penetrating analysis of the Filostrato is Hollander’s Boccaccio’s Two Venuses”, McGregor, The Shades of Aeneas, p. 8.
46 Hollander, Boccaccio’s Two Venuses, p. 179, note 105.
47 Hollander, Boccaccio’s Two Venuses, p. 51.
them with Boethian and Dantean theories on the subject that the present study shows that Hollander’s reading of the poem as an implicit condemnation of worldly love is still valid, and that a Boethian reading of the *Filostrato* reinforces such view.

Chaucer’s *Troilus* has been the subject of a vast amount of literary criticism. It is a fine example of Chaucer’s use of ambiguity, and, as such, has kindled fervent and frequent debates and inspired a variety of lines of interpretations and methodologies of inquiry. In line with my approach to Boccaccio’s *Filostrato*, my analysis of the *Troilus* inevitably investigates Boethian and, to a lesser extent, Dantean influences on this Chaucerian poem. I do not argue that this is the only possible line of inquiry, or that these sources alone inspired the *Troilus*, of course. But, as we will see, Boethius and Dante greatly influenced the perception of Fortune in Chaucer’s time, and it is therefore right to consider them when looking at the representation of Fortune in his works, and especially so if one takes into account the influence of these authors on the *Filostrato*. I concur, once more, with Hollander in believing that Chaucer was aware of Boccaccio as a reader of Dante, and I would also add of Boethius; he was able to perceive and develop subtle discourses already present in his source to which some critics are still oblivious.

Besides, in order to understand the characters’ views of Fortune in the *Troilus*, which is one of the main aims of Chapter Two, one inevitably has to evaluate their choices form a moral perspective – this is what the discourse of Fortune in Chaucer’s texts involves. And comparing the characters’ beliefs concerning Fortune with the dominant Christian positions on the subject is the logical way to proceed. One could argue that not all medieval authors had moral or philosophical considerations in mind when speaking of Fortune – it was no doubt a popular and widespread literary and iconographic motif, and in some cases it may well be that it was simply a trope devoid of further implications. But Chaucer’s familiarity with

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Boethius and Dante is unquestionable, and that he could write about Fortune without their model in mind is highly unlikely.

Looking at Fortune in the *Troilus* bearing in mind the lesson of the *Consolation* places this thesis in strong if not uncontroversial critical company. The influence of Boethius on this poem is well-attested. Early critics sometimes condemned Troilus’s ‘Boethian’ speeches as awkward and unnecessary additions to the poem and, generally, regarded them as a bad literary choice. In the first decades of the twentieth century, however, their function began to be reconsidered. A number of critics saw them as an indication of Troilus’s reflective nature, or of his ‘medieval’ way of thinking. George Lyman Kittredge, for instance, recognising the Boethian undertones of Troilus’s meditations on foreknowledge and free will, defends the character’s line of reasoning, and argues that Troilus is ‘praying like a man of the middle ages’.

Others take Troilus’s deterministic beliefs as Chaucer’s voicing of his own views on the matter, and argue that such passages enhance the

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53 See for instance Price, ‘*Troilus and Criseyde*,’ p. 311.
philosophical nature of the poem. But the notion that Troilus is (anachronistically) misquoting Boethius soon began to take hold, and is now generally accepted.

Does the poem, then, endorse Boethius’s theories, or does it sanction Troilus’s views and actions? Is worldly love to be followed or avoided? These questions naturally follow the consideration of Fortune and the value of her worldly gifts. Whether or not the poem endorses a stoic detachment from the things of this world or an abandonment to carnal love (or anything in between these two polar positions) has been and still is widely debated, with readings of the Troilus based on moral considerations emerging, and being challenged, throughout the last and present centuries. D.W. Robertson is probably the most well-known and controversial advocate of a Christian exegetical reading of the Troilus as a clear rejection of worldly love. In his A Preface to Chaucer, he argues that ‘Troilus has made himself a prisoner. Nothing destined him to subject himself to Fortune or Cupid, but his reason has lost “the lordshipe that sholde have over the sensualitee,” and he is a hopeless thrall in the chains of Venus.’ Many agree that the Troilus carries with it a similar Boethian message, while others believe that Troilus’s worldly passion is, at least to some extent, positive or even salvific. Davis Taylor, for instance, believes

56 D. W. Robertson, Jr., ‘Chaucerian Tragedy’, ELH 19, no. 1 (1952), pp. 1–37. Although he is the most famous to argue this view, he is not the first. Another good example is Howard R. Patch, ‘Troilus on Determinism’, Speculum 6, no. 2 (1931), pp. 225–243.
57 Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 493.
that it is Troilus’s love for Criseyde that ‘is responsible for his final ascension and vision’, arguing that we are meant to see this character and his choices in a favourable light.\footnote{Davis Taylor, ‘The Terms of Love’, p. 239.}

Although the tendency in more recent criticism seems to be to reject a reading of the \textit{Troilus} that condemns worldly love,\footnote{See especially Mitchell, \textit{Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature}.} I would argue that a more ‘conservative’ moral interpretation of the poem can still offer convincing and original perspectives on this complex work. Such a critical position is supported by a careful consideration of how Fortune is portrayed in the \textit{Troilus}, especially when one considers fully the extent of the influence the \textit{Filostrato} in this respect on Chaucer’s version of the story. Admittedly, this is not the only reading possible – it would make for a far less enticing poem if this were the case – but I would argue that it is still a valid critical stance, as I hope my chapter on Chaucer’s \textit{Troilus} will show.

While Chaucer’s poem has been a very popular work for centuries,\footnote{See for instance Hyder E. Rollins, ‘The Troilus-Cressida Story from Chaucer to Shakespeare’, \textit{PMLA} 32, no. 3 (1917), pp. 383–429.} Shakespeare’s \textit{Troilus and Cressida} has remained less prominent in the canon of his plays and subject to divided critical responses. After the first performances, of which scarce information remains, it disappeared from the stage,\footnote{As we will see, Dryden’s version of the play was, instead, performed in the Eighteenth century. Muir, introduction to \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, p. 9.} to resurface only in the early twentieth century, to puzzle audiences and critics alike.\footnote{Muir, introduction to \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, p. 9.} Many regarded it as an unsatisfactory and unpalatable play, and attributed its dark tones to a period of deep personal crisis in Shakespeare’s life.\footnote{A. C. Bradley, \textit{Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on “Hamlet”, “Othello”, “King Lear”, “Macbeth”} (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1904), p. 185; Georg Morris Cohen Brandes, \textit{William Shakespeare: A Critical Study}, trans. William Archer, Mary Morison, and Diana White (London: Heinemann, 1898), vol II, p. 206.} Hyder E. Rollins, for instance, doubted whether Shakespeare was responsible for the whole play, as he found the lack of

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{293} J. Allan Mitchell, \textit{Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 16–17, 28.
\bibitem{60} Davis Taylor, ‘The Terms of Love’, p. 239.
\bibitem{61} See especially Mitchell, \textit{Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature}.
\bibitem{63} As we will see, Dryden’s version of the play was, instead, performed in the Eighteenth century. Muir, introduction to \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, p. 9.
\bibitem{64} Muir, introduction to \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, p. 9.
\end{thebibliography}
closure – especially in regard to the absence of punishment for the unfaithful Cressida – somewhat un-Shakespearean.66

In the last fifty years, this sense of frustration and dissatisfaction with the play has been replaced by a growing acknowledgement of its merits. The experience of the two World Wars probably contributed to the growing popularity of the play on stage, as *Troilus and Cressida* easily lends itself to readings that see it as a cynical attack against the futility of war.67 The influence of modernism facilitated appreciation of the complex nature of this work.68 Rather than being criticised for its lack of closure, contradictions and cynicism, *Troilus and Cressida* is now often praised for its ‘modernity’ and regarded as an experimental and innovative work,69 albeit a still exceedingly problematic one.70 But critical reception is still extremely varied, and this play has inspired a diversity of interpretations and approaches. Some focus their attention on the complex style of the play.71 The theme of value is often discussed.72 In terms of imagery, some attention has been paid to the repeated

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culinary references, as well as the frequent allusions to disease. No one has, to my knowledge, offered a study of Fortune in the play. The recurrent sailing metaphors and their associations with the Renaissance Occasion have not yet been given the attention they deserve.

The theme of Fortune in Shakespeare’s works in general has received comparatively little consideration. Raymond Chapman’s 1950 article on ‘The Wheel of Fortune in Shakespeare’s Historical Plays’ proposes a moral reading of images of rise and fall, arguing that ‘Shakespeare made a brilliant use of the implications of the medieval convention’ of Fortune’s wheel. His work contributed to bring attention to the issue of Fortune in Shakespeare, although it is excessively reliant on medieval traditions and underestimates the popularity and vitality of this concept in the Renaissance. In a similar tone, John Shaws considers the opposition between the gifts of nature and of Fortune in As You Like It, once again relying primarily on medieval literary traditions and iconography. This would change in an essay of 1962 on Antony and Cleopatra by Michael Lloyd, who recognises the importance of the image of the sea in Shakespeare’s representation of Fortune in this play, and its connection to the notion of Opportunity. Some subsequent studies argued for the importance of Fortune in plays by Shakespeare, but it is not until

Charles Hallett’s analysis of, once again, *Antony and Cleopatra*, that one can find a comprehensive analysis that takes into account the complexity of the imagery associated to Fortune in this play. Kiefer’s *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, published in 1983, offers the most comprehensive analysis of Fortune in Shakespeare to date, giving adequate weight to the influence of both medieval literary tradition and Renaissance iconography. His analysis of the Shakespearean canon is, however, limited to *Romeo and Juliet, Richard II, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, King Lear, Timon of Athens* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, in the context of a broader work that considers a vast number of writers. After the appearance of such a comprehensive study of Fortune in Elizabethan literature, the topic seems to have waned from critical attention. It is not until 2001 that Clayton MacKenzie attempted to renew critical interest in the issue of Fortune in Shakespeare, noting that it is a pervasive theme, and that it is surprising that more has not been written on the subject. He argues that the way to do so is by taking into account the Occasion of Renaissance emblem books. My analysis brings these reflections to *Troilus and Cressida*, examining for the first time the recurrent imagery related to the notion of Occasion, and the references to Occasion and Fortune, in this play. I argue that the issue of Fortune is as crucial to Shakespeare’s work as it is to the other two versions of the story of Troilus here discussed – despite the fact that it has passed unnoticed by critics to date.

Each of the following chapters, after a brief critical contextualisation, provides a careful textual analysis of all major passages concerning Fortune in the *Filostrato, Troilus and Criseyde* and *Troilus and Cressida* respectively. This type of enquiry proves that Boccaccio, Chaucer and Shakespeare use Fortune to aid character portrayal in their versions of the story of Troilus. After establishing this common feature of these works, I proceed to consider the consequences of the

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82 Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*.

representations of Fortune offered by these authors for our understanding of each text as a whole. A careful consideration of the function of Fortune in the *Filostrato*, *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Troilus and Cressida* will provide new perspectives from which one can rethink these renowned and much discussed works.
CHAPTER ONE: THE MANY FACES OF FORTUNE IN THE

FILOSTRATO

Ma poco tempo durò cotal bene,
mercé de la Fortuna invidiosa,
che’n questo mondo nulla fermo tene:
ella gli volse la faccia crucciosa
per nuovo caso, sì com’egli avviene,
e sottosopra volgendo ogni cosa,
Criseida gli tolse e’ dolci frutti,
e’ lieti amor rivolse in tristi luiti.¹

But this happiness did not last
long due to jealous Fortune,
who does not allow anything to
remain unchanged in this
world. She turned her wrathful
face towards him with the new
circumstances, as she so often
does. Revolving everything
upside down, she took Criseida
and her sweet gifts away from
him, turning happy love into
sad mourning.²

At the end of the third book of the Filostrato, the narrator of Boccaccio’s poem
glimpses the future of his protagonists. After having described Troiolo’s joy
subsequent to the conquest of his beloved Criseida, he informs us that such
happiness cannot last. Fortune is about to turn Troiolo’s joy into sorrow, as she so
often does. This is a crucial moment in the story, and Fortune is here presented as
the factor determining the catastrophic turn of events that will lead to the tragic
conclusion of the story. Is Fortune then the sole arbiter of events, the one force
controlling the universe, the only entity responsible for the character’s sad end? The
proliferation of complaints against Fortune in literature establishes them as a

¹Boccaccio, Filostrato, III, 94, p. 216. Surdich’s edition uses the same text prepared by Vittore
Branca (Giovanni Boccaccio, Filostrato, vol. 2, Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio, ed. Vittore
Branca (Milano: Mondadori, 1964)), which is the version commonly used by scholars. Luigi Surdich,
bibliography to Filostrato, p. 43.
²Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine. For another English translation see Giovanni
Boccaccio, Il Filostrato, ed. Vincenzo Pernicone, trans. Robert P. apRoberts and Anna Bruni Seldis,
traditional topos and one suspects that, in some cases, authors simply reproduced a familiar literary pattern rather than actually implying the existence of an all-powerful force determining human existence. This could be also true in the case of the Filostrato in which Boccaccio, unlike Chaucer in his Troilus and Criseyde, does not seem to draw attention to the issue of causation. But, as it will be argued in the course of this chapter, Fortune in the Filostrato is in fact more important than it has been usually believed.

Vittore Branca, who was the first to provide an annotated edition of the Filostrato in 1964, dismissed the role of Fortune in the poem by stating that Fortuna is portrayed in a generic and superficial fashion. Indeed, this was one of the reasons he brought forward to show the inferiority of this work to others by Boccaccio:

La necessità di questa retrodatazione del Filostrato è confermata anche da vari indizi, sia nella materia che nello stile. Basti accennare alle presentazioni della Fortuna (III 94; IV 30) del tutto generiche in confronto a quelle precisamente visualizzate secondo ben noti canoni iconografici che a cominciare dal Filocolo […] si ripetono nelle opere del Boccaccio […]. L’analisi di passi e situazioni simili nel Filostrato e nel primo romanzo [Filocolo] […] mi pare possa confermare l’antecedenza delle ottave rispetto alla prosa: come del resto possono indicare anche la tenuità culturale e la debolezza stilistica del poema, specialmente quando si confronti la prosa stentata e malsicura del Proemio con quella già dignitosa del Filocolo, e si avverte la provvisorietà e il pressappochismo delle strutture del periodo, il cui sviluppo – spesso anacolutico – è affidato più a suggestioni musicali o a facili ondate ritmiche che a chiare ragioni sintattiche. Il Filostrato dunque dovette essere composto, come

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3See for instance Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature, p. 49.
5Branca, introduction to Filostrato, pp. 3–13.
6Branca, introduction to Filostrato, pp. 4–5.
An earlier date of composition for the *Filostrato* is also suggested by various clues, both in terms of subject matter and in style. Suffice it to consider the descriptions of Fortune (III 94; IV 30), which are utterly vague in comparison with those more precise portrayals that, following easily recognisable iconographic traditions, appeared in Boccaccio’s works starting from the *Filocolo* [...] I think that the analysis of similar passages and situations in the *Filostrato* and in the first novel [*Filocolo*] can confirm that the poem precedes the work in prose. The feeble cultural contents and the weakness in style seem to corroborate this hypothesis, especially so if we compare the tentative prose of the *Proem* with the superior style of the *Filocolo*. Its unsure and imprecise sentence structure, with the frequent use of anacolutha, reveals a greater attention to musicality and rhythm than to syntax. Therefore the *Filostrato* must have been written, like the *Caccia*, when Boccaccio was in his early twenties, and definitely before the *Filocolo*, probably around 1335.

Branca proposes a very early date for the composition of the *Filostrato* because of its alleged inferiority, both in terms of form and content, to Boccaccio’s *Filocolo*. In particular, he stresses that the representation of Fortune in the poem is generic and does not seem to comply with those precise and recognisable iconographic elements that underlie her portrayal in later works by Boccaccio. It is true, as we will see, that Fortune in this work is represented in a variety of ways; there is no unified and coherent portrayal, which could be considered as an indication that Boccaccio did not pay particular attention to this concept when he was writing the *Filostrato*. However, Branca’s dismissal of the representation of Fortune as superficial may not be correct.

Establishing a date for this poem proved to be a complex task in literary criticism. Only during the 1980s was the date 1339 finally accepted. This relatively

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7Branca, introduction to *Filostrato*, pp. 4–5.

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late discovery about the *Filostrato* had significant consequences for the varying perceptions that critics had of this work and it may allow us to consider Branca’s opinion about Fortune in the poem in a new light. Even though the date has only shifted within a space of five years, the attitude of scholars towards this poem has greatly changed. We now know that Boccaccio finished writing the *Filostrato* after the *Filocolo*.

The author of the poem can no longer be regarded as less experienced than the author of the work in prose. Branca’s mistake may have influenced his judgement and led him to undervalue the *Filostrato* and underestimate Boccaccio’s understanding of Fortune at the time of its composition. If, as Branca states, Boccaccio provides a precise and well-defined depiction of *Fortuna* in the *Filocolo*, there is no reason to suppose that the author was not capable of a similar portrayal in the *Filostrato*. The variety of manners in which Fortune is represented in this poem cannot be due to the author’s inability to produce a coherent description; there may be a different reason for this multifaceted portrayal.

Not only has the *Filostrato* been under-rated in the past, but most scholars have focused their attention on determining the date and sources of this work, whereas the analysis of the poem itself has been neglected. There was a tendency to read the *Filostrato* in biographical terms, considering it primarily as a transposition of one of Boccaccio’s love affairs. This was the common fate of

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8Vincenzo Pernicone, who was the first to study the various manuscripts of the *Filostrato* and to provide an authoritative edition of this poem in 1937 (Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il Filostrato e il Ninfale fiesolano*, vol. 2, *Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vincenzo Pernicone (Bari: Gius, Laterza & figli, 1937)), asserted that it must have been composed by Boccaccio in 1338, contradicting the hypothesis of an earlier date previously suggested by Vincenzo Crescini (Vincenzo Pernicone, ‘Il “Filostrato” di Giovanni Boccaccio’, *Studi di filologia italiana: bulletin dell’Accademia della Crusca* 2 (1929), pp. 77–86). Subsequently both Branca and Pier Giorgio Ricci, with new evidence, brought the date back to 1335 (Pier Giorgio Ricci, ‘Per la dedica e la datazione del “Filostrato”’, *Studi sul Boccaccio* 1 (1963), pp. 333–347). But this was far from being the end of the debate. In 1972 Carlo Muscetta proposed, again, to push the date forward to 1340 (Carlo Muscetta, *Giovanni Boccaccio* (Roma: Editori Laterza, 1989), p. 98), which was later brought back to 1339 by both Luigi Surdich (Surdich, *La cornice di amore: studi sul Boccaccio*, p. 107) and Armando Balduino (Balduino, *Boccaccio, Petrarcha e altri poeti del Trecento*, pp. 231–47). Scholars currently seem to agree on this date. See Francesco Bruni, *Boccaccio: l’invenzione della letteratura mezzana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), p. 173.

9Surdich, *La cornice di amore: studi sul Boccaccio*.

10Branca, introduction to *Filostrato*, pp. 4–5.

11Luigi Surdich, introduction to *Filostrato*, p. 5.
Boccaccio’s early works. Amongst the first to challenge this tradition was Robert Hollander in 1977. In his *Boccaccio’s Two Venuses*, he criticises the then common opinion that Boccaccio’s *opere minori* were a praise of carnal love. Instead, he argues that such works provide, in fact, an ‘ironic attack’ against this kind of attitude towards love. Notwithstanding Hollander’s convincing arguments, it is only since the 1990s that critics have begun to favour a reading of the *Filostrato* that considers the possibility of a critical attitude of its author towards the type of love that Troiolo and Criseida seem to be pursuing. This trend is exemplified by Francesco Bruni’s *Boccaccio – L’invenzione della letteratura mezzana*, Laura Kellogg’s *Boccaccio’s and Chaucer’s Cressida* and Fabian Alfie’s ‘Love and Poetry: Reading Boccaccio’s Filostrato as a Medieval Parody’. Considering the relatively recent change of attitude in the scholarly world towards this poem, it may be worth asking what else has been overlooked. As it is now possible to look at the *Filostrato* in a new light, the role of Fortune must also be analysed from new perspectives.

Considering the representation of Fortune in the *Filostrato* means having to deal with that intrinsic semantic problem one has to face when analysing this concept in any literary work. What does the author mean by *Fortune*? How was this concept understood? Not only do different authors use the word with varying meanings, but sometimes the same author seems to attribute to Fortune a number of meanings. We may understand Fortune as an external random force influencing human existence, or we may think it is simply the pattern of a man’s life, with its

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13This term has been traditionally used by critics of Boccaccio to indicate his works excluding the *Decameron*, which is undoubtedly his most famous production.


16Kellogg, *Boccaccio’s and Chaucer’s Cressida*.


combination of positive and negative events, and without implying anything about the causation of these events. Fortune with the capital F may be the blind goddess, or perhaps a literary personification, symbol of chance or even administrator of God’s Providence, in which case she is not blind at all. Some writers use Fortune and fate interchangeably; others firmly believe the two contradict one another, the former implying random causes behind events, and the latter involving the existence of a fixed pattern.

This multifaceted semantic tradition of Fortune seems to be mirrored in the Filostrato. In this work, a variety of terms for Fortune is used, each of them with a variety of meanings. This marked polysemy shows, on the one hand, the complexity of the concept of Fortune and, on the other, the extent to which the various meanings were ingrained in literary tradition. The first step in understanding the actual weight and role of Fortune in the poem is to examine how the terms for Fortune are used. To this end, I will first analyse the narrator’s manner of speaking about Fortune in the prologue. His views will be shown to comply with both Boethian and Dantean conceptions of this notion. For the narrator, bad Fortune is a mentor, as she reveals to him his mistakes. But this role for Fortune identified in the proem is not explicitly mentioned in the poem itself, where the variety of ways in which Fortune is represented may puzzle the reader. However, after considering in detail the different aspects of Fortune presented in the poem, it will become clear that this diversity is not due to carelessness on the part of the author. The portrayal of Fortune in the poem is both more complex and coherent than has been appreciated so far. This multifaceted representation has a very important function: it does not mirror Boccaccio’s lack of interest in the topic, but the characters’ perception, and misinterpretations, of this concept. Their views on Fortune reveal to us something about each of them. Having established the importance of Fortune in the characters’

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20Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature, p. 36.
21Dante, Inferno, Canto VII, vv. 61–96.
22Cioffiari, Fortune and Fate from Democritus to St. Thomas Aquinas, p. I.
portrayal, I will consider the poem as a whole and try to establish whether the narrator’s suggestion that Fortune acts as a mentor to him can be applied to Troiolo as well, even though this function is not explicitly recognised in the poem. As we will see, Troiolo’s crucial error is to seek the wrong type of love in Stilnovistic terms. Had love led him to the higher good, as Dante’s love for Beatrice did, the outcome of the poem would have been quite different. The carnal love he pursues has the great disadvantage of being subject to Fortune’s action. Troiolo’s loss of the happiness he so fervently strived to achieve shows the reader that he was wrong to base his joy on fickle Fortune’s gifts. This is the cause of his misery.

1 The Proem: Fortune as Mentor

The proem of the Filostrato has often been at the centre of debate as its content has been typically scrutinised by critics trying to establish the date of composition. The narrator presents himself as ‘Filostrato’, meaning won or laid low by love. A perfect example of the Stilnovistic lover, he seems quite content to observe from a distance his beloved Filomena, until her unexpected departure from Naples suddenly plunges him into a state of desperation. In order to overcome his sorrow, he decides to commit it indirectly to writing, and he looks for an ancient story through which he can express his own passions. Troiolo’s seems to be the

25Stilnovism, or, in Italian, Stilnovismo or Dolce stil novo is usually used to refer to a new type of love poetry that developed in Italian literature during the second half of the thirteenth century. It owes its name to Dante: in Canto XXIV of Purgatorio the character of Bonagiunta Orbicciani defines this new trend in love poetry as ‘dolce stil novo’ (sweet new style). One of its main characteristics is the conception of love as an inner phenomenon that brings about the spiritual renewal of the poet/lover. The poet sings the praise of the beloved without hoping or desiring anything from her. The woman is perceived and portrayed as an angel with the salvific function of mediator between man and God. For further details see Luigi Surdich, ‘Il dolce stil novo’, in Il Duecento e il Trecento (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005), pp. 43–51.


27According to Boccaccio’s ethymological understanding of this term. See Boccaccio, Filostrato, p. 47, note 1.

28This is a common feature of Boccaccio’s opere minori. See Hollander, Boccaccio’s Two Venuses, pp. 12–13.
ideal choice. By narrating the sorrows of this young Trojan he will be, cathartically, cured of his own melancholy. Moreover, by addressing his work to Filomena, he may hope to obtain her mercy and convince her to return to Naples.29

The unexpected transition from a state of happiness to a state of sorrow such as the one faced by Filostrato at Filomena’s departure is a typical change of Fortune, and it is in these circumstances that we often find complaints against Fortune in literary texts. Such passages are common in the literature of all times,30 and Boccaccio is no exception.31 Filostrato too complains, and he repeatedly blames Fortune for Filomena’s departure in the prologue. Interestingly, however, Fortune here is not depicted in an entirely negative light. She is described as a mentor by the narrator. Her actions seem to have a didactic purpose insofar as she makes Filostrato aware of a serious error in judgement. The Filostrato opens with a question: is it better to see the beloved, to talk about her, or to think about her?32 The narrator states that he used to believe that thinking about the woman was the better option, since he could make her responsive to his wishes in his own imagination. Her sudden departure, however, clearly revealed to him that he was mistaken. Imagination is little comfort once he is denied the sight of Filomena:

Ahi, lasso, quanto m’è la Fortuna, crudele inimica de’ miei piaceri, sempre stata rigida maestra e correggitrice de’ mei errori! Ora, misero me, il conosco, ora il sento, ora apertissimamente il discerno, quanto di piacere, quanto di bene, quanto di soavità, più nella luce vera degli occhi vostri veggendola co’ miei, che nella falsa lusinga del mio pensiero dimorasse. Così adunque, o splendido lume

30Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature, p. 49.
31Complaints on the part of Boccaccio’s narrators are frequent throughout his works. See Hollander, Boccaccio’s Two Venuses, p. 98.
32Boccaccio, Filostrato, Proemio, p. 48. This kind of discussion of matters related to love (or demande d’amour) was a recurring literary motif at the time, and a variation on this very question was also present in the Filocolo and, notably, also in the Roman de la Rose. See Lucia Battaglia Ricci, Boccaccio (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2000), p. 90 and Bruni, Boccaccio: l’invenzione della letteratura mezzana, pp. 171–173.
della mia mente, col privarmi della vostra vista, ha Fortuna risolto la nebul
dell’errore per addietro da me sostenuto.33

Alas, how Fortune, cruel enemy of my pleasures, has always been a severe
mentor and revealer of my errors! Now, wretched as I am, now I know, now I
feel, now I clearly understand that there was so much more pleasure, good, and
beauty to be found in the true light of your eyes as I looked at them with mine
than in the false flattery of my thought. So, O splendid light of my mind, has
Fortune dissolved the cloud of my previous error by depriving me of your sight.

If we consider Fortune as a random force, as is often the case both in the common,
everyday perception of Fortune and in its literary representations,34 it may seem
strange that she should take the role of a ‘maestra’, a mentor. If she is an aleatory
power, her action should not have a didactic purpose. One may argue that the change
in Fortune is didactic unintentionally; that it is not Fortune’s wish to make the
narrator aware of his mistake; that she does not take willingly the role of ‘maestra’,
but merely acts as one in her blind proceedings. The fact that Filostrato comments
that she has always been a teacher for him makes it clear, however, that this is not an
isolated result. If Fortune’s actions always show Filostrato his mistakes, then this
outcome is unlikely to be random. In this case, Fortune is indeed a deliberate
mentor. Not a goddess of chance as she was for the ancient Romans,35 not at all
blind, in this passage she is represented rather as a guide for man.

This notion is not new in literature. In fact, considering Fortune as a mentor
is a way of solving the medieval problem of Fortune. Fortuna as a blind force was
strongly opposed by the Church Fathers.36 With her random distribution of bliss and
sorrows she dangerously threatens God’s power. According to them, there could be
no such force.37 However, if Fortune is stripped of her pagan vestments and becomes

33Boccaccio, Filostrato, p. 54.
34See for instance, Saint Augustine, The City of God Against the Pagans, ed. R. W. Dyson
(Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), IV.XVIII.
a servant of the Christian God, then the popular figure can be preserved. Is there anything within Filostrato’s description of Fortune to suggest that this force is indeed in the service of God? Although the narrator does not openly say so, it is the description of Fortune as a mentor that implies a Christian conception of life, as may become apparent when considering the writings of Boccaccio’s favourite auctor, and most consistent source of inspiration even as early as the time of composition of the Filostrato: Dante.38 The most famous description of Fortune in the Divina Commedia fittingly takes place while Dante and Virgil are crossing the circle of the avaricious and prodigal.39 Dante asks his guide what Fortune precisely is, and his maestro describes her as the general minister and ruler of earthly possessions:

He who transcends in wisdom all that is,
Wrought every sphere and gave to each a guide,
So every part shines out to every part
Always in equal distribution of light.
So, too, above the splendours of the world,
He set a sovereign minister, ordained to move –
In permutations at the proper time –
Vain goods from tribe to tribe, from blood to blood,
In ways from which no human wisdom hides.
And this is why, where one race rules supreme,
Another faints and languishes: they all pursue
Her judgements, secret as a snake in grass.
Your power of mind cannot contend with her.
She, looking forwards, will pronounce her law,
Advancing, as do other gods, her own domain.
Her permutations never come to rest.
It is necessity that makes her quick,
So thick they come by turns to meet their fate.
She is the one so often crossed and cursed
By those who, rightly, ought to sing her praise.

39Dante, Inferno, Canto VII, vv. 61–96.
dandole biasimo e torto a mala voce; Yet vilify her name and speak her ill.

ma ella s’è beata e ciò non ode: But she, a holy being, pays no heed.
con l’altre prime creature lieta Happy, with all the other primal powers,
volve sua spera e beata si gode.40 She turns her sphere, rejoicing in beatitude.41

These famous lines have often been at the centre of critical attention,42 and they show to what extent Dante managed to find a place for Fortune within a Christian world: she becomes an agent of God’s Providence.43 More specifically, her function is the redistribution of worldly possessions. The reason for her actions is often obscure to mortals, but she does not operate blindly or whimsically:44 her judgement (‘giudicio’) is nothing but a reflection of God’s own will. In this passage, Fortune is undoubtedly in service of a Christian God and an active part in His divine plan, but can she also be considered as a mentor? Although this function is not openly stated, Virgil does not fail to mention that she is often blamed, and who blames Fortune if not those whom she displeases?45 In fact, Dante is told that she is wrongly blamed, while she should be praised.46 This clearly implies that misfortune has, in fact, a positive function which is usually overlooked. In order to understand better what Virgil means one has to turn to The Consolation of Philosophy,47 which has been recognised as the main source for Dante’s description of Fortune.48

40Dante, Inferno, Canto VII, vv. 73–96.
44Cioffiari, The Conception of Fortune and Fate in the Works of Dante, p. 35.
45Cioffiari, The Conception of Fortune and Fate in the Works of Dante, p. 40.
46Dante, Inferno, Canto VII, vv. 91–93.
47Boethius, Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio.
Boethius, with whose work Boccaccio was undoubtedly familiar,\textsuperscript{49} provides an account of misfortune that clearly shows her usefulness: in \textit{The Consolation of Philosophy} she appears indeed as a mentor. Although in this work she is not directly described as a servant of God, as in the \textit{Divine Comedy}, Fortune’s importance in Boethius’s journey towards enlightenment is revealed. Adverse Fortune acts as a moral guide, as Lady Philosophy explains:

\begin{quote}
Etenim plus hominibus reor aduersam quam prosperam prodesse fortunam; illa enim semper specie felicitatis, cum uidetur blanda, mentitur, haec semper uera est, cum se instabilem mutatione demonstrat. Illa fallit, heac instruit; illa mendacium specie bonorum mentes fruentium ligat, haec cognitione fragilis felicitatis absolut; itaque illamuideam sventosam fluentem suique semper ignaram, hanc sobriam succintamque et ipsius aduersitatis exercitatione prudentem. Postremo felix a uero bono deuios blanditiis trahit, aduersa plerumque ad uera bona reduces unco retrahit.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

For bad fortune, I think, is more use to man than good fortune. Good fortune always seems to bring happiness, but deceives you with her smiles, whereas bad fortune is always truthful because by change she shows her true fickleness. Good fortune deceives, but bad fortune enlightens. With her display of specious riches good fortune enslaves the minds of those who enjoy her, while bad fortune gives men release through the recognition of how fragile a thing happiness is. And so you can see Fortune in one way as capricious, wayward and ever inconstant, and in another way sober, prepared and made wise by the experience of her own adversity. And lastly, by her flattery good fortune lures men away from the path of true good, but adverse fortune frequently draws men back to their true good like a shepherdess with her crook.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{234, note 68. For other influences on Dante’s depiction of Fortune in this passage see Cioffari, \textit{The Conception of Fortune and Fate in the Works of Dante}, pp. 32–40. 49Hollander, \textit{Boccaccio’s Two Venuses}, p. 99. 50Boethius, \textit{Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio}, Liber II, Prosa VIII, p. 35. 51Boethius, \textit{The Consolation of Philosophy}, trans. V. E. Watts (London: Penguin Books, 1984), Book II, Prose VIII, p. 44. For a more modern translation see Boethius, \textit{The Consolation of Philosophy},}
In what way is bad Fortune a positive influence for man? How can she guide us to the true good? Lady Philosophy gradually makes Boethius understand the importance of Fortune’s role. Her domain embraces worldly goods, which are often the object of our desire and what we base our happiness upon. But wealth, social position, power, fame and pleasure cannot be true goods, as is proven by the fact that Fortune can take them away from us at any moment. The true good must be something that cannot fail us, and that can only be God. Only in the contemplation of the divine can man be truly happy, and over such happiness Fortune has no power. This shows the importance of the role played by Fortune in Boethius’s path to salvation. It is only after Boethius has comprehended the true nature and function of Fortune and the falseness of her gifts that he is ready for Lady Philosophy’s explanation of what true happiness really is. In this light, misfortune can indeed be perceived as a mentor, and more specifically as a moral guide. Showing us the transient nature of this world, she clearly proves that it is not in earthly happiness that men should place their hopes.

Boccaccio’s passage seems to be closely connected with the Consolation. Not only does bad Fortune, in both cases, appear as a mentor; her function is fundamentally the same: she reveals to the narrator that he is making a crucial error. Filostrato used to believe that thinking about Filomena was more pleasurable than seeing her; Boethius the character misconstrued the higher good. The former error may appear less severe than the latter. It may be argued that Boccaccio is intentionally placing too much emphasis on his narrator’s mistake. Critics have suggested that the proem should be seen in an ironic light. In particular, Fabian Alfie
affirms that Boccaccio exaggerates the description of Filostrato’s pain in order to underline the unreliability of the narrator.\textsuperscript{58} According to him, the prologue ironically defies Stilnovistic tradition.\textsuperscript{59} In the \textit{Vita Nuova}, Dante passes through three phases of love, which would be represented by Filostrato’s three options of seeing, talking about, and thinking about the beloved woman. The latter option would represent the last and highest stage according to Dante. Alfie argues that Filostrato’s choice of sight above meditation reveals a preference for the senses above the intellect, thus betraying a more physical idea of love which is not consistent with Dante’s vision.\textsuperscript{60} A closer look at the \textit{Filostrato} may suggest a different interpretation:

[...] difesi di gran lunga esser maggiore il diletto potere della cosa amata talvolta pensare, che quello che porgere potesse alcuna delle altre due; affermando, tra gli altri argomenti da me a ciò indotti, non essere piccola parte della beatitudine dello amante, potere secondo il disio di colui che pensa la cosa amata, e lei rendere secondo quello benevola e rispondente, come che ciò solamente durasse quanto il pensiero, il che del vedere né del ragionare non potea così certamente avvenire.\textsuperscript{61}

[...] I argued that the delight deriving from thinking about the object of love is greatly superior to that caused by any of the other two options. One of the evidences I brought forward to demonstrate this notion was that it plays no small part in a lover’s happiness to be able to imagine the object of love responsive to one’s desires, and to make it act according to those, even though this bliss shall last only as long as this fancy does. Nothing similar can happen when observing and talking about the beloved.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{58}Alfie, ‘Love and Poetry’, p. 353.
\textsuperscript{60}Alfie, ‘Love and Poetry’.
\textsuperscript{61}Boccaccio, \textit{Filostrato}, Proemio, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{62}Roberts and Seldis translate ‘ragionare’ with ‘talking to her’, Boccaccio, \textit{Il Filostrato}, p. 5. In this context, however, it is clear that Boccaccio is referring to his earlier \textit{demande d’amour} (Boccaccio, \textit{Filostrato}, Proemio, p. 48.) where talking about the woman with someone else was presented as one of the options available to the lover.
Thinking about the woman as Filostrato understands it does not seem a synonym of contemplating ‘the woman in her true form’, but rather a way of satisfying his desires through fantasy. If this is the case, watching the eyes of the woman is indeed a big step further towards a Stilnovistic understanding of love. Moreover, the importance of looking at Beatrice’s eyes in Dante’s poetry must not be overlooked, as is shown, for instance, at the end of Purgatorio, when Dante the character finally sees the eyes of the woman for the first time after she dies in the Vita Nuova. They clearly radiate God’s own light. It is in looking at her that he moves from Purgatory to Heaven. Beatrice is a clear medium between man and God, and observing her is a way to rise above the limits of this world and reach the divine. If, as Alfie suggests, and as I believe to be the case, one is to see Filostrato’s discussion of love as implicitly recalling Dante’s works, his final choice of sight above thought is indeed a step forward.

In this light, Filostrato’s initial mistake and Boethius’s error can be considered of equal weight. Both narrators fail to see the true good, by their own admission. Boccaccio’s narrator used to think that the greatest happiness resides in earthly goods (thinking about the woman, that is to say obtaining pleasure) while, thanks to the action of Fortuna, he realises that greater happiness is to be found in looking into her eyes (which brings him towards the divine). Now he is in the same position as Boethius after he understands the true nature of Fortune: they have both realised the transience of earthly goods and they are a step forward on the way to salvation. In both the Consolation and the Filostrato’s proem, Fortune is not only a mentor, but a moral guide, as her actions promote a Christian attitude towards earthly goods.

The removal of Filomena appears, indeed, as a cruel punishment on the part of Fortune, but it is also a useful one as it has revealed to Filostrato the importance

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63 Alfie, ‘Love and Poetry’.
of looking at her eyes. It is true, as Alfie suggests, that the contemplation of God without
the need for the woman’s physical presence would be a sign of greater illumination, but
the narrator has already made a significant step forward towards God by realising his initial
mistake; it is too early to proceed without his guide. After all, Beatrice escorts Dante
until the very end of the Divine Comedy. Filostrato can be construed not as ignorant
and sinful, but rather as enlightened in comparison with his previous mistakes. This
does not entirely exclude the possibility of irony on the part of the author, but it clearly
shows the extent to which the narrator characterises himself as complying with Dante’s
 teachings. Whether he really does so is too early to tell. The poem itself has yet to begin.

2 The Portrayal of Fortune in the Poem

Whereas the function of Fortune in the proem is that of moral guide, within
the poem itself she is described in different terms. There are two words, and
derivative forms, that are commonly used in the poem to mean Fortune: Fortuna
and ventura. In some instances the two terms seem to be used interchangeably, although
we will see that this is not always the case and that there can be significant
differences in terms of implications. For now, suffice to say that most occurrences of
the terms Fortuna, ventura and derivates (such as fortunato, sfortuna, avventura,
and sventura) can be found when the characters reflect upon their current
situation, and especially when they complain about a sudden and negative turn of events
that disrupts their former state of happiness or stability. This is perfectly in line with the
traditional complaints about Fortune in literature. What may surprise the careful
reader is the variety of ways in which Fortune is described. In some passages she is
addressed as a pagan goddess, in others she seems more like an agent controlling
external events. Sometimes, rather than a random force, Fortune is something fixed

67Dante, Paradiso, Canto XXXIII.
69Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature, p. 49.
and predetermined, thus coinciding with the notion of fate understood as a preordained plan that cannot be altered. In other occurrences, terms such as *Fortuna* and *ventura* simply signify luck, without any implication about the forces determining the outcome of events. It seems that Boccaccio drew upon the vast and often contradictory imagery related to Fortune without attempting any unification. In other words, Fortune does not appear to have a specific and logically articulated role within the poem. This is probably what brought Branca to consider the representation of Fortune in the *Filostrato* as generic and superficial. What explanation can be given for this apparently unsatisfactory and illogical portrayal of Fortune? One possible solution is that advocated by Branca: that Boccaccio was simply not deeply engaged by the issue of Fortune when writing this poem.  

The frequent occurrence of terms related to Fortune would simply be due to the reproduction of an extremely common literary *topos*. It may be so, but the apparently minimal concern with Fortune on the literal level does not exclude the possibility of a more important role on the tropological level. In order to shed some light on Boccaccio’s use of Fortune in the poem, I will proceed along two lines of inquiry. First, the occurrences of *Fortuna* and *ventura* within the poem will be categorised according to the different roles and meanings that are associated with these words. This method of analysis has often been adopted by scholars embarking upon studies about Fortune, as the multiplicity of meanings and iconographical traditions that tends to be associated with this figure seems to call for a categorisation of her different connotations and appearances.  

Second, following the suggestions contained in the prologue, I will attempt to establish whether Fortune can be regarded as a moral teacher for Troiolo as much as she is for Filostrato. This will call for a moral reading of the love story and will, ultimately, establish whether or not the poem can be considered as a critique of Stilnovistic love.

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70 Branca, introduction to *Filostrato*, pp. 4–5.  
2.1 The Roles of Fortune

Before proceeding with the analysis of the different ways in which Fortune is described within the poem, it may be useful to provide the reader with a brief synopsis. The poem begins with an image of the siege of Troy. Calcas, a Trojan and priest of Apollo, foresees the destruction of his city and flees to the Greek camp, leaving behind his beautiful and virtuous daughter Criseida, who is a widow. Abandoned in a city where her father is regarded as a traitor, she seeks and finds the protection of Hector. Time goes by, and the city is still under siege. When spring comes, the Trojans celebrate Apollo at the Palladium. During the festivities, young Troilo first sets eyes on Criseida. Ironically, after spending the evening mocking lovers, he is pierced by Cupid’s arrow. He first hides his passions and suffers in silence, convinced that the beautiful and honourable woman does not care about him. He wastes away in tears. Pandaro, his good friend and Criseida’s uncle, noticing his melancholy, finally obtains a confession and immediately starts acting as intermediary between the two. Criseida initially resists (she is primarily worried about people’s opinion), but, after meditating upon the brevity of life, she gradually adopts a rather epicurean philosophy: she may as well enjoy herself while she has the chance, as long as nobody knows about it. After all, a secret affair is more exciting than a lawful one and the flames of passion are bound to last longer. As a widow, she is very much a pragmatic lover. The couple soon meet and they enjoy their first night together, which will be followed by many others, until their happiness is suddenly and unexpectedly turned into sorrow. During an exchange of prisoners, Criseida is granted to her father who wants her back; she is to leave for the Greek camp. Both lovers hear the news and, in their chambers, shed copious

72Boccaccio, Filostrato, I, 7–9, pp. 69–71.
73Boccaccio, Filostrato, I, 11, p. 72.
74Boccaccio, Filostrato, I, 12–14, pp. 72–74.
75Boccaccio, Filostrato, I, 16–17, pp. 74–75.
76Boccaccio, Filostrato, I, 17–31, pp. 75–84.
77Boccaccio, Filostrato, I, 32–57, pp. 84–100.
tears. Pandaro consoles both and arranges a last meeting. Once in the arms of her lover, Criseida faints with sorrow. Troiolo, believing her dead, almost takes his own life. The woman comes to her senses just in time to prevent the tragedy. He tries to convince her not to leave and to flee with him instead. Criseida refuses: the honour of each of them is at stake. She promises that she will find a way to abandon the Greek camp and return ten days after her departure. Troiolo accompanies her to the exchange and leaves her in the company of Diomede, who immediately realises that there is an understanding between the two and seems to be intrigued by the challenge of conquering Criseida’s affections. Once alone in the Greek camp, she soon realises the desperate situation she is in. Returning to Troy is more difficult than she had anticipated. She gradually falls for Diomede and forgets Troiolo, even though the reader is not openly shown her betrayal. Troiolo, in the meantime, waits for her, wasting away in tears. Ten days pass, and she is not back. More tears. A prophetic dream reveals the betrayal. Divided between fear and hope, he writes her a letter. Her cold reply and mild reassurances seem suspicious even to the self-deluded Troiolo. Proof of the betrayal arrives when Deifobo, one of Troiolo’s numerous brothers, takes a vestment from Diomede during battle. Therein Troiolo finds a brooch he had given to Criseida: now he can no longer deny the truth. After more tears, he decides to seek death in battle. He repeatedly tries to kill Diomede but he is miserably killed by Achilles. In a single verse, the reader is informed of his death. So ends the ill-conceived love of Troiolo and Criseida. This extremely anticlimactic conclusion is followed by the narrator’s advice to young men. Keeping in mind Troiolo’s example, they should be cautious in love and not trust unreliable and lustful young women. They should choose carefully a more constant and wise

lady. In the conclusion, Filostrato sends the book to his beloved so that it may persuade her to return to Naples.

Thus, a poem that arguably shows the pains and dangers of love is used by the narrator as a token that should remind Filomena of his affection. One might think that this is not a particularly wise strategy. We will return to the problematic and possibly ironic nature of this envoy towards the end of the chapter. For now, we shall focus on the way in which both characters and the narrator speak of Fortune throughout the poem.

2.1.1 Fortune as Agent and Arbiter of Earthly Possessions

As mentioned above, Fortune is primarily referred to by the characters when they complain about what is happening to them. This is, according to Patch, the most typical occurrence of Fortune in literature. As the negative events in the story unfold, the characters lament the situations they have to face, and Fortune is one of the entities blamed for negative events, even though she is not the only one. Love, God, the gods, Zeus, and destiny are alternately indicated by the characters as agents, and, therefore, these utterances could be seen simply as reproductions of literary motifs, or rhetoric choices to convey characters’ emotions, with no philosophical or theological significance; rationally, these agents cannot possibly be conceived as acting simultaneously. One has to wonder to what extent the characters believe in such forces. Is Fortune merely a word for causes they cannot understand? In order to find an answer to this question we shall now turn to those passages within

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90Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature*, p. 49.
92Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, II, 52, 8, p. 126; II, 67, 6–8, p. 133; II, 74, 7, p. 136; III, 14, 8, p. 176; IV, 126, 4–5, p. 286; V, 37, 1, p. 322; VIII, 24, 6–8, p. 415.
93Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, IV, 28, 8, p. 234; IV, 75, 8, p. 256; VIII, 19, 5–8, p. 413.
94Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, I, 24, 1–4, p. 79; III, 67, 6–8, p. 201; IV, 97, 6–8, p. 270; VIII, 17–18, p. 412.
95Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, II, 46, 3, pp. 123; II, 64, 4–5, p. 131; IV, 87, 6, p. 262; IV, 98, 2, p. 270.
the poem in which Fortune seems to be considered as responsible for causing a character’s unhappiness by taking away the object of his or her desires. This disruptive quality of Fortune, already described by the narrator during his lamentation in the poem, is in the poem itself first mentioned by Pandaro. After telling Troiolo that Criseida has consented to meet him, he warns him to be cautious: if she will indeed accept him as her lover, he must act with discretion so as not to endanger the woman’s reputation:

Ma come Dio, che tutto quanto vede,
  e tu che’l sai, a ciò non m’ha indotto
di premio isperanza, ma sol fede,
  che come amico portoti, condotto
m’ha ad ovrar che tu trovi mercede.
Per ch’io ti priego, s’el non ti sia rotto
da ria fortuna il disiato bene,
  che facci com’a savio far conviene.  

But as God, who sees all, you know well that no hope of reward urged me to act as I did. In the name of our friendship alone I tried to put an end to your sorrows. Therefore I pray you, unless evil fortune disrupts your longed for joy, act as a wise man should.

All those obstacles that prevented Troiolo from obtaining Criseida’s love seem to have been overcome thanks to Pandaro’s help. Fortune is identified with what may yet come between the lovers; she stands for the unforeseen and unexpected that could still ruin their happiness. Pandaro here uses ‘fortuna’ to designate something that cannot be predicted and that would have negative consequences for the people involved. This is indeed a very common way of thinking about Fortune. In so far as Fortune in this passage refers to something unexpected and significant that befalls (or may befall) an individual, it could bring to mind Aristotle’s discussion of chance in *Physics* 2.4–2.5.

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There, Aristotle expresses surprise at the lack of consideration of this topic on the part of those philosophers who deal with the causes of events. Since people often ascribe what happens to chance, and philosophers themselves refer to it in their own works, it is something that must be taken into account. Not to do so is a serious oversight. According to Lisa Raphals, Aristotle was, in fact, the first Greek philosopher to recognise chance amongst the causes of events. Aristotle inserts chance within his discussion of causality by describing when and why people tend to ascribe what happens to chance or luck. We say that something is the outcome of luck, when it is both accidental and desirable; it is something that would have been sought had we known it was a possible outcome. For instance, if a man goes to the market and happens to find his debtor and collect the money he was due, this would usually be considered lucky. He did not know his debtor would be there, hence he did not expect to find him. Had he known he could be there, however, he would have sought him, and the collection of the money would not have been the outcome of luck but the result of his own will and actions.

Vincenzo Cioffari extrapolates a definition of chance from this passage, describing it as the indeterminate cause of an unexpected effect. He also stresses that the effect must be of relevance, or it would not be ascribed to chance but would rather pass unnoticed. To illustrate this point Cioffari uses the example of a farmer digging for agricultural purposes who finds a pot of gold. This occurrence can be considered as the outcome of luck because finding the gold was not the intent of the farmer, and was utterly unexpected. This event is also extremely positive for the farmer. Had he found a worthless vase for instance, the incident, being of no import, would not have been considered lucky, but would have been ignored. This story was not used by Aristotle in Physics, but in Metaphysics 4.30 (and not to define

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100 Raphals, ‘Fate, Fortune, Chance, and Luck in Chinese and Greek’, p. 560.
101 Aristotle, Phys 2.5, 196b10–197a35.
102 Cioffari, Fortune and Fate from Democritus to St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 17.
103 Cioffari, Fortune and Fate from Democritus to St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 17.
104 Cioffari, Fortune and Fate from Democritus to St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 16–22.
chance but accident, as clearly emerges from Cioffari’s own writings).\footnote{Cioffari, *Fortune and Fate from Democritus to St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 19.} I believe that Cioffari is following Boethius in placing this story in his discussion of Aristotle’s *Physics*. In the *Consolation*, Lady Philosophy uses precisely this story to illustrate Aristotle’s thoughts on chance in the *Physics*:

\textit{Quotiens, ait, aliquid cuiuspiam rei gratia geritur alidque quibusdam de causis quam quod intendebatur obtingit caus uocatur, ut si quis colendi agri causa fodiens humum defossi auri pondus inueniat. Hoc igitur fortuitu quidem creditur accidisse, umer non de nihilo est; nam proprias causas habet, quarum inoprouisus inopinatusque concursus casum uidetur operatus. Nam nisi cultor agri humum foderet, nisi eo loci pecuniam suam depositor obruisset, auriro non esset inuentum. [...] Licet igitur definire casum esse inopinatum ex confluentibus causis in his quae ob aliquid geruntur eventum.}\footnote{Boethius, *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolationis*, Liber V, Prosa I, p. 89.}

Whenever something is done for some purpose, and for certain reasons something other than what was intended happens, it is called chance. For example, if someone began to dig the ground in order to cultivate a field and found a cache of buried gold. This is believed to have happened fortuitously, but it does not happen as a result of nothing; it has its own causes, the unforeseen and unexpected conjunction of which have clearly effected the chance event. If the cultivator of the field had not been digging, and if the depositor had not buried his money at that point, the gold would not have been found. [...] We may therefore define chance as an unexpected event due to the conjunction of its causes with action which is done for some purpose.\footnote{Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V, Prose I, p. 117.}

It is interesting, however, to note that while both Raphals and Cioffari claim that in the *Physics* Aristotle evidently believes that there is such a thing as chance,\footnote{Raphals, ‘Fate, Fortune, Chance, and Luck in Chinese and Greek’, p. 560; Cioffari, *Fortune and Fate from Democritus to St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 16–24.} Lady Philosophy here reads Aristotle much differently, and she uses his example to prove the opposite, to Boethius the character. She believes that the Greek
philosopher aims at explaining what it is that is called *chance* by common people. His example shows, in fact, that what we usually consider to be the outcome of luck has other causes we are not aware of.\footnote{Boethius, *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio*, Liber V, Prosa I, pp. 88–89.} This reading of Aristotle is interesting, and it does stress the fact that the Greek philosopher deals with chance *because* common people cannot help talking about it, and even philosophers who, admittedly, do not believe that anything can happen by chance end up using this word in their writings. It seems that what Aristotle emphasises is that chance or luck is something to be reckoned with because people cannot help feeling that some things are the outcome of chance. This does not necessarily mean that there truly is such a force, and Boethius picks up on this possibility. Seen from Lady Philosophy’s perspective, chance becomes primarily a matter of point of view.

In the passage quoted earlier, Pandaro uses ‘fortuna’ in a way that is similar to both Aristotle’s and Boethius’s description of chance; it is something that, with its unpredictable and random action, may ruin Troiolo’s happiness. What one may wonder, then, is whether there truly is such a force, and if it is the only thing that still has power to come between the lovers. Since there are no rational and predictable reasons why the couple should not be united, now that they are both willing to accept one another, it is the unexpected and unpredictable that they must fear. Pandaro calls this *evil Fortune*, but does he truly believe in such a force? Can Fortune (here considered as arbiter of chance events) truly be the cause of what happens or, as Lady Philosophy suggested, is it merely a matter of not knowing the true causes of things? The fact that Pandaro allows for the existence of Fortune and chance events seems, however, to be contradicted by the first sentence of the passage. He states that God sees everything, thus openly referring to the Christian notion of Providence, which in the Middle Ages was considered to clash with the notion of chance.\footnote{Patch, ‘Chaucer and Lady Fortune’, p. 378.} According to Lady Philosophy, what we call a chance event derives, in fact, from Providence: ‘Concurrere uero atque confluere causas facit ordo ille ineuitabili conexione procedens qui de prouidentiae fonte descendens cuncta suis
locis temporibusque disponit’. Is Pandaro then contradicting himself? Is ‘ria fortuna’ simply a phrase he uses to indicate a possible negative outcome that would, indeed, have other causes, while he truly believes in God’s Providence, or does he actually accept the existence of both Providence and Fortune? The text does not offer a resolution of this dilemma, of which Pandaro seems to be unaware, and this is not an isolated instance within the poem, as we shall see.

As Pandaro anticipated, Fortune will indeed disrupt the happiness of the two lovers. After their first night together, they have to part in order to safeguard the secrecy of their affair, and it is Fortuna that Troiolo blames for his imminent departure:

Non so com’io non mora pur pensando ch’andar me ne convien contra ’l volere e già di vita ch’io n’ho preso il bando, e morte sopra me monta a potere, né so del ritornar come né quando. O Fortuna perché da tal piacere lontani me, che più ch’altro mi piace? Perché mi togli il sollazzo e la pace? I do not know why I do not perish instantly when I think that I have to leave against my will. I have already been banished from life; death is taking control over me. I do not know when I will be able to return nor how. O Fortune, why do you take me away from this pleasure that pleases me most of all? Why do you remove from me my solace and my peace?

As in the earlier lines uttered by Pandaro, Fortune here is something that has the power to disrupt happiness (as he said she would), but in this case this concept

111Boethius, Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolationis, Liber V, Prosa I, p. 89. ‘The conjunction and coincidences of the causes is effected by that order which proceeds by the inescapable nexus of causation, descending from the fount of Providence and ordering all things in their own time and place’. Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, Book V, Prose I, p. 117.
seems to be more emphatically personified by Troiolo. She is definitely more than just chance here, whereas in the previous passage the two notions could overlap. Fortune appears, in accordance with the notion of the turning of her wheel, as a force that can replace joy with sorrow by taking away from Troiolo the source of his happiness: Criseida. Morning has come, and Troilus has to leave. Fortune here is not necessarily connected to the unforeseen and unexpected – his imminent departure could hardly have come as a surprise – she is rather perceived as a being in charge of worldly goods. It is the change of state from happiness to sorrow that characterises her action. After the emphatic lamentation of the first five lines, in which the happiness of being with his beloved is equated with life itself, and parting from her with death, Troiolo insistently uses terms related to pleasure in the last three lines of the stanza (‘piacere’, twice, ‘piace’, ‘sollazzo’). The use of this kind of vocabulary, together with the idea that he has found ‘pace’, imply that the happiness he is talking about, and the good that he is here deprived of, consists in physical pleasure. The gift that Fortune is taking away from Troiolo is carnal love. This is indeed something that falls under the domain of Fortune, together with all worldly things, and this is not the only time Troiolo blames her for taking back her former gifts.

After learning that Criseida is soon to leave for the Greek camp, and after shedding copious tears, as he so often does, Troiolo expresses his distress to loyal Pandaro. Dangerous Fortune (‘fortuna insidiosa’), while taking away his beloved, denies him his ‘conforto’, ‘sollazzo’ and ‘diporto’. If comfort does not necessarily have sexual connotations, sollazzo (solace) and diporto (recreation) openly betray an extremely carnal and hedonistic vision of love. He does not miss talking to the woman, nor seeing her, but holding her in his arms. This is the amore per

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114The peace he is talking about is the one brought to his desires by the consummation of his love, as can clearly be seen in a later passage where he speaks of his love for Criseyde in this light, using ‘pace’ precisely with this meaning. Boccaccio, Filostrato, IV, 122, 3–6, p. 283
115Boccaccio, Filostrato, IV, 45, 5, p. 242.
116Boccaccio, Filostrato, IV, 45, 4–6, p. 242.
117Boccaccio, Filostrato, IV, 113, 6–7, p. 278.
in Boccaccio’s early poems.119 In this sense misfortune is indeed an enemy to pleasure:

Che farò io, dolente, poi che tanto M’è stata la fortuna mia nemica, ch’i’ ho perduto la mia dolce amica?120
What shall I do now, sorrowful that I am, since fortune has proven such an enemy to me that I have lost my sweet friend?

There is little doubt that here ‘amica’ must be intended in its frequent Latin meaning of lover.121 Troiolo, like Filostrato, is finally parted from his beloved. Unlike the narrator in the proem, he does not miss the sight of his woman. It is quite plain that what he longs for is very much her physical presence. Does this mean that Troiolo is more entangled in earthly things than the narrator? Seen in this light, his constant complaining about the action of Fortune would suggest so. As he is at the mercy of physical pleasure, he is the ideal victim of Fortune.122 On the other hand, the narrator has chosen to sing of Troiolo to describe his own sufferings.123 Does the narrator imply more than he says? Is Filostrato simply a more able poet than his alter ego, managing to be more effective and less explicit in this poem than the character is when talking about love?

As Filostrato openly states, something that separates him from the Trojan lover is the fact that the latter managed to savour the joys of love.124 In this respect, the narrator has something in common with Pandaro. Never has Pandaro’s love been reciprocated, which he believes to be a worse fate than Troiolo’s.125 However, his friend does not quite agree:

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118 An Italian set phrase to indicate a carnal understanding of love, in which its sole aim is immediate pleasure. See, among others, Surdich, introduction to Filostrato, p. 19.
119 Hollander, Boccaccio’s Two Venuses, pp. 3–4.
120 Boccaccio, Filostrato, V, 23, 6–8, pp. 316–317.
121 Oxford Latin Dictionary, s. v. ‘amica’.
123 Boccaccio, Filostrato, Proemio, p. 56.
124 Boccaccio, Filostrato, Proemio, p. 57.
125 Boccaccio, Filostrato, IV, 47, p. 243.
But you are mistaken if you believe that losing causes less suffering than never possessing at all. This is pure folly. Pandaro, remember this much: there is no greater sorrow than that brought by evil fortune to one who was happy. Whoever says differently does not speak the truth.

Troilo thinks that Fortune’s blows are worse for those who have reached happiness. This traditional idea, which is also expressed by the narrator in the proem, can be explained by considering Boethius’s view of the wheel of Fortune. The more we enjoy earthly happiness, the stronger the power of Fortune above us, the harder the fall from this false happiness. In this light, Fortune as an arbiter of worldly affairs could be perceived as similar to how she is described in the prologue. She could even be construed as performing the same function of maestra that was there identified by Filostrato: the deeper that one is entangled in worldly pleasure, the more he will suffer Fortune’s sudden reversal, which is no doubt proof of the frailty of such worldly things. However, this function is not openly recognised by Pandaro, or by any other character within the poem. Other motivations are usually provided for Fortune’s actions.

Ma poco tempo durò cotal bene, But this happiness did not last mercé de la Fortuna invidiosa, long thanks to jealous Fortune,
che’n questo mondo nulla fermo tene:
ella gli volse la faccia crucciosa
per nuovo caso, sì com’egli avviene,
e sottosopra volgendo ogni cosa,
Criseida gli tolse e’ dolci frutti,
e’ lieti amor rivolse in tristi luti. 129

who does not allow anything to remain unchanged in this world. She turned her wrathful face towards him under the new circumstances, as she so often does. Revolving everything upside down, she took Criseida and her sweet gifts away from him, turning happy love into sad mourning.

This passage, significantly, appears at the end of the third part of the Filostrato, in which the happiness of the lovers has been described, showing the rapid succession of sorrow and joy. The narrator interrupts the description of Troiolo’s happiness and reveals what lies ahead. Although Fortune is, once again, presented as an entity in charge of worldly goods, here she does not seem to act at random nor as a moral teacher. Her motivation is explicitly stated: she is invidiosa, jealous. 130 This idea contradicts the implications of previous depictions of Fortune within the poem and, again, has its roots in well-established literary tradition, dating back to pagan times. The idea that misfortune succeeds happiness because of the envy of a god was recurrent in both Greek and Roman literature. 131 The substitution of Fortune for the action of pagan gods is not surprising or unusual. Before there was a word for Fortune, before there was a concept for it, the gods were held responsible for unexpected and unforeseen events in the lives of mortals. This can be seen in the oldest ancestor of the story of Troiolo, the Iliad, as has been shown by Dean Hammer. 132 Therefore, in this instance, Fortune appears as a malicious goddess, which better fits a pagan deity rather than an agent in service of the Christian god.

129 Boccaccio, Filostrato, III, 94, p. 216.
130 The same idea that Fortune acts out of envy is also present, later on, in Troiolo’s complaint, Boccaccio, Filostrato, IV, 30–32, pp. 235–236.
The passage is dominated by the traditional image of the turning of the wheel of Fortune. Although no wheel is explicitly mentioned, the idea of the revolution of Fortune is markedly present. Fortune keeps nothing unchanged in this world, which reminds us that she operates in the sublunar domain (in ‘questo mondo’ as opposed to the celestial realm). The change she enacts presents itself in terms of circular movements. She turns everything ‘sottosopra’, upside down, which clearly suggests the rotation of her wheel, and so does the turning of happy loves into ‘tristi luti’.

However, the image here departs from the most common depictions of this popular subject\(^{133}\) in that not only does Fortune rotate everything, but she herself turns. ‘Ella gli volse la faccia crucciosa’ implies either that she changes the expression on her face or, more likely, that she turns towards him a second, ugly face in contrast with the beautiful one she shows while favouring someone.

The same image returns in Troiolo’s extensive complaint after he finds out that Criseida is to be sent to the Greek camp:

Poi poco appresso cominciò a dire
Seco nel pianto: – O misera Fortuna,
che t’ho io fatto, ch’ad ogni desir
mio si t’oppon? Non hai tu più alcuna
altra faccenda fuor che ’l mio languire?
Perché si tosto hai voltata la bruna
faccia ver me, che già t’amava assai
più ch’altro iddio, come tu crudel sai?\(^{134}\)

Shortly afterwards he began to speak to himself while crying: ‘O cruel Fortune, what have I done to you? Why do you fight so against all my desires? Is my sorrow all you care about now? Why have you turned your dark face towards me so soon, while I already loved you more than any other god, as you, cruel, know well?’


\(^{134}\) Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, IV, 30, p. 235.
Once more Troiolo blames Fortune for destroying his happiness. The rhyme *disire–languire* well expresses his predicament: it is in denying his carnal desires that Fortune torments him. This change of attitude on the part of Fortune towards the lover is described, Janus-like, in terms of the goddess turning towards him a second, dark face. This variation on the traditional image, with Fortune herself turning rather than simply revolving her wheel, may remind us of something observed by Patch. Describing the various imagery of Fortune, he notes that, while she usually turns her wheel, sometimes she is, instead, turned upon it:

After the time of Boethius two traditions were established, one in which Fortune turns the wheel, and one in which she herself is turned thereon. In the second figure she logically should have no control over the turns. In just this inconsistency, perhaps, lies the solution. In Honorius Fortune has no power over the wheel; in Wace she apparently has a borrowed control. The tradition is not direct, the ideas are not precisely the same. In Honorius Fortune revolves and her head goes where her feet should be; in Wace she simply rises and falls; in the *Roman de la Rose* she is stationary; in Chaucer and Lydgate she revolves like a ball – the wheel-figure itself is not even presented. In other words, I do not think these passages have enough points of contact to establish a tradition. Wherever Honorius found his ideas, then, I do not think he passed them on to his successors. The writers following him chronologically seem to have original touches, introducing only a similar confusion of type and symbol. […]

The point, then, is this: that the main tradition from classical literature is the figure of Fortune turning her wheel, on which mankind and the state of men depend, and that this idea has some actual beginnings in early Roman times.¹³⁵

Boccaccio’s passages seem to propose a depiction of Fortune that stands in between the two sets of images identified by Patch. Fortune does not turn her wheel nor does she revolve upon it; she rather turns her head revealing a new, horrible face. She is subject to change, but maintains her power to produce that change wilfully. The idea of a Janus-like, two-faced Fortune, although not as common as the two types of

representations Patch here describes, is not unique. It is an idea that will become more popular at a later stage, as it appears both in Lydgate and in *The Mirror for Magistrates*.\textsuperscript{136} The most frequent examples can be found in Renaissance literature and emblem books, as Cioffari seems to suggest.\textsuperscript{137} However, this image was also present in earlier texts. Petrarch speaks of a two-faced Fortune in *De remediis utriusque fortunae*.\textsuperscript{138} Even in the *Consolation* there is a reference to the fact that Fortune has more than one face. Once Boethius has realised Fortune’s treachery, Lady Philosophy tells him that he has discovered the changing faces, ‘ambiguos vultus,’ of the blind goddess.\textsuperscript{139} Worth noting is that the adjective *ambīgūus* was sometimes used to describe the double nature of mythological monsters, the idea of duality being present in the very etymology of the word.\textsuperscript{140} Perhaps, rather than ‘changing faces’,\textsuperscript{141} this expression could then be taken to refer to the two faces of the goddess. Interestingly, Chaucer translates ‘ambiguos vultus’ as ‘double visage’.\textsuperscript{142}

What has emerged from the previous passages is that in those instances in the *Filostrato* in which Fortune appears in charge of worldly goods, the figure seems to lack the philosophical and logical coherence achieved, for instance, in the descriptions provided by Boethius and Dante. In some passages she may be construed as an agent in service of the Christian God and acting for a moral purpose (possibly showing Troiolo the transient nature of worldly love), but this is never openly stated within the poem. In some cases she seems to be a random force (more akin to chance than to a goddess), while in others she willingly hurts the characters out of envy, as a pagan god may do. One constant in Troiolo’s depiction of Fortune is that he blames her. However, although he never recognises her as a teacher or mentor as the narrator does, perhaps she is one. His complaints can be perceived as a symptom of the limited perspective of this character. Troiolo’s lack of understanding

\textsuperscript{136}Chew, ‘Time and Fortune’, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{137}See Chew, ‘Time and Fortune’, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{139}Boethius, *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatione*, Liber II, Prosa I, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{140}Oxford Latin Dictionary, s. v. ‘ambiguus’.
\textsuperscript{142}Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘Boece’, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, Book II, Prosa 1, 58.
of what Fortune really does for him could be a sign of his unworthiness. Unable to see the higher good, captive of physical pleasures, he blames Fortune for what is indeed the result of his own blind passions. His insistence on the identification of happiness with carnal love would seem to suggest so. As Virgil notes in the *Commedia*, men do not usually perceive Fortune’s purpose or function (which is hidden like a snake in the grass). Troiolo seems to be partaking of this common misinterpretation of Fortune’s action. Overall, the function of these instances in which Fortune appears as ‘general ministra e duce’ of worldly things, may be to show Troiolo’s moral limitations in contrast with the narrator’s apparently superior understanding of true happiness.

2.1.2 *Fortune as Luck*

*Fortuna* is not the only term for Fortune in the poem, nor does it always refer to the administrator of wealth and happiness in this world. At the beginning of the poem, immediately after Calcàs has fled from Troy, Ettore tells Criseida that she will not suffer the consequences of her father’s disloyalty:

[…]

Let your father go with misfortune since he so offended us. You shall remain with us in Troy safe, happy and undisturbed as long as it pleases you.

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143See Hollander, *Boccaccio’s Two Venuses*, p. 51: ‘Troiolo’s frequent complaints against Fortuna […] have an anti-Boethian spirit that bring the De Consolatione to mind as a corrective model. The same may be said for finding consolation in love’, and p. 179, note 106 about the character’s complaints against Fortune in Boccaccio’s opere minori: ‘The context of their complaints is likely to make them seem vain and wrong’.


146Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, I, 13, 5–8, pp. 73–74.
In this instance ‘ria ventura’, meaning evil Fortune, is almost used as a curse. Although Calcàs is strongly blamed for his behaviour within the city,\(^\text{147}\) he does not seem to suffer misfortune at the present time as he is safe among the Greeks. Therefore, ‘ria ventura’ is something Hector wishes for him as a punishment for his treason and for leaving his daughter behind. The Trojan hero is not asking the goddess of Fortune to bring ruin to Calcàs, nor is he talking about an external force influencing human events: he is merely wishing him ill. Although this implies that misfortune may occur as a punishment for evil actions, still ‘ria ventura’ is here primarily used in what could be considered a colloquial sense (as opposed to a philosophical or religious sense), meaning simply bad luck, with no apparent reference to causation. This is not the sole example within the poem. Sometimes Fortuna and ventura, rather than referring to an external force somehow influencing the outcome of events, describe the positive or negative nature of a specific occurrence or of a course of events for the characters. The English word that would best translate these occurrences is luck, good or bad. The term ventura and its derivates are more frequently used than Fortuna with this meaning, but there are some exceptions. Although, as we will see, ventura does not occur in the text with only this connotation, the fact that it primarily does is consistent with the origin of this word. Today Fortuna and ventura can be understood as synonyms, but the latter derives from the Latin ventūrus,\(^\text{148}\) that which is to come,\(^\text{149}\) thus not necessarily implying a belief in Fortune more than in destiny. It can be taken to designate future events without expressing anything about their causes. In this case, Boccaccio’s lexical choices seem appropriate. Ventura and its derivates appear with this meaning in a number of occurrences.

After falling in love with Criseida, Troiolo considers himself lucky for loving such a remarkable woman:

\(^{147}\)Boccaccio, Filostrato, I, 10, p. 71.
\(^{149}\)Oxford Latin Dictionary, s. v. ‘uenio’.
Lodava molto gli atti e la statura e lei di cuor grandissimo stimava ne’ modi e nell’andare, e gran ventura di cotal donna amar si reputava, e vie maggior, se per sua lunga cura potesse far, se quanto egli essa amava, cotanto o presso da lei fosse amato, o per servente almen non rifiutato.  

Much he praised her acts and stature. Her manners and countenance were to him proofs of her noble nature. He thought it was a great fortune to love such a woman; more so if, after great toil, he could finally persuade her to love him as he loved her, or almost as much, or if he could, at least, be accepted as her servant.

Again, *ventura* here simply means good luck. Troiolo regards himself as fortunate because he is in love with such a woman. Ironically, his choice of a lover will not prove such a positive one in the end. Fortune and misfortune are very much a matter of point of view; the outcome of events often proves that what we believed to be positive or negative is not quite so. As Troiolo believes himself lucky to love Criseida, so Pandaro tells the woman that she is indeed fortunate to be loved by such a noble man:

> A cui Pandar rispose lieto e presto: 
> – Però che ’l tuo è ’l più avventurato viso che donna avesse mai in questo mondo; se io non ne sono ingannato, a sì fatto uomo ho sentito che piace oltre misura sì che se ne sface. –

Quickly and with cheer, Pandaro replied – Because your face is more fortunate than any other woman’s in this world, present or past; if I am not mistaken, I have heard that it pleases a most noble man, to such an extent that he is consumed by this feeling.

According to Pandaro, her face is *avventurato* because it is admired by such a worthy man as Troiolo. The lovers are appraising the value of one another and it

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150 Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, I, 34, p. 86.
151 Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, II, 37, 3–8, p. 118.
seems that this would indeed be a promising match. Similarly, sventura is often used to describe a negative event or set of events, as can be seen in the first of the following passages, in which we are shown Troiolo’s distress due to Criseida’s imminent departure:

Rimaso adunque Troiolo soletto nella camera sua serrata e scura, e sanza aver di nessun uomo sospetto, o di poter udito esser paura, il raccolto dolor nel tristo petto per la venuta subita sventura cominciò ad aprire in tal maniera, ch’uom non parea, ma arrabbiata fera.\textsuperscript{152}

Once Troiolo was alone in his locked, dark chamber, suspecting no one and needing not to fear to be heard, he began to vent the sorrow that had been hidden in his sad breast for his sudden misfortune in such a manner that he seemed no man but an enraged beast.

Poi che la mia ventura è tanto cruda Che ciò che gli occhi incontra più m’attrista, per Dio, Amor, che la tua man li chiuda, poi ch’ho perduta l’amorosa vista.\textsuperscript{153}

Since my fortune is so harsh that whatever meets my eyes increases my sorrow, by God, O Love, may your hand close them, since I have lost the beloved sight.

The sudden sventura of the first passage seems to have much in common with Fortune, as it befalls the character unexpectedly; similarly, the cruda ventura of the second passage is strongly reminiscent of Troiolo’s complaints to cruel Fortune. The main difference lies in the fact that here ventura is not something that is blamed by Troiolo. In both instances, the narrator and Troiolo use this word to qualify the extremely negative nature of what is happening.

\textsuperscript{152}Boccaccio, Filostrato, IV, 26, pp. 231-232.
\textsuperscript{153}Boccaccio, Filostrato, V, 65, 1–4, p. 337.
Such occurrences do not seem to imply a moral conception of Fortune nor a preoccupation with the causes of events, but have a merely descriptive function. They are closely related to what Cioffari describes as the popular sense of Fortune, which he excludes from his study of Fortune from Democritus to Saint Thomas Aquinas because

Such a study would involve the consideration of so many different conceptions as to make it a logical impossibility. Fortune at all times seems to have meant almost everything imaginable. Wealth is fortuna – success is fortuna – the storm is fortuna. We are fortunate in the books we write, in the children we bear, in the public offices we hold. Everything that is good has been or may be credited to good fortune; everything bad, to the evil one. Its wheel grinds out our entire life, when we consider fortune from the above point of view.

The problem here underlined by Cioffari may be not as impossible to overcome as it seems. It is true that the way in which Fortune tends to be used in common speech sometimes defies logic. In some cases, we can refer to Fortune as a goddess or agent, whereas in others (and possibly more often so), when we use Fortune we give no thought to the causes of events. But to consider these latter occurrences merely as a mistake or as something a literary analysis of Fortune should not be concerned with is simplistic. When we use the term Fortune or derivates in common speech, we do not always think about causation, and the same is sometimes true in literature. The characters in the Filostrato often show a similar attitude. These occurrences should not be excluded from a study of Fortune but must be taken into account, because they mirror the extent to which the concept of Fortune is ingrained in common speech. So often do we complain about misfortune and rejoice for our good Fortune that we tend to forget what the word originally meant. This is not, possibly, so much a logical mistake as a natural evolution of language. The former examples clearly show that ventura can be used in the poem to describe a positive (or negative) impact of events or sets of events in the life of a specific character, without any

154 Cioffari, *Fortune and Fate from Democritus to St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. i.
155 Cioffari, *Fortune and Fate from Democritus to St. Thomas Aquinas*. 
theological or philosophical implication. Stripped of its sacred, mystical powers, Fortune remains with a merely qualifying function, meaning luck, and it is very appropriate, given the etymological origin of this word, that Boccaccio chose to use *ventura* and not *Fortuna* in these passages.

There are, however, three instances in which *Fortuna* seems to be employed with a similar meaning. In all of the cases in which the word *Fortuna* is explicitly indicated as an agent influencing the outcome of events, or is personified, one can safely assume that she is being referred to as a force, mostly in charge of worldly goods, and these instances have been discussed above. However, there are some passages in which the word *Fortuna* is not necessarily invested with agency and could be taken to mean simply *luck*. Does Boccaccio then use *Fortuna* and *ventura* interchangeably with this meaning? One such instance for discussion is in the following passage:

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Tra picciol tempo, la lieta fortuna
di Troiolo rendé luogo a’ suoi amori,
il qual, poscia che fu la notte bruna,
del suo palagio solo uscito fori,
sanza nel ciel vedere stella alcuna,
per lo cammino usato, a’ suoi dolzori
nascostamente se n’entrò, e cheto
nel luogo usato e’ si stette segreto.¹⁵⁶
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In a short time, Troiolo’s happy fortune brought about the time for his love. When the dark night fell, he left his palace. Seeing no stars in the sky and, walking on the usual path, he secretly entered the accustomed place of his pleasures, and there waited quietly and secretly.

After having been separated from Criseida for a while following their first night together, Troiolo can finally meet her again. In this instance it is rather difficult to establish whether Troiolo’s ‘lieta fortuna’ is closer to meaning Fortune or luck. The fact that it is *Troiolo’s* good Fortune may suggest that we are not talking of the all-powerful goddess or the agent here, but rather of the positive and happy state of

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¹⁵⁶Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, III, 64, p. 200.
affairs Troiolo was experiencing. Fortune would seem to refer to a positive chain of circumstances for Troiolo, hence being closer to meaning luck rather than Fortune understood as an agent or force. And yet, Fortuna here is the subject of the sentence: apparently, she is performing an action. One has to establish whether the type of action indicated by the verb implies volition. The difficulty lies in the fact that ‘rendé luogo’ is a rather unusual expression and its exact meaning is not immediately clear. The general idea is that Troiolo’s happy Fortune makes it so that he can meet Criseida again, but is this something that just happens, luckily, or that happens thanks to Fortune? Rendere luogo is not a common phrase. Literally, rendre means to return something to someone. Luogo usually means place, but, interestingly, it can also refer to favourable circumstances or opportunities, and this was also the case in Boccaccio’s time. In this context, ‘rendé luogo’ would seem to mean that Fortune re-presented Troiolo with that set of favourable circumstances that allowed him to meet his Criseida again. In rendere luogo there is both the implied reference to a return of a former state of happiness, suggestive of the circularity of Fortune’s wheel, and of Fortune bringing about a favourable opportunity (which is something we will further discuss later). Here, then, Fortuna stands for more than mere luck.

The other two instances in which Fortuna could mean luck in the Filostrato are potentially more difficult to unravel, as in both cases this term is not the subject of any action. Just before the prisoner exchange, and after discussing their options, Troiolo tells Criseida that the love he feels for her cannot be disrupted by changeable Fortune, since it is not based on those material aspects that can be altered by time

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157Patch labels as ‘personal Fortune’ those occurrences in which there is a possessive adjective associated with Fortune, as is the case here (Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Medi eval Literature, pp. 112–113). He thinks that such instances delineate the belief in a personal goddess of Fortune interested only in events relating to a specific individual. Although that may well be true in some cases, I see no reason to believe that when a character is referring to his or her Fortune, he is thinking of a different goddess from the one who traditionally redistributes happiness and sorrow.
158Grande dizionario della lingua italiana, s. v. ‘rendere’.
159Grande dizionario della lingua italiana, s. v. ‘luogo’.
160Roberts and Seldis translate ‘rendere luogo’ with ‘gave an opportunity for’, which effectively places emphasis on the sense of opportunity, but the idea of the cyclical returning to a former state of happiness is, inevitably, lost in translation. Boccaccio, Il Filostrato, p. 165.
Changeable Fortune is here something associated with the passing of time. Although Fortune is not explicitly personified, still the references to her mutability and her transformations in time seem, again, to be referring to the personified entity, traditionally fickle, and her turning wheel that was often considered in connection with the flow of time. Although not necessarily an agent from a grammatical point of view, the implications suggest that *Fortuna* means *Fortune*, and not simply *luck*.

The third instance can be found when Troiolo considers killing himself, believing that Criseida has died in his arms (when she has just fainted for sorrow, due to their imminent separation). He thinks that he might have better luck or Fortune in the afterlife, where, perhaps, he would be reunited with his beloved:

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forse di là miglior fortuna avraggio
con lei avendo de’ miei disir pace,
se di là s’ama, sí come io aggio
udito alcuna volta vi si face.  
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This statement comes within a lamentation to Jupiter and Fortune; Troiolo is trying to ascertain their will and decide whether to kill himself. If he is speaking to Fortune the goddess, the fact that he wonders whether he might have better Fortune in death might suggest that the two *Fortunes* here discussed are not exactly the same thing. The two words must have separate referents. *Fortuna* as it appears in this passage could then be translated as *luck*. And yet the fact that he is speaking to personified Fortune about Fortune implies that he is thinking in terms of causation. Perhaps one could consider *Fortuna* to refer here to the happy set of circumstances

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161 Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, IV, 166, 1–2, p. 304. [And the years, with changeable Fortune, cannot take these things away].


164 Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, IV, 121, p. 283.
brought about by the upward movement of Fortune’s wheel. Besides, as we have seen, Troiolo often associates Fortune’s favours with the fulfilment of his love for Criseida, as he does here. In this case, even if it could be translated as luck, *Fortuna* also implies the action of Fortune as agent or goddess.

Within the poem, then, the concept of luck tends to be expressed by Boccaccio with the word *ventura*. Although, as will see, *ventura* can also mean *Fortune*, the fact that *Fortuna* is never used to designate mere luck without agency clearly shows that Boccaccio does not use these words interchangeably after all. He is clearly aware of the differences between Fortune, chance and luck. However, in some cases, the actions of Fortune and fate seem to overlap, as we will shortly see.

### 2.1.3 *Fortune or Fate?*

Fortune and fate are logically distinct, even opposing concepts, if one considers the former as the goddess of chance, and the latter as a predetermined plan according to which things happen (usually due to a god, the Christian God, the three Fates or Parcae). Fortune, although often referring to a personified entity carrying out her own will, would logically exclude the idea of a preordained plan in human life, as such a concept does not allow for the existence of the arbitrary and unforeseeable that the idea of Fortune represents. And yet these two notions can indeed be more akin than logic alone would suggest. As we have seen, Fortune becomes God’s minister on earth for Dante, thus carrying out His divine providential plan. Besides, the circular motion of Fortune’s wheel is itself suggestive of a pattern that she follows. If after happiness sorrow is bound to come, and vice versa, her action would not seem to be entirely accidental. This is probably why Fortune and

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165 Of course, the movement of Fortune’s wheel does not apply to the afterlife, as she has only influence in this world. But the very idea of bringing peace to his carnal desires after death is, of course, erroneous from a Christian perspective. This type of incongruity seems to be typical of Troiolo.


167 Dietrich, *Death, Fate, and the Gods*.

168 As suggested in Buttay-Jutier, *Fortuna*, p. 87.
fate are very often merged and confused both in literature and in common speech,\textsuperscript{169} and the \textit{Filostrato} is not immune from the widespread overlapping, as a number of passages testify. Although such occurrences should not necessarily surprise us, some in particular betray a distinctly illogical perception of the forces determining the outcome of events. This may be regarded as an erroneous and imprecise use of the terms related to causation or, from a theological perspective and within a medieval context, could even be seen as a serious misunderstanding of the forces at work in this world.

As Criseida tries to convince Pandaro that she will not yield to Troiolo’s love, she prays her cousin to let her lead such a life as Fortune has prepared for her (‘chente Fortuna apparecchiata m’have’\textsuperscript{170}). ‘Apparecchiata’ suggests that there is a plan or pattern that Fortune has established for Criseida, and, since there is no reference to chance or the accidental and whimsical nature of Fortune, if one were to substitute ‘fortuna’ with ‘fato’ (fate) the meaning of this sentence would not be altered. On the contrary, \textit{fato} would seem to be a more appropriate lexical choice.

Why does Criseida attribute what happens to her to Fortune if she is thinking in terms of a preordained plan? The idea that the future is predetermined is precisely what we call \textit{fate}, and not \textit{Fortune}. Troiolo seems to show a similar understanding (or misunderstanding) of Fortune in the seventh book of the \textit{Filostrato}. Criseida has long since departed for the Greek camp and has not returned, breaking her promise. It is a dream that opens Troiolo’s eyes to her betrayal.\textsuperscript{171} After realising that she has given her heart to another man, he expresses his desperation to his loyal Pandaro:

\textsuperscript{169}Cioffari, \textit{Fortune and Fate from Democritus to St. Thomas Aquinas}, p. i.
\textsuperscript{170}Boccaccio, \textit{Filostrato}, II, 51, 2, p. 125.
This complaint against Fortune follows a major negative turn of events and the character wishes for death, as is often the case in literature. What is, perhaps, less usual is Troiolo’s peculiar expression of ‘fortuna’ leading him to an evil ‘sorte’. Sorte in Italian can mean fate, but not always. In some cases, it may in fact refer to a superior force determining the outcome of events capriciously and unforeseeably. Looking at the definition in the Grande dizionario della lingua italiana, what surprises is that, in fact, sorte would seem to mean both Fortune and destiny in different contexts, and, interestingly, most of the examples quoted date back to the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. In some instances, its use may denote determinism, while, in others, it seems to imply randomness and fickleness. If we take it to mean Fortune here, the expression is tautological. If we take it to mean destiny, it is perplexing. Fortune and fate are two separate agents, and they usually imply a rather different modus operandi, as we have seen, so it is not clear how one could lead to the other. Troiolo vividly expresses his distress and his rage: it is like a fire burning inside him. His passion has been transformed into fury, as it were. But he wishes to turn such rage against himself: he wants to die. By taking away Criseida, Fortune has effectively ended his pleasures (‘gioco’ clearly denotes, once more, the sensual nature of their love based on physical enjoyment). ‘Diletto’ is no longer used to refer to being with the woman. This term, strongly suggestive of

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173Grande dizionario della lingua italiana, s. v. ‘sorte’.
sensual love (amore per diletto), is here associated with death: ceasing to suffer is all the pleasure he can expect, since ‘noia’ and ‘dispetto’ are what life can now offer him (in contrast with ‘sollazzo’ and ‘diporto’ which he used to describe his happy love). These lexical choices seem to suggest effectively a reversal in Fortune, which readily recalls the turning of Fortune’s wheel. How do we explain, then, the problematic expression ‘la Fortuna a sí malvagia sorte / recato m’ha’? Surely, mentioning Fortune alone would have been as effective and the passage would have decidedly gained in clarity.

The problem is posed by the ambiguous use of sorte. The reason for its multiple meanings lies in its etymology. Sorte derives from the Latin sors, which refers to pieces of wood, usually joined with a rope or chain (sors derives from sēro, joining or binding together) that were thrown to the ground. The shapes that they thus formed were interpreted in order to tell the future. Therefore, originally this term referred to a way of foreseeing what was to come, whether this was believed to be determined by Fortune, destiny, or a god. Possibly, the idea of foretelling would better suit a belief in destiny, as it implies the existence of a predetermined plan rather than randomness. Can one foresee the action of whimsical Fortune? Ultimately, the origin of this word leaves room for argument. It could be seen, more generally, as the set of circumstances that will present themselves, no matter their causes. In the end, Troiolo’s contradiction is not necessarily as marked as one might have believed at first. His statement could simply mean that Fortune has led him to a miserable situation. Maybe Troiolo is not overtly contradicting himself here, but there are numerous instances in the poem in which the characters openly betray confusion as to the causes of what happens to them.

When lamenting her imminent departure, Criseida seems unsure as to what forces are to be blamed for her impending misery:

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174Boccaccio, Filostrato, IV, 45, 4–6, p. 242.
175Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana, ed. Ottorino Pianigiani (Roma: Società editrice Dante Alighieri di Albrighi e Segati, 1907), s. v. ‘sorte’.
176Grande dizionario della lingua italiana, s. v. ‘sorte’.
Ella diceva: – Lassa, sventurata, misera me dolente, ove vo io? Oh, trista me, che ’n mal punto fui nata, dove ti lascio, dolce l’amor mio? Deh, or foss’io nel nascere affogata, o non t’avessi, dolce mio disio, veduto mai, poi che si ria ventura e me a te, e te a me or fura.  

She often said: ‘Wretched, unlucky woman that I am, where shall I go? Woe is me; I was born at an evil hour. Where do I leave you, my sweet love? I would that I had drowned at birth or that I had never set eyes on you, since such evil fortune is parting us’.

She states that ventura does not allow for the lovers to be together. As we have seen, in previous instances of the use of this term Boccaccio seemed to employ it to indicate the positive or negative impact of events on the lives of the characters, without referring to causational forces. Here, instead, the term is clearly used in a new fashion. ‘Ventura’ is decidedly depicted as an agent: it is not a term simply used to describe positive or negative circumstances; it is the force responsible for driving the lovers apart. In this case, then, ventura seems to mean Fortune. If ventura is blamed, it is appropriate that Criseida should consider herself as sventurata. What is less appropriate is that she curses her birth with words that clearly refer to astrological determinism. ‘In mal punto fui nata’ means that she believes that the constellations at the time of her birth determined the course of her life. If she thinks that a negative conjunction of astral bodies doomed her to a miserable existence, then she should blame destiny or fate rather than vague ventura or whimsical Fortune. And yet, once more, we are stepping into the gray area in which the soverighties of these forces overlap. Of course, for the Church Fathers both Fortune and the influence of the stars would be nothing but ministers of the divine will, and no distinction would apply. And yet here Criseida’s complaint does not conform

178For the distinction between Fortune and astrological influences, and their common conflation in medieval literature, see Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature, pp. 76–78.
179Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature, p. 76.
to such doctrine (she is, after all, a pagan): cursing one’s birth is not a very Christian thing to do, nor is complaining about Fortune. One could think that the fact that ventura here has a meaning that contradicts the occurrences of this word previously analysed might be due to Boccaccio’s using Fortuna and ventura interchangeably; but, given Criseida’s misconstructions about the causes of her misery, it is more likely that the imprecise use of this term should be attributed to her. While riding towards the Greek camp, she betrays a similar confusion more openly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Italian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahi, cruel Giove, e Fortuna noiosa, dove me ne portate contra voglia?</td>
<td>Oh, cruel Jove, and wicked fortune, where are you leading me against my wishes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perché v’aggrada tanto la mia doglia?</td>
<td>Why do you so rejoice in my suffering?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here both Fortune and Jove are held responsible for her distress. But can they both act at the same time? If the greatest of the Olympian gods wanted Criseida to suffer and acted so that she would have to abandon her happy life in Troy, can this event be caused, at the same time, by random Fortune? As opposed as these agents may seem, they appear united here, rejoicing together at Criseida’s suffering. This characterisation of malevolent gods is, as we have seen, strongly pagan. Exactly the same overlapping of the action of Fortune and the greatest of the Olympian gods emerges when Troiolo, believing that Criseida has died of sorrow at the thought of having to leave him, is contemplating suicide. He clearly deems both Fortune and Jupiter to be responsible for her death, and he thinks that it is their will that he kill himself:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Italian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O cruel Giove, e tu Fortuna ria, a quel che voi volete, ecco ch’io vegno; tolta m’avete Criseda mia, la qual credetti che con altro ingegno</td>
<td>O cruel Jove, and you evil Fortune, here I come to do what you will; you have taken my Criseida away from me,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, V, 6, 6–8, p. 309.
tor mi doveste, e dove ella si sia
ora non so, ma'l corpo suo qui morto
veggio da voi a grandissimo torto.\textsuperscript{181}

whom I believed you would
remove by other means, and
where she is now I know not,
but here I see her body
rendered lifeless by you, with
great injustice.

Again, Fortune and Jupiter seem to act simultaneously. No distinction is offered
between the two agents; they are united in their actions, which are unexpected, cruel
and unjust. Like Criseida, Troiolo here offers a markedly pagan vision of the causes
behind things: misfortune is brought about by the malice of the gods.

\textit{Less overtly pagan but, perhaps, more confused as to causation is Pandaro in
the following passage. After informing Criseida of Troiolo’s love for the first time,
he exhorts the woman to seize this favourable \textit{ventura}, and juxtaposes her happy
situation with his miserable state:}

\begin{quote}
Lascia me pianger che’n malora nacqui,
ch’a Dio al mondo e a Fortuna spiacqui.\textsuperscript{182}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Leave weeping to me, since
I was born at an evil hour,
despised by God, the world
and Fortune.
\end{quote}

Again, God and Fortune are presented as working side-by-side, even though this
time a more generic \textit{Dio} replaces Jove. God, the world, and Fortune despise
Pandaro, which is, implicitly, the cause of his constant failures in love. Interestingly,
Pandaro states that he was borne in ‘malora’, at an evil hour; therefore he seems to
believe in astrological determinism, like Criseida.\textsuperscript{183} Pandaro simultaneously holds
responsible for his misery God, Fortune, the stars, and the world (the latter
suggesting, possibly, worldly factors in addition to superhuman forces). It seems that

\begin{footnotes}
\item{181} Boccaccio, \textit{Filostrato}, IV, 121, 2–8, p. 283.
\item{182} Boccaccio, \textit{Filostrato}, II, 44, 7–8, p. 122.
\item{183} To be \textit{born in malora} means, to be borne under the influence of an evil star, and this is not an
isolated instance in Boccaccio’s works. See \textit{Grande dizionario della lingua italiana}, s. v. ‘malora’.
\end{footnotes}
he is blaming all possible culprits for what is happening to him (except himself),
irrespective of the logical impossibility of all of these factors acting at once.
Similarly to Troiolo and Criseida, Pandaro does not seem to perceive these
theological and philosophical incongruities. Multiple causation appears, again,
shortly afterwards, when he is still trying to convince the woman to yield:

Tu che farai? Deh, dilmi, starai altera,
e lascerai colui, che sé non cura
per amar te, a morte tanto fera
venire? O reo distino, o rea ventura
ch’un si fatto uom per te amando pera!\(^{184}\)

What will you do? Will you be proud and allow this man, who cares not for
himself because of his love for you, to come to such a cruel death? O cruel
destiny, O evil fortune that such a man should die for your love.

Here ventura cannot be considered as a term with no relation to causation, since
Pandaro is openly complaining about its actions. What does it mean then? If we take
it as signifying Fortune, then here is another odd example of multiple and
contradicting causes. If we take it to mean fate, Pandaro is betraying, once more,
confusion as to the reason why things are happening: destiny and Fortune can hardly
be regarded as simultaneous causes.

Why does ventura appear to be used with a different meaning in these
passages? If Boccaccio showed awareness of the differences between Fortuna and
ventura in the excerpts analysed earlier on, why is this not the case here? Moreover,
why are Fortune, the gods, God, and the stars all deemed responsible for what is
happening? Has Boccaccio forgotten his theology, and his Boethius? Although this
is unlikely, one could argue that he has not been paying attention to the problem of
causation. On the other hand, a more obvious explanation is possible: these passages
aim at showing us something about the characters who utter them. The logical and

\(^{184}\)Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, II, 64, 1–5, pp. 131–132.
theological confusion displayed by Troiolo, Pandaro and Criseida show us their own misconstruction of reality. After all, they are pagans. As such, they are denied the knowledge of God, and it is, therefore, appropriate that they should display a certain amount of confusion as to the causes of events. Most importantly, their error has the important function of showing the reader Troiolo’s, Criseida’s and Pandaro’s limits. We should be aware of the fact that their vision of reality is distorted.185

2.1.4 Occasio

Patch argues that the conception of Fortune in the Filostrato is strictly pagan, and that this work provides an essentially fatalistic vision of life in accordance with the pre-Christian setting.186 This may appear true when considering some of the characters’ complaints against Fortune: the very idea of blaming an external random force for whatever happens to us is, in itself, a way of rejecting responsibility for events in our lives. At the same time, Patch’s understanding of Fortune in the poem largely simplifies the complex and multifaceted portrayal of this force in the Filostrato. Some passages in particular provide a representation of Fortune that is far from being fatalistic, suggesting that man can influence and even counteract the action of Fortune. The chief exponent of this vision of Fortune is Pandaro. He often urges both Troiolo and Criseida to become active agents by assuming control over what is happening to them. When trying to convince Criseida to accept and reciprocate Troiolo’s love, he recommends that she take action:

185Interestingly, the narrator’s view of Fortune is not entirely consistent either, which might say something about his reliability. At the very end of the poem as he states that ‘fortuna suo corso facea’, Fortune followed its course (Boccaccio, Filostrato, 25, 2, p. 415), and ‘non avea la Fortuna disposto’, Fortune had planned otherwise (Boccaccio, Filostrato, VIII, 26, 7, p. 416). Like previous statements by the characters of his poem, these expressions might be seen as merging the action of Fortune with that of fate (albeit not as explicitly as in passages previously analysed), by describing the former as something which follows a plan or course. May the Christian narrator share in his pagan characters’ confusion as to the causes of events? If this is indeed the case, then he may not be as enlightened as he would like the reader to believe.

186Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature, pp. 31–32.
Here ‘ventura’ seems to acquire a new meaning, which is not necessarily in contradiction with the one it assumed before, when expressing the positive impact of events in the life of the characters. This word refers to favourable circumstances. In this case, it means opportunity, which is in fact one of its possible acceptations. The Grande dizionario della lingua italiana uses precisely this passage from the Filostrato, among others, to illustrate this possible meaning of ventura. What is different from the occurrences of this word analysed above is that here ventura is personified. However, this is not the persona of Fortune with her wheel; it is rather the embodiment of Opportunity or Occasion. Ventura as favourable Opportunity is something that needs to be grasped while she is approaching, because once she has passed it is too late. Criseida must seize Occasion while she has the chance to do so (i.e. while Troiolo is in love with her); if she waits too long she will only have herself to blame for not acting at the propitious moment.

The idea that there is a limited amount of time to seize favourable Opportunity has a long literary tradition. Cicero expressed this concept in the following way in De inventione I, 27: ‘Occasio est pars temporis, habens in se alicuius rei idoneam faciendi aut non faciendi opportunitatem’. Typically, the ancient personification of Opportunity (Occasio in Latin and Kairos in Greek), was depicted with a forelock, while the back of her head was bald, to signify that one

188 Grande dizionario della lingua italiana, s. v. ‘ventura’.
189 As quoted in Wittkower, ‘Chance, Time and Virtue’, p. 313. [An occasion is a moment in time which has within itself the suitable opportunity to do or not to do a certain thing].
190 Kiefer, Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 196.
can only grab her while she is approaching (‘vegnente’ in the passage from the *Filostrato*) as it is impossible to hold onto her once she has turned away.\(^{191}\) This way of considering good Fortune strongly puts the emphasis on the actions of the individual. For a situation to produce a positive outcome, a favourable opportunity has to present itself, but then it is up to us to act so as not to waste the occasion. As Pandaro stresses, one can take advantage of good Opportunity if one knows how to seize her (‘s’ei la sa pigliare’). ‘Sa’ stresses the importance of the abilities of the individual. Conversely, the one who fails in securing Opportunity has only himself or herself to blame. Far from being fatalistic, this passage puts the emphasis on the importance of acting promptly in order to secure what we want.

Pandaro expresses a similar outlook when he tries to convince Troiolo to elope with Criseida in order to avoid their imminent separation:

\[\text{Tu non hai da rapir donna che sia dal tuo voler lontana, ma è tale, che di ciò che farai, contenta fia, e se di ciò seguisse troppo male, o biasimo di te, tu hai la via di riuscirne tosto, ch’è cotale: renderla indietro. La Fortuna aiuta chiunque ardisce e timidi rifiuta.}\(^{192}\)

The woman you have to kidnap is not an enemy to your desires, but she will welcome your decision. If the outcome should be misery or should she blame you, you can promptly resolve the situation by returning her. Fortune helps whoever is brave and refuses the fearful.

Here we have *Fortuna* instead of *ventura*, but the ideas expressed are strongly reminiscent of the previous passage about Opportunity. Troiolo has to act with boldness if he wants to subdue Fortune. Although the reference to Occasion is not as explicit as in the earlier exhortation by Pandaro to Criseida (there is no reference to


\(^{192}\)Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, IV, 73, p. 255.
timing here), the idea that one has to act decisively in order to secure a favourable outcome definitely suggests an understanding of Fortune as something that can be affected by human action. The idea that Fortune aids the brave was commonplace, and the proverbial expression can be found in both Virgil (Aeneid, X, 284: ‘Audentis Fortuna iuvat’) and Ovid (Ars Amatoria, I, 608: ‘audentem Forsque Venusque iuvat’ and Fasti, II, 782: ‘Audentes forsne deusne iuvet’). One should also note that there can be a logical reason for using ‘ventura’ in the first passage and ‘Fortuna’ in the second. In the earlier excerpt, Pandaro is speaking of Fortune seen as a positive opportunity, whereas in the second ‘Fortuna’ is used to refer to the goddess or personification, who can be both favourable and unfavourable. Therefore, this term refers here not so much to the specific circumstances but to the overall force or entity and her modus operandi.

In these two passages ventura and Fortuna are used to describe a new aspect of Fortune. She is no longer conceived as an external, all-powerful force but rather as something that can be controlled and affected by human action. Courage and the ability to recognise promptly a favourable opportunity and act accordingly are presented as determining factors in one’s existence. Fortune has still the power to bring about favourable or unfavourable circumstances, but her action does not seem, ultimately, to determine the outcome of events. Thus, this notion of Fortune is used to express a vision of life which is definitely not fatalistic, and that will later be predominant in Renaissance thought, as is exemplified in Machiavelli’s Il Principe. It is one of the qualities necessary to good leaders to be able to recognise when Fortune presents a favourable set of circumstances and to take action, as we will further discuss when dealing with Shakespeare’s version of the Troilus and Cressida story. Pandaro, therefore, appears as a character with a decidedly active view of the relationship between man and Fortune. Far from being fatalistic, he believes that man can determine the outcome of events if he acts with boldness at the

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193Boccaccio, Filostrato, p. 255, note 73.
appropriate time. Pandaro has a practical approach to life, as he tries to make the best of whatever circumstances present themselves, and suggests his friends to do the same.

He is not the only character with this outlook. Criseida too expresses a similar notion of Fortune as she tries to comfort Troiolo after the news of her imminent departure:

Dunque prendi conforto, e la Fortuna
Col dare il dosso vinci e rendi stanca;
non soggiacette a lei giamaia nessuna
persona in cui trovasse anima franca.
Seguiamo il corso suo, fingiti alcuna
andata in questo mezzo, e’n quella manca
li tuoi sospiri, ch’al decimo giorno,
senza alcun fallo, qui farò ritorno.\textsuperscript{196}

Therefore take comfort, tire out Fortune and win her over by turning your back on her. She could never conquer a strong and brave spirit. Let us follow her course, imagine some journey in the meantime and thus cease your sighs. Without fail I will be back on the tenth day.

Not only is it possible to affect the outcome of events by understanding when Fortune is favourable and taking immediate action; Criseida suggests that man can even fight against misfortune and resist her with perseverance and strength. By enduring her blows with courage, a strong person endowed with a brave spirit can resist her. This notion too, even though expressed more vividly, can be found in Machiavelli’s work,\textsuperscript{197} as we will see. It is interesting, however, that Criseida is suggesting endurance and patience rather than action (she refuses to elope with Troiolo, as Pandaro suggested he do).\textsuperscript{198} This may betray her tendency to adapt to circumstances that present themselves, rather than to oppose them directly. Undoubtedly, Troiolo never proves to have the qualities necessary to win over

\textsuperscript{196}Boccaccio, \textit{Filostrato}, IV, 154, pp. 298–299.
\textsuperscript{197}Machiavelli, \textit{Il Principe}, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{198}We will return to this passage in the next chapter, where we will see how Chaucer translates it.
Fortune or to oppose her actions. The reader may indeed have the impression that if he had acted more bravely and put to a better use the time he spent wasting away in tears, the outcome of the story could have been quite different. But this is possibly the reaction of the modern reader alone, as Troiolo’s tears and lamentations fit well within the elegiac tradition that the poems seeks to adhere to. After all, Filostrato himself had anticipated that the style of his poem was going to be ‘assai pietoso’ (extremely pitiful). Nevertheless, this portrayal of Fortune strongly juxtaposes Criseida and Pandaro with Troiolo. Unlike him, they strive to adjust to circumstances and influence events rather than complain about Fortune’s disfavour. In this sense, Patch’s description of Fortune in the poem as a deterministic force can possibly better suit Troiolo’s understanding of this concept rather than the portrayal of Fortune in this work as a whole. Criseida in particular seems well able to adjust to her surrounding. Like Fortune herself, she constantly changes. Her betrayal could be seen in this light, thus, arguably, characterising her in a positive fashion as someone who is better able to cope with reality than the more naïve Troiolo who, paralysed by his own sorrow, is utterly incapable of any constructive action.

The foregoing exploration of the diverse roles that Fortune plays within the Filostrato and of the variety of ways in which she is described has revealed that the portrayal of this concept in the poem is much more complex, as well as coherent, than critics such as Branca argued. Fortune appears in a number of roles. First and foremost, she is an entity in charge of worldly goods, partly complying with Dante’s influential way of assimilating her in a Christian worldview. When Fortune is described in this manner, Boccaccio always uses Fortuna. Usually, we see her in her negative aspect, when she denies her precious gifts to the characters (or when they fear she might do so). Her favours are consistently identified with love, and, more precisely, with carnal satisfaction. This is, on the one hand, appropriate to the

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200 Boccaccio, Filostrato, Proemio, p. 56.
202 Such a view could be considered to contradict the Boethian reading of the poem so far suggested, but this is not necessarily the case. The main subject of the Boethian critique presented in the poem is Troiolo: it is he who bases his happiness on worldly love. Pandaro and Criseida appear to be more willing to adapt to current circumstances; therefore they are more free and active than Troiolo.
poem’s subject matter and, on the other, it complies with the traditional idea that Fortune is responsible for worldly things (one of them being carnal love, as opposed to spiritual love). The characters’ complaints about their misfortune ultimately mirror the fact that they base their happiness on physical pleasures.

Fortune also appears as luck, in passages that do not consider the causes that lie behind events but simply qualify the events themselves as positive or negative for the characters involved. Aptly, Boccaccio consistently uses *ventura* in such instances. *Ventura* is also used to refer to the notion of a favourable occasion, which is, again, appropriate. When describing Occasion as a personified entity, *Fortuna* is also used. These occurrences reveal, once more, something about the characters of this poem: Pandaro and Criseida, in contrast with Troiolo, have a more positive and less passive understanding of the relationship between man and Fortune. Courage, endurance, and the ability to recognise a good opportunity and seize it can determine the favourable outcome of a situation. Man can win over Fortune if he is strong enough. These passages characterise Pandaro and Criseida as more active characters than Troiolo, who tends to complain passively about Fortune instead. Finally, those passages that betray confusion as to the causes behind what happens reveal the misunderstandings of the pagan characters rather than constituting inaccurate or loose lexical choices on the part of Boccaccio. Ultimately, all of the instances in which Fortune appears are of great relevance to our perception of the protagonists of the poem: the way in which they speak of Fortune reveals something about their perception of reality and their character. Next, we will try to establish to what extent the representation of Fortune in the poem relates to the narrator’s description of this concept in the proem. If she is a mentor for him, can she be considered as a teacher for Troiolo as well?
3 Is Fortune a Mentor for Troiolo?

As we have seen, Fortune is never explicitly referred to as a moral guide within the poem itself, but when considering the development of the story, there are numerous clues that may suggest that Fortune can indeed be considered to act as a mentor for Troiolo as well as for the narrator, even if Troiolo fails to take her counsel. Troiolo seems to commit a moral mistake that is very similar to that described by Filostrato in the prologue. The poem’s conclusion suggests that his crucial error was to trust Criseida.203 This, however, does not necessarily place the blame on her. Trusting Criseida, thus basing his happiness on a changeable and unreliable woman, becomes itself a symbol of trusting fickle Lady Fortune. Troiolo is the one who should be blamed for this mistake. Those who trust in Fortune’s gifts are, from a Boethian perspective, responsible for making the wrong moral choices, as Lady Philosophy teaches.204 Is there, then, anything in Troiolo’s behaviour to suggest that he may be blamed? Should his falling in love with Criseida be seen in a positive light, as was the case in Stilnovistic poetry, or is there anything in the poem to suggest otherwise? Is his love as pure as he seems to think?205

Some critics regard Troiolo as a kind of lover-poet,206 especially considering his role as an alter ego for the narrator. Troiolo’s conception of love is ambiguous throughout the poem, however. In some passages, he uses a language fitting Stilnovistic tradition, although the type of love that he truly pursues and that prevails in his story is the amore per diletto. Troiolo’s ambiguous attitude can best be seen in the letter he writes to Criseida in order to declare his feelings for her. The letter is, allegedly, a literary production of Troiolo the poet. He describes both Criseida and his love in terms that seem appropriate to the dolce stil nuovo:

204Boethius, Anicici Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio, Liber II.
205Boccaccio, Filostrato, IV, 163–166, pp. 303–305.
Io non posso fuggir quel ch’Amor vuole,之意:
il qual più vil di me già fece ardito,
ed el mi strigne a scriver le parole
che tu vedrai, e vuol pure obbedito
esser da me si come quegli esser suole;
per ciò se per me fia in ciò fallito,
lui ne riprendi, ed a me perdonanza
ti priego doni, dolce mia speranza.

L’alta bellezza tua, e lo splendore
De’ tuoi vaghi occhi e de’ costumi ornati,
l’onestà cara e’l donnesco valore,
li modi e gli atti più ch’altro lodati,
nella mia mente hanno lui per signore
e te per donna in tal guida fermati,
ch’altro accidente mai fuor che la morte
a tirarvine fuor non saria forte.  

I cannot escape what Love wants. He has given
courage to more cowardly men than me, and he now
presses me to write the words you will see,
expecting to be obeyed by me as he is by all.
Therefore, should I fail in my task, I pray you to
blame him and grant me pardon, my sweet hope.

Your great beauty, the splendour of your fair eyes
and your comely manners, your dear honesty and
womanly valour, your acts and countenance, praised
above all, have proclaimed him my lord and you my
mistress in such a fashion that nothing but death shall
end your sovereignty over me.

Trojolo professes his submission to Love, who has urged him to serve and praise the woman. He commends her beauty, her eyes, her valour and honesty (i.e. chastity), thus reproducing a traditional pattern of the Stilnovistic tradition. But can he really be considered a follower of the dolce stil nuovo? The very beginning of the letter is emblematic of its ambivalent attitude towards traditional love poetry.

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Troiolo states that he cannot *dare salute* the woman (literally giving/wishing good health, in the sense of greeting), which one was traditionally expected to do when beginning to address the beloved. As he is deprived of *salute* until the woman grants it to him, he cannot give *salute* to anyone else. Dante in his *Vita Nuova* used the term with the ambiguous meaning of salutation and salvation. Alfie suggests that Boccaccio’s use of the term here is ironic. Troiolo is using a word dear to Dante to imply the ‘satisfaction of his corporeal desires’. The pun on ‘salute’ is quite evident to the careful reader and has been noted before, both in this occurrence and in other works by Boccaccio. There seems to be consensus that this is an ironic use of the term that aims at parodying its occurrence in the *Vita Nuova*. The fact that Troiolo’s letter opens in this ironic fashion should warn us that his use of Stilnovistic and, especially, Dantean literary elements is at least peculiar. After the more traditional second and third stanzas previously quoted, the fourth seems to continue in a very Stilnovistic manner:

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210Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, p. 148, note 96. As Bruni notes, the use of *salute* here gestures, on the one hand, to Dante’s understanding of the term in the *Vita Nuova* and, on the other, reproduces the appropriate opening of letters according to the traditions of the *ars dictandi*. Bruni, *Boccaccio: l’invenzione della letteratura mezzana*, p. 164.
211Alfie, ‘Love and Poetry’, p. 357
212Alfie, ‘Love and Poetry’.
E che ch’io faccia, l’immagine bella
Di te sempre nel cor reca un pensiero,
Ch’ogni altro caccia che d’altro favella
Che sol di te, benché d’altro nel vero
Dell’anima non caglia, fatta ancella
Del tuo valor, nel quale io spero:
E’il nome tuo m’è sempre nella bocca
E’il cor con più disio ognor mi tocca. 214

Whatever I do, your fair image constantly brings the thought of you in my heart, removing any other that does not speak of you. Nothing else matters to my soul, which is now a servant to your valour in which I hope. And your name is always in my mouth; and a stronger desire always touches my heart.

The colon provides a clear visual and syntactic break between the first six lines and the last two, which is further emphasised by the anaphora of ‘E’il’ in lines seven and eight. The lexical choices also show a significant difference between the two sets of verses. In the first group there is a prevalence of abstract nouns and verbs related to the act of thinking, whereas in the second group we have a decidedly concrete noun (‘bocca’, mouth) and a verb related to touch (‘tocca’, touches) which are in the prominent position of the final rhyming couplet of the stanza. All these stylistic choices foreground ‘bocca’ and ‘tocca’ and their extremely physical and sensual connotations, exalted precisely because they are unexpected after the preceding lines. Troiolo, after complying for a while with the images and language of love poetry, seems to begin to betray a stronger kind of desire, which emerges more openly in the succeeding stanza. His soul is tormented by a fire that does not give him rest. He cries and burns. When he asks again for salute in the final line of this stanza, even those readers who might have had some doubts as to the meaning of this term at the beginning of the letter cannot but realise that what he is seeking is carnal satisfaction. 215 Criseida is the only one who can bring an end to his sorrow.

215Boccaccio, Filostrato, II, 100, 8, p. 151.
He never openly states how, but he makes sure that she will discover what he implies:

Or tu sei savia: s’io non dico appieno,
Intenderai, so, me’ ch’io non ragiono.\(^2\)

You are wise; If I do not say in full you will comprehend better than I can express.

The final stanza of the letter professes, again, his submission to Amor, and affirms his hope that his lord may convince Criseida to love him back and make her his, forever.\(^3\)

In this epistle Troiolo does not simply express his love, as any Stilnovistic poet ought to do,\(^4\) but he explicitly asks to be loved back, clearly hinting at a physical satisfaction of his desires. The Stilnovistic traits of the letter would simply be a means to an end. However, Troiolo appears to be painfully aware of his own contradictions:

Di che Troiol con Pandaro talvolta
si dolea forte: – Lasso me – dicendo –
el m’ha Criseida si l’anima tolta
co’ suoi begli’ occhi, che morire intendo
per lo disio fervente che s’affolta
si sopra il cuor nel quale io ardo e’ncendo.

Thereof Troiolo often did complain, saying to Pandaro: ‘Woe is me, Criseida has so stolen my soul with her pretty eyes that I wish to die because of the fervent desire that overtakes my heart, that burns so. What shall I do? I should wish for nothing more than her kindness.

\(^4\)Surdich, ‘Il dolce stil novo’, p. 44.
ma l’apetito cupido vorrebbe
non so che più, si mal son regolati
gli ardor che’l muovon, e nol crederebbe
chi nol provasse, quanto mi tormenta
tal fiamma che maggiore ognor diventa.

Che farò dunque? Io non so che mi fare,
se non chiamarti, Criseida bella;
tu sola sei che mi puoi aiutare,
tu, valorosa donna, tu sei quella
che sola puoi il mio foco attutare,
o dolce luce e del mio cor fiammella:
or stess’io teco una notte d’inverno
cento cinquanta poi stessi in inferno. 219

She looks at me and suffers me to look honestly at her;
this should be enough for my burning desires, but my lustful appetite would wish for something more, so unbalanced are the flames that move it. Who does not feel it cannot know how this ever growing flame torments me.

What shall I do? I know not what to do but call your name, my beautiful Criseida. You are the only one who can aid me; you, virtuous woman, you are the only one who can control these flames, O sweet light and flare of my heart, I’d spend one hundred and fifty nights in hell if I could now spend one winter’s night with you’.

Troiolo is clearly aware of the Stilnovistic conception of love: the contemplation of his beloved should fulfil his desires. But that is not the case; the flames of passion are almost unnaturally strong and, in the end, he decides to abandon himself to the ‘apetito cupido’. He seems to be perfectly conscious of the consequences of this choice. Hell would be waiting for him. This may indeed seem an excessive punishment for worldly love, but it is adequate if considering the proem. Troiolo’s is
no small flaw. He substitutes what should be the object of happiness (i.e. the contemplation of the woman that elevates the human spirit up to God) with physical pleasure. In this sense, the choice between contemplating Criseida and surrendering to his passion for her is indeed choosing between salvation and perdition, heaven and hell. The character seems to be aware of this, even though limiting his punishment in the underworld to one hundred and fifty days is indeed a theological misconstruction (he is, after all, a pagan). As Dante teaches, there is no leaving hell.\textsuperscript{220}

Troiolo’s dilemma of whether to abandon himself to his passion is also expressed in his recurrent doubt as to whether Criseida is a goddess or a woman.\textsuperscript{221} A similar dilemma features in the \textit{Teseida} as well,\textsuperscript{222} and will be famously reproduced by Chaucer in the \textit{Knight’s Tale}.\textsuperscript{223} In Troiolo’s case, considering Criseida as a woman and loving her as such might imply a physical understanding of love, whereas choosing to worship and venerate her would, instead, suggest a more spiritual and contemplative vision of love akin to the Stilnovistic tradition of the angelic woman. Conversely, one could consider thinking about the woman as a goddess as an instance of idolatry and a sign of misunderstanding the worldly as the divine, but given the insistence on Dantean references throughout the poem I believe that the first interpretation should be applied here. Troiolo’s doubts disappear during his first, long sought for, meeting with Criseida:

\begin{quote}
A cui Troiolo disse: – Donna, bella, sola speranza e ben della mia mente, sempre davanti m’è stata la stella del tuo bel viso splendido e lucente; e stata m’è più cara particella questa, che’l mio palagio certamente, e dimandar perdono a ciò non tocca. –
\end{quote}

To which Troiolo replied:

\begin{quote}
‘Beautiful woman, only hope and treasure of my mind, the star of your radiant and splendid face has always been before me. And this was always dearer to me than my
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{220}Dante, \textit{Inferno}, Canto III, v. 8.

\textsuperscript{221}See for instance Boccaccio, \textit{Filostroto}, I, 38, 5, p. 88; IV, 139, 4–5, p. 291.

\textsuperscript{222}Hollander, \textit{Boccaccio’s Two Venuses}, p. 54.

As in Troiolo’s first letter to Criseida, this passage features a sudden and unexpected change from a seemingly Stilnovistic mode to a more sensual understanding of love. The lover’s words in the first seven lines express an extremely ethereal vision of love with a vocabulary appropriate to the *dolce stil nuovo*. The woman is a star that gives hope and guidance. There is nothing physical or concrete in his description of her. And yet his last word is ‘tocca’, to touch. Even if in this occurrence this verb is part of a figurative expression not literally related to the physical action of touching, still its strong physical associations come to the reader as an anticipation of the significant change that is going to take place in the last line: after such an ethereal and almost mystical preamble, he takes her in his arms. The imagery consistent with Stilnovistic love of the first seven lines dissolves in an extremely sensual kiss. Again, exactly as in the previous excerpt from Troiolo’s letter, it is the strongly erotic rhyme *tocca-bocca* that finalises this transition from ethereal love to physical passion.

Troiolo chooses earthly love above spiritual Love, and this choice does not seem to be directly criticised by the narrator. On the contrary, the description of their first night together can easily be considered as a celebration of worldly love and a direct criticism of the ethereal interpretation provided by the *Stilnovisti* poets. And yet Troiolo still has to suffer the consequences of his choice: by basing his happiness on something as unstable as physical pleasure, he has submitted his happiness to the wheel of Fortune and he will have to lose what he has gained in accordance with Boethian thought. In this light, Fortune can, indeed, be considered as a constructive

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force, showing Troiolo the unstable nature of worldly love, even though this function is not recognised by Troiolo. He does not seem to be able to learn anything from his misfortune; on the contrary, he appears to be hopelessly moving toward self-destruction. While on the one hand this may suggest that, if Fortune is indeed a mentor, she is not a good one, on the other she may be perceived as carrying out her didactic function towards the readers rather than towards the characters. This poem undoubtedly shows the dangers of physical love and of the substitution of physical pleasure for the higher good.

4 Conclusion

Far from being generic and superficial, as Branca argued, the representation of Fortune in the Filostrato follows a precise pattern. After scrutiny, it is evident that Boccaccio chooses his words carefully, and is aware of the differences between Fortune, fate, chance and luck. Within the poem, Fortune reveals a variety of aspects, and it is true that her portrayal is not homogenous. She is primarily a minister of worldly goods. In this guise, her actions are sometimes attributed to mere chance, while in other instances her role could possibly be construed as God’s minister as envisaged by Dante. In other occurrences, however, she appears to be acting out of envy and cruelty, which does not comply with a Christian understanding of Fortune and more readily reminds us, instead, of the whimsical and capricious action of a pagan deity. Usually ventura is not used to refer to a force, minister or goddess, but in a more colloquial fashion, simply meaning good or bad luck with no philosophical or theological implications. Elsewhere Fortune appears as a synonym for fate, and her action is often associated with that of Love, Zeus, the gods, the stars, and even, anachronistically, with a seemingly Christian God. Finally, the notion of Fortune as Occasion is also present, in passages that betray a markedly more optimistic attitude towards Fortune: with strength and willpower, one can hope to master her and influence the outcome of events.
This extraordinary variety of forms, meanings and implications related to the concept of Fortune within the poem may seem to defy an attempt to provide a logical and comprehensive reading of it. But this is not the case here. What we read on the page is mediated through the characters’ viewpoints; these varying perceptions of Fortune are their own. Their confusion is, possibly, that of pagans who lack the theological knowledge necessary to understand what Fortune really is. However, one does not have to be a pagan to misunderstand and misuse the word Fortune. This clearly emerges when considering other works by Boccaccio. In the *De casibus virorum illustrium*\(^{229}\) he shows more explicitly his ideas on Fortune. In the proem, he declares his intention to write a book that may be useful to princes and leaders in general, and he wonders how to best accomplish this purpose.

Sane cum tales, obscenis sueti voluptatibus, difficile animos demonstrationibus prestare consueverint, et lepiditate hystoriarum capi non numquam, exemplis agendum ratus sum eis describere quid Deus omnipotens, seu –ut eorum loquar more – Fortuna, in elatos possit et fecerit.\(^{230}\)

No doubt these men, used as they are to obscene pleasures, seldom pay attention to sermons, while they are, sometimes, prone to listen to tales. Therefore I thought that the best way to proceed was to use examples, describing to these people what God the almighty (or Fortune, to use their language) can do and did against those who were at the apex of power.

Fortune would seem to be, for Boccaccio as for many medieval authors,\(^{231}\) nothing more than the action of God in disguise. Common imagery and ignorance cause Fortune to be invested with the power of directing events, whereas there is no such agent. This may remind us of Lady Philosophy’s comments about chance in Aristotle’s *Physics*, as mentioned above.\(^{232}\) Interestingly, in the passage from the *De casibus* this error is primarily identified as a problem of language. People are so


\(^{230}\)Boccaccio, *De casibus virorum illustrium*, p. 10.


used to the term *Fortune* that it is hard to employ it properly. The characters in the *Filostrato* partake of this common mistake.

Something more about the author’s understanding of Fortune may be found in the *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia.*\(^{233}\) As he analyses Dante’s *Commedia*, the author often shares with us his own beliefs. In his commentary on Canto VII, Boccaccio’s views on Fortune openly emerge. Although this work was composed much later than the *Filostrato* and Boccaccio’s idea of Fortune may have evolved in the interim, still this passage may explain the use of Fortune in the early poem:

> In questa parte l’autore, quanto più può, secondo il costume poetico parla, li quali spesse volte fanno le cose insensate, non altrimenti che le sensate, parlare e adoperare, ed alle cose spirituali danno forma corporale, e, che è ancora più, alle passioni nostre aproprian deità e danno forma come se veramente cosa umana e corporea fossero: il che qui l’autore usa, mostrando la fortuna avere sentimento di deità; con ciò sia cosa che, come appresso apparirà, questi accidenti non possano avvenire in quella cosa la quale qui l’autore nomina “Fortuna”, se poeticamente fingendo non s’attribuiscono […]

> Come molti per avventura abbian creduto o credano, io estimo questa ministra dei beni temporalì non essere altro se non l’universale effetto de’ vari movimenti de’ cieli, li quali movimenti si credono esser causati dal nono cielo, e il movimento uniforme di quello esser causato dalla divina mente […]

> E dicesi dato ministro, più tosto a dimostrazione che cosa possa essere questo nome “fortuna” attribuito a questi mutamenti delle cose che perché alcun ministerio vi bisogni, se non essa medesima operazion de’ cieli. […]

> Ed esso effetto non è altro che permutazioni delle cose prodotte da’ cieli, le quali, non avendo stabilità le cose da’ quali causate sono, né esse similmente possono avere stabilità […]

> Ora hanno gli uomini a questo effetto posto nome “fortuna” a beneplacito, come quasi a tutte l’altre è stato posto; e, secondo che le cose secondo i nostri

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piaceri o contrarie n’avvengono, le chiamano “buona fortuna” o “mala fortuna”.

In this section the author, as much as he can, speaks conforming to poetic fashion. Poets often represent insentient entities acting and speaking as if they were living creatures, and give physical form to spiritual things; and they even portray like deities our passions and give them shape as if they really were human and tangible things; this is what our author does here, as he describes fortune like a goddess. However, as it will soon become clear, these accidents cannot be properly attributed to that thing the author calls “Fortune”, unless we consider this a poetic way of describing them. […]

As many perhaps believed and still do, I think that this minister of temporal goods is nothing but the universal effect of all the movements of the skies. These are believed to be caused by the ninth sky, whose unvarying motion is ultimately generated by the divine intellect […]

This effect is described as a minister not so much because a minister is needed, everything being caused by the movements of the skies, but rather to give a meaning to this name “fortune” that is usually attributed to these permutations of things. […]

And this effect is nothing but the permutations of the things generated by the skies which, since their causes are in constant motion, cannot themselves be stable. […]

Men arbitrarily called this effect “fortune”, as almost all things have been given an aleatory name. Depending on whether events are conforming to our wishes or not, we call them “good fortune” or “bad fortune”.


235For another, recently published translation, see Giovanni Boccaccio, *Boccaccio’s Expositions on Dante’s Comedy*, trans. Michael Papio (Toronto: Buffalo, NY, 2009). I have decided to use my own translation even after consulting Papio’s because, although his work must be commended for its elegance, he does not always capture the precise meaning of the original version in this passage. He begins the second section of the excerpt with ‘Despite what many may perhaps have believed and still do, I believe […]’, but Boccaccio’s sentence does not suggest that he was distancing himself from what other authors usually believed about Fortune (‘come’ means ‘as’, rather than ‘despite’). On the contrary, Boccaccio is here suggesting that the opinion that Fortune is nothing but the movements of the skies was rather common. Papio also translates ‘non avendo stabilità le cose da’ quali causate sono’, as ‘things that lack the stability of their creators’, which means the opposite. Boccaccio states that the effects described are not stable because their causes are themselves in motion. Most importantly, the translation Papio provides does not quite capture the way in which Boccaccio thinks
Truly, there is no such thing as Fortune. What happens in this world is a direct consequence of the movements of the skies, which derive from God’s will. What we call Fortune is not really an agent; it is our erroneous or poetic way of describing the causes of things, while in truth everything is due to God.

Boccaccio was not alone in viewing Fortune in this light. Even Petrarch, after having extensively dealt with *fortuna* in his works (notably in *De remediis utriusque fortunae*), revealed in a letter to a friend that he had been misguided in dealing with Fortune in such terms as, truly, there is no such force:

Io miserabile peccatore, inteso peraltro a cure secolaresche, udendo sulla bocca di tutti, e scritto trovandolo in ogni libro, lo ripetetei mille volte nelle mie operuziole: e tanto fui lungi dal pentirmene che scrisi non ha guari un libro avente per titolo: *I rimedi dell’una e dell’altra fortuna*, ove non giò di due Fortune, ma di una sola a due faccie tenni lungo discorso […] Ed io ti rispondo che la fortuna veramente ho sempre stimato essere nulla […] Credesi generalmente cha quando accade alcuna cosa senza cagione apparente (chè senza causa veramente non accade mai nulla), avvenga per caso, e s’imputa alla Fortuna.236

I, wretched sinner, devoted to secular studies, hearing it in everyone’s mouth, and finding it written in every book, repeated it a thousand times in my petty works. And so far was I from regretting it that I wrote, not long ago, a book entitled *The remedies of the one and the other fortune*, where I discussed at length not two Fortunes, but one with two faces. And I reply to you that, truly, I always believed fortune to be nothing. It is usually believed that when anything happens for no apparent reason (and nothing, truly, happens without a cause) it happens by chance, and it is attributed to Fortune.

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of Fortune. Boccaccio’s primary focus is on how people use this ‘name’. This is how Papio translates the third section of the excerpt: ‘I say “one who administers” more in order to explain the nature of this goddess “Fortune”, to whom is attributed this shifting of things, rather than because there is any need to have such a minister in addition to the heavens’ movement itself’. See Boccaccio, *Boccaccio’s Expositions on Dante’s Comedy*, pp. 343–346.
These two instances seem to establish a pattern: authors who have dealt extensively with Fortune in their works look back at them and reveal that, truly, they do not believe in the existence of such a force. And yet, they did use this term. The two Italian poets are not alone. Saint Augustine too, in his Retractations, regrets his former use of the word Fortune in Against the Academics:

I regret that, in these three books of mine, I mention fortune so often, although I did not intend that any goddess be understood by this term, but a fortuitous outcome of events in good and evil circumstances, either in our bodies or extraneous to them.\textsuperscript{237}

Like Petrarch, Augustine seems to have used ‘Fortune’ without intending to speak of an actual agent or goddess.\textsuperscript{238} Thus, Boccaccio’s description of Fortune in the Esposizioni describes well the predicament of this term and aptly identifies the problem of its use; there is no such thing, and yet the word Fortune often appears in literature.

In this light, Fortune emerges a word that does not have a precise, determined referent. It comes to mean different things depending on who uses this term and on what they believe in. Its function is, ultimately, to reveal to us something about the speaker or writer rather than about the forces controlling events. The sometimes contradictory references to Fortune on the part of the characters of the Filostrato essentially show their own confusion, but they also reveal something about each of them. In the case of Troiolo, the prevalence of a fatalistic attitude towards the actions of Fortune shows his inherent paralysis. Conversely, Pandaro and Criseida sometimes speak of Fortune as something that can be influenced or even challenged with courage and valour. This shows their extremely practical nature. Although they may appear more directly responsible for the catastrophic end

\textsuperscript{237}Augustine, The Retractations, 6–7, as quoted in Kiefer, Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{238}This reminds us of Lady Philosophy’s interpretation of Aristotle: we call chance something whose causes we do not know. Boethius, Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio, Liber V, Prosa I, p. 89.
than Troiolo, they also display the ability to adapt to Fortune’s turns. That is, possibly, why they survive while Troiolo, unable to change, must share the fate of his city.

This explains the characters’ views of Fortune; but what is the reason for the narrator’s attitude to this concept? Whereas in the prologue his ideas about Fortune seem appropriate, he too betrays incoherence throughout the poem. In order to try to understand the possible reasons for these contradictions it is necessary to deal with the complex issue of the role and attitude of the narrator of this poem and, ultimately, with the problematic topic of irony in Boccaccio’s works. As we have seen, critics traditionally see the Filostrato and, more generally, all his opere minori, as a celebration of carnal love, by contrast with a more religious and spiritual vision of love like the one expressed in Dante’s works.239 Robert Hollander, as mentioned above, was among the first to contest openly this view by arguing for an ironic portrayal of physical love in these works. He sees there the presence of two Venuses: one is the pagan goddess of carnal love, the other the guardian of marriage and of the begetting of children. According to him, in these works physical love does not lead the protagonists to a miserable end only if its outcome is a wedding and the creation of a new family,240 as one can clearly see, for instance, in the Teseida, which happily ends in marriage.241 In the Filostrato the veneration of the more carnal Venus ends up in tragedy.242 Hollander’s hypothesis that sensual love is indeed criticised in these works, although clashing with the traditional view of Boccaccio as a libertine author par excellence, seems indeed to be confirmed by a careful analysis of the Filostrato.

The passages where Troiolo deploys the language of Stilnovistic poetry are clearly ironic and can, logically, be seen either as an implicit criticism of the character or of the poets of the dolce stil nuovo. Given the narrator’s earlier defence

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239 Hollander, Boccaccio’s Two Venuses, p. 3.
240 Hollander, Boccaccio’s Two Venuses, p. 5.
241 Hollander, Boccaccio’s Two Venuses, pp. 53–65.
242 Hollander, Boccaccio’s Two Venuses, esp. pp. 49–53.
of the Dantean view of love, perhaps the character is, indeed, to be blamed for his choice of a more earthly kind of passion that only leads to self-destruction. And yet the narrator himself does not appear to be entirely sincere. Although the prologue suggests his belief in Stilnovistic love, the epilogue may suggest otherwise. After the reader has familiarised himself with Troiolo’s cunning use of the traditional language of love poetry, the narrator’s request of salute from his woman may indeed seem at least suspect. As Troiolo sent his letter to win Criseida’s love, so Filostrato sends this book into the hands of Filomena to pray for her compassion and urge her return to Naples. The reader may suppose that his intentions and desires are similar to those of the character he chose as his alter ego: Troiolo. If this is the case, then the difference between the two is merely that the narrator is a better poet than his character is, as he can better preserve his façade of honesty and honour. This hidden message to Filomena is probably what brought so many critics to believe that this work was indeed a celebration of worldly love. The reason why it is not so is the ironic distance that the reader feels from the narrator by the end of the poem: we cannot ignore the disruptive power of this kind of love.

All the references to Fortune and the Boethian thought underlying them clearly show why Troiolo had to suffer as much as he did. Medieval readers would no doubt have been more familiar than modern ones with the implication of the discourse of Fortune. This interpretation explains the sometimes illogical use of terms relating to Fortune by both the narrator and the characters: it shows that they do not fully understand what Fortune is. Unaware of what could truly bring them happiness, they pursue physical pleasure or, in Hollander’s terms, they follow the wrong Venus, the wrong type of love. Boccaccio’s message is not a criticism of Dante, but it rather confirms his vision, by reproducing both the passion and the tragedy of one of the most infamous couple of lovers in medieval literature: Paolo and Francesca.

243 Boccaccio, Filostrato, IX, 5, 8, p. 424.  
244 Dante, Inferno, Canto V.
Ultimately, the use of Fortune in this poem calls attention to the peculiar function of this concept from a literary perspective. As an empty word, Fortuna derives its significance from the way in which it is used. In deconstructing this acquired meaning, the true usefulness of this concept emerges. Every time a character speaks of Fortune, he or she gives us an opportunity to understand his beliefs, fears and moral or theological errors. For instance, a cry against evil and cruel Fortune is an act of desperation and, firstly, a call for sympathy. We all empathise with the victim of Fortune because we all know what it feels like when events take an unexpected downward turn. Simultaneously, complaining about bad Fortune is also a sign of passivity: the character is unwilling to take responsibility for what is happening. From a theological perspective, it is a clear error and a misunderstanding of the causes behind events: there is no such thing as Fortune, as everything ultimately derives from God within a medieval, Christian context. This concept that has no real referent proves to be a sort of literary indicator of a character’s state of mind, motives and beliefs. That is why Boccaccio, while suggesting in later works that Fortune is a word with no meaning, still uses it: on one level it captures the reader’s attention (as he writes in the De casibus, it is a concept people are extremely familiar with and that they can easily understand) but, more importantly, a careful reader can easily see past the literal meaning and read passages about Fortune as a revelation of the character of whoever is uttering them. Thinking of Fortune as, primarily, a philosophical concept is reductive; the natural conclusion of this perspective is that there is no such thing as Fortune. Medieval authors knew this well, and yet she keeps appearing on the pages of their works. It is her usefulness as a literary tool that has secured her survival not despite, but because of the theologically, logically and morally problematic nature of this concept. Boccaccio in the Filostrato uses Fortune to emphasise the characters’ misunderstanding of the forces that lie behind what is happening to them, as well as Troiolo’s failure to comply with Stilnovistic love. Chaucer will further develop Fortune as an instrument to aid characterisation in his Troilus.
CHAPTER TWO: CHARACTERS, WORLDLY JOY AND THE FATE OF TROY: FORTUNE IN CHAUCER’S TROILUS

1 The Critics, the Troilus and Fortune

As we have seen, Fortune in Boccaccio’s Filostrato plays a greater role than is usually recognised by critics. The issue of Fortune in Chaucer’s Troilus has been given more prominence, although it is often discussed in passing in works focusing on other aspects of the poem. It is also true that any analysis of this concept in the Chaucerian version of the story of Troilus and Cressida inevitably has to take into account a wider thematic context. This means, first of all, having to consider Chaucer’s relationship with the Consolation, and many have preceded me along this line of inquiry.1 That Chaucer drew heavily upon Boethius’s work is indisputable, and it is now usually agreed that he expected his audience to be familiar with this

work as well. This is where the consensus lies, and where disagreements begin. As we have seen, Boccaccio’s *Filostrato* has often been considered as an exaltation of worldly love and a criticism of the Dantean and Stilnovistic transcendent view of *amore*, but recently the idea that Boccaccio was in fact complying with Dante’s vision has begun to take hold. With the *Troilus* similar problems emerge. Critics still divide between those who interpret the poem in a strictly Boethian sense as a rejection of carnal in favour of divine love, and those who, on the contrary, believe that Troilus’s worldly passion is, at least to some extent, positive and even salvific. Among the latter, some argue that Chaucer slightly modifies or corrects Boethius’s theories, while according to others this positive view of carnal love is perfectly consistent with Boethius’s views. The open-ended nature of the poem and the virtually endless possibilities for irony it offers allow for a number of contradictory readings. Many have been offered, and many have been convincing. Nobody has had the final word on the matter, and nobody will; this is the appeal of the *Troilus*.

One gets the impression that this was precisely Chaucer’s aim in writing the *Troilus*: producing a work that defies a univocal reading. Some consider the poem’s

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5Phillips argues that in his works Chaucer invites the reader to question the Boethian view of love, as it cannot satisfactorily represent the complexities of the love experience, Phillips, ‘Fortune and the Lady’, p. 136; Camargo too argues for a qualified Boethianism: Lady Philosophy’s teachings are not so easily applied to real life. Camargo, ‘The Consolation of Pandarus’, p. 226.

6McAlpine, *The Genre of “Troilus* and *Criseyde”*, p. 59. Alan Mitchell argues that Troilus was right in pursuing love, and that this is not necessarily against Boethius’s views as expressed in the *Consolation*. J. Allan Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 16–17, 28.
lack of closure as an attempt by the poet to bridge the gap between art and reality. It may be so. I see the ambiguities of the poem as constituting a fine riddle defying a definite answer, and I imagine Chaucer, like Troilus at the end of the poem on the eighth sphere, laughing at us poor mortals as we argue once more about one of its many mysteries. What better way to ensure a poem’s enduring appeal than to infuse it with tantalizing ambiguities? That is not to say that any definite interpretation is pointless. On the contrary, the poem invites us to produce readings of it, to fill in the gaps left open for us. In order to do so one has to take a stand and choose a possible angle of interpretation. This chapter argues that Chaucer agreed with Boethius, that he recognised the Boethian underlying messages in Boccaccio’s *Filostrato* (which many Chaucerians are oblivious to) and produced something similar, although not identical, in his version of the story. Carnal love is not the higher good, nor can it lead to it, and Troilus, like Troilo, is wrong to think that it is. I believe that we are meant to see the error of his ways in his peculiar manner of ‘misquoting’ Boethius. However, Troilus’s condemnation is not as complete or final in the poem as it is in the *Filostrato*. After all, what Lady Philosophy tells us of human love is that it can bring a great amount of pain, and this is undeniably what happens in the *Troilus*. But, in the end, I do not think that Mercury will assign Troilus to hell for loving Criseyde. This is not because Chaucer implies that human love can lead to divine love, as the critics following this route of interpretation have argued, or because Troilus is true to his love till the end, which would make of him a good pagan,

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8On this process in Chaucer’s works, especially in respect to their relationship to their sources, see Phillips, ‘Fortune and the Lady’.
9Many state that Chaucer added Boethian philosophy to the Italian source, failing to see that Boccaccio was familiar with Boethius as well and that, as we have seen, there are hints to the *Consolation* in the Italian, albeit not as frequent nor as explicit as is the case in the *Troilus*. Benson even argues that Chaucer’s poem is a struggle between Boethius and Boccaccio, see Benson, *Chaucer’s “Troilus and Criseyde”*, p. 152. Others who seem to underestimate the importance of Boethius in the *Filostrato* are McCall, ‘Five-Book Structure in Chaucer’s *Troilus*’, p. 307; Camargo, ‘The Consolation of Pandarus’, p. 221; Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature*, p. 27.
rather because Troilus’s kind of misdirected love is not, even by Dantean standards, enough for eternal damnation. It is still a dangerous thing, and likely to bring pain in this world. It is a sin, if we look at it in theological and moral terms, but it is not one deserving of hell. Moreover, Troilus’s type of love, dependent as it is on worldly factors, inevitably binds him to the movement of Fortune’s wheel, and Fortune and her wheel are very often mentioned within the poem.

In criticism of the Troilus, Fortune has been looked at in a variety of ways. As we shall now see, most critics considering Fortune in the poem have done so within the Boethian and Christian context discussed above, and in connection with the relationship between man and the higher good. From a theological perspective, Fortune is usually considered, in compliance with Dante’s vision, as an entity in charge of worldly things. Many have also seen Fortune in connection with the structure of the poem, as it is usually considered central to Chaucer’s notion of tragedy. A smaller number of critics have considered this topic in relation with the characters’ perceptions of reality.

When Fortune is considered as an administrator of worldly possessions, her action usually derives from God’s Providence. This could even be interpreted as a denial of Fortune’s very existence. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, many seem to agree that Fortune in the poem is nothing but the agent of God in this world, and a symbol of the transient nature of the sublunar world, a view which is perfectly in line with Boethian thought.

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12 D. W. Robertson, Jr., ‘Chaucerian Tragedy’, *ELH* 19, no. 1 (1952), p. 3; Elbow, ‘Two Boethian Speeches in *Troilus and Criseyde* and Boethian Irony’, p. 89; Mann, ‘Chance and Destiny in *Troilus and Criseyde* and The Knight’s Tale’, pp. 85–86.

earliest (and one of the few) critical works on Chaucer centred on the concept of Fortune, Howard Patch’s ‘Chaucer and Lady Fortune’. On Fortune in Chaucer’s works generally, he writes:

In brief, Fortune’s gifts are ‘richesses, highte degrees of lordships, preisinges of the people,’ and obviously sometimes success in love. These she doles out, subject to a rational Deity, whose plan she puts in operation.

This is nothing but Dante’s ‘general ministra e duce’, which is also in keeping with a Boethian reading of the poem: by loving Criseyde as he does, Troilus submits himself to Fortune’s wheel. Since this kind of happiness is, in Boethian terms, false and unstable, because entirely based on fickle Fortune’s gifts, he has to suffer the consequences of this choice. Most studies which look at Fortune in the poem from a moral and philosophical perspective arrive at this conclusion, consistent with Boccaccio’s portrayal of Fortune in the Filostrato, as we have seen. And yet most of these critical works fail to account for the extraordinary prominence that Fortune is given in the poem. Not only, as in the Filostrato, do both characters and narrator talk about Fortune, but in the Troilus there is a more marked interest in why things happen and what forces determine what takes place within the story. The circular

14 Patch, ‘Chaucer and Lady Fortune’.
16 Dante, Inferno, Canto VII, v. 78.
movement of the wheel of Fortune and the idea of the wheel in general is very often suggested within the poem. As a result, the recurrent, inescapable cycle of happiness and sorrow emerges as a strong leitmotif within the poem, and it also conveys a deeper sense of the power that Fortune has over the lives of the characters.

The turning of Fortune’s wheel becomes the very structure of the story. A number of studies have considered this structural role of Fortune in connection with the tragic plot of the *Troilus*. George Lyman Kittredge, following the *de casibus* tradition, was among the first to emphasise this correlation between the circular movement of the wheel of Fortune and tragedy in this poem:

> Tragedies described the malice of Fortune when she casts down men of high estate and brings them to a miserable end. *[Troilus and Criseyde]* was to be a tragedy of love, and the fall of the hero was to be from a happy union with his lady to the woe and ruin of her unfaithfulness.

The assertion of a close association between the movement of the wheel of Fortune and tragedy has recurred in critical works on the poem up to the present day, and many quote the Monk’s words on this topic in the *Canterbury Tales*. A step forward along these lines was to conceive the double sorwe of Troilus as a wheel of Fortune, thus identifying the very plot as describing a turn on her wheel. Among the

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22Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘The Monk’s Tale’, in *The Riverside Chaucer, vv. 1991–1998*: ‘I wol biwaille in manere of tragedie / The harm of hem that stoode in heigh degree, / And fillen so that ther nas no remedie / To brynge hem out of hir adversitee. / For certain, whan that Fortune list to flee, / Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde. / Lat no man truste on blynd prosperitee; / Be war by this ensamples trewe and olde’.
first to put forward this hypothesis was Anne Barbara Gill in 1960. Notwithstanding the existence of some alternative theories, the idea that the story of Troilus describes a turn of the wheel proved quite popular in subsequent critical works. In particular, Charles Berryman in his ‘The Ironic Design of Fortune in Troilus and Criseyde’ considers Fortune as the design of the story, perceiving her course as an ‘ironic pattern of recognition’. In 1975 Samuel Schuman argued for a spiral structure in the poem, but the circular structure continued to be mentioned in later works.

This way of looking at Fortune is interesting insofar as, rather than concentrating on what Fortune is from a moral or theoretical point of view, it focuses on what Fortune does from a literary perspective. But Fortune’s literary function is not limited to providing the structure of the poem. Some critics have observed, although often in marginal comments, that the way in which the characters address the issue of Fortune reveals something about their way of perceiving reality. Thus D. W. Robertson in 1962, talking about the Knight’s Tale, noted that Arcite’s way of discussing Providence and Fortune is meant to show us his failure to understand the conventional Boethian theories on the issue. Peter Elbow was amongst the first to argue that Troilus’s submissive attitude towards Fortune should

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24For instance, Gerry Brenner did not agree and suggested a W or V structure in 1965. Gerry Brenner, ‘Narrative Structure in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde’, in *Chaucer’s Troilus: Essays in Criticism*, pp. 131–143 (previously published in *Annuale Medievale* 6 (1965), pp. 5–18). Famously, Monica McAlpine (McAlpine, *The Genre of “Troilus and Criseyde”*) argues that the Troilus actually defies the de casibus type of tragedy, although I believe that in her study she strongly underestimates the importance of the notion of Fortune and the complexities of its implications in the so called ‘tragedy of Fortune’. She argues that such a tragedy inevitably denies any moral implication on the part of the protagonist, whereas I believe that speaking of Fortune alone, from a Boethian perspective, cannot but bring into play the problem of agency itself, and certainly so during Chaucer’s times.


28Windeatt, ‘Classical and Medieval Elements in Chaucer’s Troilus’, p. 120; Leonard Michael Koff, ‘Ending a Poem before Beginning It, or The “Cas” of Troilus’, in *Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde: Subgit to Alle Poeysye*, p. 166; Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 264.

not be shared by the reader; on the contrary we should see in this ‘his own tendency to give up’. Ida Gordon also suggests that Pandarus’s discussion of Fortune helps with his characterisation, as it shows his resourcefulness. Many agree that references to Fortune in the poem underline the characters’ faulty perspective on this topic. Although the idea is not new, the scholars who have looked at the main characters’ perceptions of Fortune in some depth are still very few. Sashi Nair recognises Criseyde’s vital role in the poem’s Boethian discourse, as well as the importance of her Boethian speeches in furthering her characterisation. In ‘The Winds of Fortune in the Troilus’, Martin Stevens looks at the use of this specific metaphor in the poem, and shows that the way in which each character relates to it tells us something about them. In a similar fashion, Anne Payne accounts for Troilus’s, Criseyde’s and Pandarus’s views of Fortune, and so does Katherine

31 Gordon, The Double Sorrow of Troilus, p. 41.
33 Nair, ‘Gender and Philosophy in Troilus and Criseyde’, pp. 35–56.
34 Although mostly limited to the character of Criseyde, this study is very rare in its claim of Criseyde’s superior Boethian philosophical understanding to Troilus’s. This is a position I agree with, while I still think that her views of Fortune and causation are to be perceived as flawed from a Boethian perspective. Even if Nair’s study does not place particular emphasis on Fortune, it is one of the few attempts to stress the importance of the Boethian elements of the Troilus for characterization.
36 Stevens’s work is interesting in that it is one of the few systematic analyses of the imagery related to Fortune considered in connection with characterization in the poem. However, I am not convinced that the image of the winds of Fortune has the prominence that he suggests in the Troilus. Although the metaphor of life as a ship sailing upon the sea does appear a number of times, only in one instance amongst the examples he quotes it is explicitly suggested that Fortune is a propelling force in connection with this imagery (p. 290): Troilus says that he does not care whither Fortune will ‘steere’ him. I would suggest that ‘steere’, although it does indeed refer to Fortune as guiding Troilus’s ship, as it were, may also refer to her turning of the ship’s steering wheel. This could possibly also be seen as a reference to Fortune’s wheel. In any case, here there is no explicit reference to Fortune’s winds, nor anywhere else in the poem. I am not suggesting that Stevens’s reading is erroneous, but merely that this image is not as prominent as he suggests, and that Fortune’s wheel is, without doubt, a more prominent image, and one more readily associated with Fortune at Chaucer’s time. It is true, however, as Stevens states, that Fortune was at the time sometimes associated with the sea and the tempest (Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature, pp. 101–107), as was also the case in the Consolation (p. 287). But as we will see in detail in the next chapter, the association between Fortune and the sea will become popular only at a later stage, once the notions of Fortune and Occasion begin to merge.
37 F. Anne Payne, Chaucer and Menippean Satire (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), pp. 86–121. Payne considers the relation between the speeches on Fortune, happiness and love in the Troilus and the Consolation in order to establish which place the three main characters hold in the
Helinrichs. I believe that, although these works are heading in the right direction towards recognising the significance of what the passages on Fortune tell us about the characters of the *Troilus*, they do not fully acknowledge the importance of Fortune and related imagery for characterisation, nor do they devote adequate scope to a careful and systematic analysis of the occurrences of Fortune in the poem. Only once such analysis is carried out, can the extraordinary importance of Fortune in this poem be fully appreciated. This is precisely the purpose of the present chapter.

2 A Foreword: Disambiguating Fortune

In ‘Troilus on Determinism’, Howard Patch explains why an analysis of Fortune in the poem is intrinsically problematic, which, in turn, provides a clue as to what a study of this issue should address. After recognising the significance of Chaucer’s philosophical and astrological additions to Boccaccio’s *Filostrato*, Patch adds:

> These additions might lead one to regard the poem as a study of a particular case of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. But one must not overdo the matter. While character, love, and ‘the influences of these hevenes hye,’ and fate itself in various ways, affect the actions of the characters in the poem, we can hardly have a right to put all these elements together, as merely separate aspects of destiny, to show the total effect of destiny on the reader or hearer. […] Few readers, I think, would see in Troilus’s impulse to love the same force as that which ruled the doom of Troy. Moreover, the great majority of Menippean dialogue. Her analysis is carried out in some detail, although her focus is not solely on Fortune. Her views will be further discussed later.

38 Heinrichs, “‘Lovers’ Consolations of Philosophy’ in Boccaccio, Machaut, and Chaucer”, pp. 111–114. Heinrichs’s analysis of the *Troilus* is limited in scope, and it does not focus on Fortune alone, as this is not the main topic of her article, but her study is interesting as she explicitly recognises that in Chaucer, as well as in Boccaccio and Machaut, lovers tend to use Boethian arguments without bringing them to their proper conclusion. She argues that this is both a source of humor as well as ‘a means of characterization’, and that the *Troilus* is the best example of this use of Boethian references (p. 111).
Chaucer’s references to fortune or fate are based on similar passages in the *Filostrato*, and there the same fatal scheme is in process.\(^{39}\)

This passage touches on a crucial issue that any study of Fortune in the *Troilus* must face: the overlapping in critical works on the poem of those forces relating to causation (which, as we have seen, is something that tends to happen in works on Fortune in medieval literature in general). Patch dismisses the possibility of reading *Troilus and Criseyde* as a study of the actions of Fortune precisely because of this problem. Patch says that all those factors that seem to influence what happens in the story – such as Fortune, love, the actions of the characters, the movements of the skies – cannot just be aspects of destiny. Why, then, should the study of the actions of Fortune as a distinct and separate concept from destiny, and all other causational forces, not be undertaken? It is true that, as we have seen, Fortune in the criticism on the poem is usually considered as nothing but Providence in disguise. But it is also true that there must be a reason why Chaucer chooses to speak of Fortune in some passages, even though, like Boccaccio, it is unlikely that he believed in such an agent.

The problem with numerous studies of Fortune in the poem (and in other works) is that they tend to treat terms such as Fortune, fate, and chance as synonyms, or to amalgamate them in the same category of causal forces, failing to give adequate weight to the contextual meaning and implication of each word.\(^{40}\) This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that all of these elements can, at times, be perceived as crucial factors in determining what happens in the story and, on the other, to the confusion over which words used by Chaucer should be considered as meaning *Fortune*, which *chance*, which *fate* and so on. That is why, before proceeding to the

\(^{39}\)Patch, ‘Troilus on Determinism’, p. 233.

analysis of the passages concerning Fortune in the poem, it is necessary to introduce some clarity into this lexical anarchy.

I consider Fortune either as the goddess of chance with her wheel, or an independent and uncontrollable force that causes what happens. The present study argues that the only word that strictly means Fortune is Fortune. This statement may not be as tautological as it seems. In the poem there are a number of terms that are usually considered by Middle English dictionaries and scholars as meaning Fortune but, once we take into account their etymological implications and their precise lexical meaning, it will be clear that they have connotations that are significantly different from Fortune, and I would argue that it is precisely because of these connotations that Chaucer does not use such words interchangeably. Fortune has a somewhat peculiar place amongst the variety of terms related to causation in the poem, as it stands in between two clearly separated categories in which such terms can be divided. On the one hand, we have all those words that are used to describe a chance event, or series of events, and a happy or unhappy circumstance. These terms are: aventure and disaventure, chance and meschaunce, hap and unhappes.

\[41\] Aventure occurs eighteen times within the poem: Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book I, vv. 35, 268, 368, 784, 1092; Book II, vv. 224, 281, 288, 291, 742, 1519; Book III, vv. 1217, 1367; Book IV, vv. 324, 388, 1329; Book V, vv. 298, 1540. Disaventure occurs four times: Book II, v. 415; Book IV, vv. 297, 1448. Aventures and Mysaventure occur once each, in Book I, vv. 3 and 706 respectively. Perauenter or Paraunter, which usually means perhaps, has the same root. It occurs ten times: Book I, vv. 619, 668, 854; Book II, vv. 711, 921, 1373; Book IV, vv. 598; Book V, vv. 991, 1282, 1526. Middle English Dictionary, ed. Sherman M. Kuhn, Hans Kurath, and Robert E. Lewis (London: G. Cumberledge, Oxford University Press, 1952), s. v. ‘aventure’, provides a variety of meanings for the entry aventure and derived forms. The first meaning includes ‘fate, fortune, chance, one’s lot or destiny’. That is to say, almost anything within the semantic field of causation. The second meaning, more interestingly, defines aventure as ‘Something that happens, an event or occurrence; an experience; an accident’. This is more in line with the etymological meaning of the word, which derives from the Latin ventūrus, that which is to come (Grande dizionario della lingua italiana, s. v. ‘ventura’). This definition, therefore, can be regarded as the proper meaning of the word which is sometimes used in a looser manner encompassing a broader semantic field, but her precise significance is not directly connected either with the notion of Fortune nor of fate, referring to what happens or will happen without any explicit reference to its causes. Therefore, the use of this term or derivates does not necessarily imply that the author is talking about Fortune, but rather about what happens, and sometimes of its positive or negative nature for the people involved. For instance, Troilus’s aventure that fellen / Fro wo to wele (Book I, vv. 3–4), are Troilus’s vicissitudes; Pandarus tells Criseyde that thus fare an aventure has happened to her – such a lucky or happy circumstance has occurred. This does not mean that aventure and derivates exclude that what happens can be considered in relation to Fortune – as we will see later – but the notion of Fortune is not necessarily
and *accident*. This category is characterised by the random nature of what happens or what is: there is no controlling or overseeing force at work. To the other group belong those words and concepts that refer to an event or circumstance that is controlled or influenced by a superior force (one or more gods, a supernatural agent, or a cosmic influence). In this case, what happens is not perceived as random but is, somehow, controlled or determined by one or more of these factors. These forces or factors are indicated by the following terms or expressions: *destine*, *fate*, *grace*.

implied by the use of this term, and this is precisely why a study of the occurrences of Fortune in the poem should be primarily concerned with those passages featuring *Fortune*.

*Cas* occurs forty-two times: Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book I, vv. 29, 271, 568, 836; Book II, vv. 285, 422, 426, 457, 604, 758, 1068, 1346, 1475, 1611, 1656, 1680, 1682; Book III, vv. 172, 279, 283, 446, 841, 1147, 1619; Book IV, vv. 290, 388, 416, 420, 571, 628, 635, 649, 657, 547, 794, 880, 1509; Book V, vv. 60, 1064, 1270, 1638, 1641. There is also one occurrence of *casuel* (Book IV, v. 419). The meaning of *cas* is more straightforward than that of *aventure*, and it can easily be perceived depending on the context in which it is used. In the Troilus it used with three separate meanings. The first is case, predicament or circumstances (as in ‘In the cas of Troilus’, I, 29; ‘In this cas’, I, 836; ‘Is this my blisful cas?’), II, 422; ‘In swych manere cas’, II, 457; ‘right for the newe cas’, II, 604; ‘In cas if’, II, 758; ‘In many a cas’, III, 1147; ‘In any cas’, III, 1619; ‘Upon newe cas’, IV, 416; ‘Som cas’, IV, 420; ‘In every cas’, IV, 571 and 628; ‘For no cas’, IV, 635); the second meaning is cause, claim, petition, and is found when Deiphebu asks Pandarus to speak in favour of Criseyde (‘Tel thow thi neecs cas’, II, 1611; ‘Rehere hire cas’, II, 1656; ‘hire cas’, II, 1680 and 1682). The third meaning is that of chance and it occurs only four times within the poem: ‘Upon cas bifel’, I, 271; ‘What cas […] or what aventure’; I, 568; ‘Neyther cas ne fortune hym deceyven’, II, 285; and ‘Through cas or aventure, IV, 388’. This later meaning is the one that is of more relevance here, and it is the one closer to its etymology. *Cas*, like the Italian *caso*, derives from the Latin *cāsus*, which refers to an event that has happened, is happening or will happen (*Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, s. v. ‘caso’). Again, this term implies no direct reference to Fortune, or to any force controlling the outcome of events, but rather focuses on the events themselves. For a further discussion of *cas* in the poem see Koff, ‘Ending a Poem before Beginning It, or The “Cas” of Troilus’, pp. 161–178.

*Hap* appears four times in the poem: Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book I, v. 896; Book II, vv. 1454, 1696; Book III, v. 1246. There is one occurrence of *Unhap* (Book I, v. 552), and one of its plural form * unhappes* (Book II, v. 456). The verb *happe* is used six times within the poem: Book I, v. 625; Book II, v. 29; Book IV, v. 1563; Book V, vv. 796 (twice); 991. *Hap* derives from the Old Norse *happ*, meaning chance or luck (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s. v. ‘hap’). Again, it refers to something that *happens*, or befalls, without any intrinsic reference to the causes or forces behind it. This meaning is emphasised by Pandarus just after Troilus reveals he is in love with Criseyde. He underlines that his young friend should consider that he loves such worthy woman as bliss, as he states: ‘The oughte not to clepe it hap, but grace’ (I, 896). This shows that *hap* simply indicates that something takes place, without implying any cause but mere chance.

There are only two occurrences of *accident* within the poem: Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book III, v. 918 (‘This accident so piteous was to here’), and Book IV, v. 1505 (‘For accident his substance ay to lese’). Its meaning is quite straightforward: it is something that happens or occurs fortuitously (*Middle English Dictionary*, s. v. ‘accident’). It derives from the Latin verb *accīdo* to happen or to fall upon, composed of the preposition *ad*, to, towards, and *cido*, from *cādo*, to fall (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s. v. ‘accident’). Therefore it belongs to the semantic field of chance events.

*Destine*, also found in the forms *destyne* and *destinee*, occurs six times within the poem (Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book I, v. 520; Book II, v. 1091; Book III, v. 734; Book IV, vv. 959, 969;
purveyance, sort and by sort, astronomye, augurye, and calculynge, coursed constellacioun and coursed tyme, and of course by the direct recognition of an agent, be it God, the various pagan gods, the god of Love, Nature, or the Parcae.

Book V, v. 1); predestine also appears once (Book IV, v. 969). There is little room for doubt about its meaning: it is ‘an inexorable force that shapes and controls events and men’s lives’, and in a Christian sense it is used to refer to God’s Providence (Middle English Dictionary, s. v. ‘destine’). It derives, through Old French from the Latin dēstīno, to establish, to decree (The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, s. v. ‘destine’). Moreover, Destino was the pagan god of Fate, often superseding the Gods themselves (Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana, s. v. ‘destinare’).

The noun fate appears three times in the poem (Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book V, vv. 209, 1150, 1152) and these are the only recorded occurrences in Chaucer’s works (The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, s. v. ‘fate’). The adjective fatal also appears twice in the poem (‘fātal sustren’, Book III, v. 733; ‘fātal destyne’, Book V, v. 1). It is a synonym of destiny (Middle English Dictionary, s. v. ‘fate’) and it derives from the Italian fato (The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, s. v. ‘fate’) which, in turn, originated from the Latin ēstum, from for, to tell, or foretell (Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana, s. v. ‘fato’), and it is therefore related to the notion of the oracle foretelling what is to come.

Grace occurs fifty-five times within the poem (Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book I, vv. 370, 713, 896, 907, 933, 962, 980, 1005, 1063, 1077; Book II, vv. 32, 243, 266, 714, 831, 973, 1070, 1122, 1365, 1526; Book III, vv. 461, 472, 705, 719, 922, 928, 1176, 1262, 1267, 1269, 1349, 1456, 1804; Book IV, vv. 10, 103, 263, 293, 555, 952, 1117, 1233, 1393, 1684, 1693; Book V, vv. 171, 172, 502, 581, 592, 694, 940, 957, 1323, 1631, 1702). There is also one instance of graceles (Book I, v. 781). Deriving, through the Old French, from the Latin grātus, grateful or pleasing (The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, s. v. ‘grace’), the word denotes someone’s favour, or benevolent attitude. This use can be seen in the numerous instances within the poem in which grace is used to indicate someone’s good favour. This agent is often God (‘Thorugh grace of God that list hem to hym drawe’, Book II, v. 527; ‘God thank I of his grace’, Book III, v. 533; ‘And with the grace of God’, II, 243; ‘God thank I of his grace’, III, 1349), but also the pagan gods (‘O Venus deere, / thi might, thi grace, theryed be it here!’), II, 972–973; ‘As that Cupide wolde hem grace sende’, III, 461; ‘Now, blissful Venus, thow me grace sende!’), III, 705), the god of love (‘Thy grace, lord [of love], for now I me repente’, I, 933), or a character, usually Criseyde (‘How Troilus com to his lady grace’, II, 32; ‘That he so ful stood in his lady grace’, III, 472; ‘I am al in youre grace’, III, 1176). Therefore, when grace is mentioned without an agent, it is to be understood as the favour of whatever superior agent believeth to be in charge of what happens, usually God’s, and, by extension, it indicates a favourable or positive event or circumstance (‘Yet myghte he falle in grace’, I, 370; ‘What wonder is, though swich oon have no grace?’, I, 962; ‘Is ther no grace?’, IV, 263).

Purveyance, also found as purveyaunce and purveyance, appears ten times in the poem (Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book II, v. 527; Book III, v. 533; Book IV, vv. 961, 977, 982, 1000, 1046, 1070; Book V, vv. 1446, 1543); forms of the verb purveye occur twelve times (Book II, v. 426, 504, 1161; Book IV, vv. 896, 1006, 1008, 1015, 1052, 1053, 1055, 10056, 1066, ). Fifteen of these instances can be found in Troilus’s monologue on determinism. As is evident from Troilus’s explanation, Providence is God’s ability to foresee the future, with one exception in which it means preparations or arrangements and has no religious connotations (III, 533). Purveye too is used, in three instances as ‘to prepare’ or ‘provide’ (II, 426, 504, 1161). It derives from the Latin prōvidē, composed of pro, before, and vidēo, to see, hence meaning to foresee (The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, s. v. ‘provide’).

In the poem there are four instances of the use of sort (Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book II, v. 1754; Book IV, vv. 1401, 1404; Book V, v. 1827) and three of the expression by sort (Book I, v. 76; Book III, v. 1447; Book IV, v. 116). Originally, this term refers to the notion of a choice made by the casting or drawing of lots (Middle English Dictionary, s. v. ‘sort’), as it derives from the Latin sortem which was the name of small wooden tablets that were carried around tied together by a small rope (sortem derives from sēro, tie together) and that were cast to the ground in order to foresee,
Fortune rightfully belongs to neither group. She is goddess of chance, but she is no mere chance, because she is a willful agent at the same time. It is true that she can, and in most cases should, be construed as standing for something else (usually the action of God’s Providence within a Medieval and Christian context), but I would like to place emphasis on Chaucer’s use of this symbol, metaphor, or personification. Speaking of Fortune does not have the same effect on the reader as mentioning Providence or aventure: the term has very precise and strong implications, as it inevitably brings with it its problematic literary, philosophical and theological tradition. That is why this is not a study of causational forces in the poem, but an analysis of the occurrences of Fortune and their literary and poetic function. By focusing on this term specifically I hope to overcome the problem identified by Patch and do justice to the importance of Fortune in the poem.

There is another crucial factor to take into account while carrying out such an analysis, which emerges from Patch’s remark. He mentions that Chaucer’s additions to the Filostrato regarding causation and interrelated philosophical issues are so significant that some may argue that the poem is a ‘study of a particular case of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’; at the same time, towards the end of the passage, he states that most of the references to Fortune and her general role within considering the figure they displayed, what was to come (Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana, s. v. ‘sorte’). This is precisely what Chaucer intends when he uses by sort, which occurs, twice, to indicate Calkas’s attempts to foresee the future (‘For wel wiste he by sort that Troye sholde / Destroyed ben’, I, 76–77; ‘it be astronomye / By sort and by augurie ek’, IV, 115–116), and once by Criseyde (‘by ordal or by oth / by sort or in what wise so yow leste’, III, 1046–1047). This notion implies the existence of a preordained plan, or destiny, that the casting of lots reveals. Although, as we have seen in the case of sorte in the previous chapter, the etymology of the word may leave room for ambiguity, sort in the Troilus seems to be used chiefly in relation to destiny. Other examples are: ‘O Lord, right now renneth my sort’ (II, 1754), ‘Makynge his sort’ (IV, 1404), ‘Ther as Mercurye sorted hym to dwelle’ (V, 1827).

50 All of these terms also refer to ways of foretelling the future and, therefore, imply the existence of a predetermined plan for what is to come. In the poem, they are almost exclusively used in relation to Calkas’s prophecies: ‘I have ek founde it be astronomye, / by sort and by augurie ek’, Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book IV, vv. 115–116; ‘And treweliche ek augurie of thise fowles’, Book V, v. 380; ‘So whan this Calkas knew by calkulinge’, Book I, v. 71; ‘For al Apollo, or his clerkes lawes, / or calkulinge, availeth nough thre hawes’, IV, 1397–1398.

51 Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book IV, vv. 334, 745; Book V, v. 1699. The notion that one can be born under an unfavourable astral disposition implies that the stars or the celestial bodies can determine what happens in one’s life.
the plot are merely taken from Boccaccio’s version. To what extent does Chaucer augment his borrowings from Boccaccio?

It is recognised by most critics that Chaucer’s version of the story of Troilus displays a greater interest in Fortune and in the philosophical issues related to the problem of causation than its primary source. Stephen A. Barney and C. S. Lewis are among those expressing the widespread opinion that Chaucer added a layer of Boethian philosophy to Boccaccio’s tale.\(^5\) Barry Windeatt argues that Chaucer’s modifications to the Italian source increase the sense of the importance of both destinal forces and of chance in the poem.\(^5\) Similarly, C. David Benson notes that Chaucer increases the number and scope of the allusions to Fortune in the *Troilus*.\(^5\)

At the same time, as has been shown in the previous chapter, it is important to note that Boccaccio’s *Filostrato* has been often underestimated by critics, and especially during Patch’s time, and that Chaucerians tend to ignore the extent to which Boccaccio’s poem relied on Boethius. It is true that Fortune, as well as Boethian references, are more prominent in Chaucer’s version, but the seeds for these discussions were already present in his main source. The question one has to answer is, then, to what extent did Chaucer’s use of Fortune derive from the *Filostrato*? Did he develop Boccaccio’s portrayal of *Fortuna*? Did he only bring to the surface what was already present in Boccaccio’s work or did he modify what he found there? The only way to determine what Chaucer really did to the representation of Fortune in the *Filostrato* is to compare the two versions of the story, thus establishing more fully Chaucer’s indebtedness to Boccaccio in this respect. By analysing in detail what both the characters and the narrator say about Fortune in Chaucer’s poem and comparing these passages with the corresponding lines of the *Filostrato* it is possible to identify the extent of Chaucer’s borrowings from Boccaccio’s portrayal of Fortune.

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\(^5\)Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 265.
\(^5\)Benson, *Chaucer’s “Troilus and Criseyde”*, p. 150.
In this chapter, I will first consider the characters’ manner of speaking of Fortune. As in the *Filostrato*, Fortune proves an excellent means of characterisation. It will become clear that Chaucer uses this technique more extensively and with greater effect than his predecessor. As in Boccaccio’s version, the narrator also engages with Fortune. We will consider what he has to say on this topic, as well the consequences of the extraordinary emphasis he places on the connections between the story of Troilus and the movements of Fortune’s wheel. I defer the discussion of the frame of the poem because the narrator has a fuller understanding of Fortune than the characters he speaks of. It is only after considering their faulty perceptions that the narrator’s considerations about this issue can be more fully appreciated. I suggest that the connection between the story of Troilus and the wheel of Fortune emphasised by the narrator is not merely a way of relating to the *de casibus* tragedy: there is something specific and unique about this story that makes Fortune particularly relevant and significant. Finally, I will consider the peculiar epilogue of Chaucer’s poem, offering a hypothesis as to Troilus’s final resting place that fits with both the Boethian and Dantean references dispersed throughout the poem and which, ultimately, may provide a further reason for his extraordinary insistence on the image of Fortune’s wheel in this text.

### 3 The Characters’ Views of Fortune

As in the *Filostrato*, in the *Troilus* the characters’ manner of speaking about Fortune tells us more about them and their beliefs and attitudes towards life than about Fortune itself. But how does Chaucer relate to Boccaccio’s portrayal of the three main characters and their views of Fortune? After comparing the two poems, it will become evident that Chaucer added, or significantly expanded, many of the passages on Fortune. Most importantly, the characters’ sometimes contradictory portrayal of Fortune in the *Filostrato* is clarified and unified in the *Troilus*: each of

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55 Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 262.
the three main characters provides a personally consistent (although erroneous in Boethian terms) description of Fortune. As we have seen, Fortune can mean many things, and Troilus, Pandarus, Criseyde, and the narrator consider this concept in significantly different terms, which mirrors their different understanding of causational forces. Troilus and Pandarus often explicitly discuss Fortune and her actions, much more so than in Boccaccio’s version. What emerges from their exchanges is a severely limited understanding of the phenomenon on the part of Troilus, who primarily sees Fortune as a capricious and powerful pagan goddess. Pandarus’s view, in contrast, is more ‘medieval’, in the sense that he constantly considers Fortune in relation to the motion of her wheel. Criseyde, who talks less about Fortune in explicit terms, shows a clearer understanding of the transient nature of worldly happiness. The narrator, by contrast, provides the only coherently Christian portrayal of Fortune in the poem. The way in which he speaks of Fortune reveals that her role is decidedly more crucial in this poem than it was in its primary source. Fortune becomes fundamental to his way of retelling the story of both Troy and Troilus.

3.1 Troilus, Pandarus and the Relentless Motion of Fortune’s Wheel

Both Troilus and Pandarus often mention Fortune. While Troilus tends to complain about Fortune’s actions, Pandarus usually perceives her in a more constructive fashion: he always proposes a productive action or a positive mental attitude as a reaction to Fortune’s current disposition. This is reminiscent of the Filostrato. In the Troilus, however, these two very different attitudes expressed by Troilus and Pandarus towards Fortune are directly juxtaposed as the characters actively discuss Fortune with one another in passages that are usually not derived from the Italian poem. We will first look at those instances that are closer to the Filostrato, and then move to Troilus and Pandarus’s ongoing debate on the turning of Fortune’s wheel.
In two cases Troilus complains about the action of Fortune in a manner that brings to mind Troiolo’s lamentations. These occurrences take place at an advanced stage in the poem. After he hears that Criseyde must leave for the Greek camp as a consequence of Calkas’s request to exchange the Trojan prisoner Antenor for his daughter,\textsuperscript{56} whom he regrets having left behind,\textsuperscript{57} Troilus is overcome by a torrent of emotions and, once alone in his chamber, launches into a lengthy lamentation. He blames Fortune for this sudden catastrophe:

Than seyde he thus: “Fortune, ala the while!
What have I don? What have I thus agylt?
How myghtestow for rowthe me bygile?
Is ther no grace, and shal I thus be spilt?
Shal thus Creiseyde away, for that thow wilt?
Allas, how maistow in thyn herte fynde
To ben to me thus cruwel and unkynde?

“Have I the nought honoured al my lyve,
As thow wel woost, above the goddes alle?
When wiltow me fro joie thus deprive?
O Troilus, what may men now the calle
But wrecche of wrecches, out of honour falle
Into miserie, in which I wol bewaille
Criseyde – allas! – til that the breth me faille?”\textsuperscript{58}

The first ten lines of Troilus’s lamentation are addressed to Fortune, while in the remaining four he empathically addresses himself with remarkable self-pity. The two sections present some stylistic differences. While invoking Fortune, Troilus utters nine questions in ten lines. The purpose of such questions is to underline that he cannot understand the reasons for what is happening to him and that he is not

\textsuperscript{56}Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book IV, vv. 148–149.
\textsuperscript{57}Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book IV, vv. 90–98.
responsible for it: all the blame is to be placed on Fortune’s malice. Fortune is very much characterised as a pagan goddess here. Notwithstanding his proofs of devotion, the cruel deity has decided to take his beloved away from him. Troilus’s questions emphasise his dismay and sense of having been betrayed by the goddess. The last four lines contain a single question, and very much a rhetorical one, since Troilus readily provides the answer for us. He seems to be concerned with his fame: what will people call him but wretched of wretches, since he has fallen from honour to misery? All he can do now is to lament the loss of his Criseyde, until death. The idea of falling suggests Fortune’s wheel, although we do not know if Troilus is aware of it. Interestingly, however, he calls himself ‘wrecche’, which is precisely the term that Chaucer uses for the typical victim of Fortune in his *Boece*.\textsuperscript{59}

A very similar depiction of the pagan Fortuna is present in the corresponding passage of the *Filostrato*:

Poi poco appresso cominciò a dire Seco nel pianto: – O misera Fortuna, che t’ho io fatto, ch’ad ogni disire mio si t’oppon? Non hai tu più alcuna altra faccenda fuor che ’l mio languire? Perché si tosto hai voltata la bruna faccia ver me, che già t’amava assai più ch’altro iddio, come tu crudel sai?\textsuperscript{60}

Shortly afterwards he began to speak to himself while crying: ‘O cruel Fortune, what have I done to you? Why do you fight so against all my desires? Is my sorrow all you care about now? Why have you turned your dark face towards me so soon, while I already loved you more than any other god, as you, cruel, know well?’

Fortune shows her cruelty towards Troiolo as she arbitrarily decides to bring misery to a loyal servant. Here Chaucer largely reproduces Troiolo’s pagan view of Fortune, as well as his questioning of her. At the same time, he expands Troilus’s complaint by further emphasizing his tendency to ask questions, to blame her cruelty and claim his innocence. Troilus still holds Fortune responsible for what happens to him when,

\textsuperscript{60}Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, IV, 30, p. 235.
during the final night with his lover, Criseyde faints with sorrow and he believes her to be dead:

Than seyde he thus, fulfild of heigh desdayn:
“O cruel Jove, and thow, Fortune adverse,
This al and som: that falsly have ye slayn
Criseyde, and syn ye may do me no werse,
Fy on youre myght and werkes so dyverse”\textsuperscript{61}

This is not only another instance of Troilus’s blaming Fortune, but also a case of double causation, which is so often present in the \textit{Filostrato} and, according to John McCall, is also a blasphemous remark on the part of Troilus.\textsuperscript{62} In the corresponding passage Troiolo, too, blames both Fortune and Jove.\textsuperscript{63} In both of the previous passages, Chaucer seems to improve upon Boccaccio’s use of Fortune to show Troilus’s limited philosophical perspective and inherent paralysis. Troilus’s complaints are decidedly more emphatic than Troiolo’s. This increases the sense of his desperation and, by implication, of his submission to Fortune. One could possibly even say that, with his excessive lamentations, Troilus is looking for the reader’s sympathy. We keenly perceive his loss, and possibly even more so when we realise that, like Troiolo, he is wrong to blame Fortune.

In a similar way, Chaucer also uses Fortune to mark Pandarus as a distinctively less passive character by comparison with Troilus, just as Boccaccio did. Two other passages show Chaucer’s loyalty to his source in this respect. The first can be found relatively early on in the poem, when Pandarus goes to his niece’s palace to inform her of Troilus’s feelings for her and to try to convince her to

\textsuperscript{61}\textit{Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’}, Book IV, vv. 1191–1195.
\textsuperscript{62}\textit{McCall, ‘Five-Book Structure in Chaucer’s Track’}, p. 304.
\textsuperscript{63}\textit{Boccaccio, Filostrato}, IV, 121, p. 283: ‘Ma pria disse, acceso d’alto sdegno: / – O crudel Jove, e tu Fortuna ria / a quel che voi volete, ecco ch’io vegno; / tolta m’avete Criseida mia, / la qual credetti \linebreak[\hbox]{con altro ingegno / tor mi dovreste, e dove ella si sia / ora non so, ma’l corpo suo qui morto / veggio da voi a grandissimo torto’}. [Oh cruel Jove, and you evil Fortune, here I come to do what you will; you have taken my Criseida away from me, whom I believed you would remove by other means, and where she is now I know not, but here I see her body rendered lifeless by you, with great injustice].
reciprocate them. While she is in the garden with her maids, her uncle invites her to leave aside her mourning garments and adopt a more jovial disposition. There is something wonderful in store for her:

But be my trouthe, I thoughte now if ye
Be fortunat, for now men shal it se.

For to every wight som goodly aventure
Som tyme is shape, if he it kan receyven;
But if he wol take of it no cure,
When that it cometh, but wilfully it weyven,
Lo, neyther cas ne fortune hym deceyven,
But ryght his verry sloute and wrecchednesse;
And swich a wight is for to blame, I gesse.

Good aventure, O beele nece, have ye
Ful lightly founden, and ye konne it take;
And for the love of God, and ek of me,
Cache it anon, lest aventure slake!

This passage is mostly taken from the *Filostrato*. *Fortunat* here probably derives from *avventurato viso* (fortunate/lucky face) present in Boccaccio as it expresses the same concept: Criseyde is lucky because Troilus is in love with her. The rest of the passage is directly translated, with minor differences. Here what is dealt with is Fortune as Occasion, as is also the case in the source. Pandarus exhorts Criseyde to seize good *avventure*, which is here to be considered as a favourable opportunity, either caused by chance or Fortune, as Pandarus suggests. In this case, the use of this

67 Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, II, 44, pp. 121–122: ‘Solo una volta ha nel mondo ventura / Qualunque vive, s’ei la sa pigliare; /chi lei vegnente lascia, sua sciagura / piana da se senza altrui biasimare; / la tua vaga e bellissima figura / la t’ha trovata, or sappi adoperare. / Lascia me pianger che’ n malora nacqui, / ch’a Dio, al mondo ed a Fortuna spiacqui’. [Once only can anyone living have good fortune if he can seize her; who lets her go while she approaches should blame only himself. Your graceful and beautiful figure has found her for you, now you must act wisely].
term is closer to the notion of Fortune rather than chance because his speech follows the tradition according to which man does indeed have the power to respond to Fortune’s favour by recognising a propitious situation and acting accordingly, in order to achieve a positive outcome. 68

Pandarus’s portrayal of Fortune is in line with his generally positive and energetic outlook on life, which has often been observed, 69 by contrast with Troilus’s passive attitude. At the same time, one must note that Pandarus is here talking with a set purpose in mind: convincing his niece to accept Troilus. As he himself acknowledges, he is suiting his style to her wit. 70 In other words, Pandarus’s exhortation to seize favourable Fortune is instrumental in convincing Criseyde to reciprocate Troilus’s love. Interestingly, Boccaccio’s Pandaro ends the stanza by contrasting Criseida’s situation with his own; unlike his niece, he always had to endure the disfavour of God, the world, and Fortune (‘Lascia me pianger che ’n malora nacqui, / ch’a Dio, al mondo ed a Fortuna spiacqui’). By omitting these lines, Chaucer avoids double causation, and, more importantly, he removes Pandarus’s complaint about his own love situation, which would be a poor way of convincing Criseyde to accept love. In so doing, Pandarus produces a more markedly optimistic depiction of Fortune by contrast with Troilus’s, and even more so than Pandaro did in the Filostrato. Simultaneously, his way of speaking of Fortune becomes more distinctly instrumental in obtaining a favourable response from his niece.

68 Kiefer, Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 196.
69 See for instance Camargo, ‘The Consolation of Pandarus’, p. 219. Among those critics focusing on Chaucer’s use of the Consolation in the Troilus, Camargo offers one of the most positive readings of the character of Pandarus, as he praises his vitality and optimism in contrast with Lady Philosophy’s unsympathetic attitude.
70 Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book II, vv. 267–273: ‘Than thought he thus: “If I my tale endite / Aught harde, or make a proces any whyle, / She shal no savour have therin but lite, / And trowe I wolde hire in my wil bigyle; / For tendre wittes wenen al be wyle / Theras thei kan nought pleynly understondre; / Forthi hire wit to serven wol I fonde”’. This stanza is not present in the Filostrato. Payne comments upon these lines that Pandarus is ‘feeling out’ exactly how to speak to Criseyde. Payne, Chaucer and Menippean Satire, p. 99.
Pandarus expresses a very similar attitude towards Fortune later on in the poem when, after he has received news of Criseyde’s imminent departure from Troy, he suggests that Troilus run away with her:

It is no rape, in my dom, ne no vice,
Hire to withholden that ye love moost;
Peraunter she myghte holde the for nyce
To late hir go thus unto the Grek oost.
Thenk ek Fortune, as wel thiselven woost,
Helpeth hardy man unto his enprise,
And weyveth wrecches for hire cowardise.\(^71\)

Fortune aids the brave. Again, Pandarus uses Fortune to incite another character to heed his advice and take action. Payne argues that this passage could have been inspired by the *Consolation* liber IV, prosa 7, where Lady Philosophy invites Boethius ‘to form for himself what Fortune he pleases’.\(^72\) But Lady Philosophy would never suggest an action that is only likely to further Troilus’s dependence on Fortune’s gifts. This way of dealing with Fortune is emblematic of Pandarus’s practical nature and, once more, these verses are translated from the *Filostrato*.\(^73\)

What clearly emerges from these passages is that Chaucer employs Fortune as an instrument of characterisation; following Boccaccio’s precedent, he uses Troilus’s complaints about Fortune to show his paralysis,\(^74\) as opposed to Pandarus’s more

\(^{71}\)Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book IV, vv. 596–602.
\(^{72}\)Payne, *Chaucer and Menippean Satire*, p. 95.
\(^{73}\)Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, IV, 73, p. 255: ‘Tu non hai da rapir donna che sia / dal tuo voler lontana, ma è tale, / che di ciò che farai, contenta fia, / e se di ciò seguisse troppo male, / o biasimo di te, tu hai la via / di riuscirne tosto, ch’è cotale: / renderla indietro. La Fortuna aiuta / chiunque ardisce e timidi rifiuta’. [The woman you have to kidnap is not an enemy to your desires, but she will welcome your decision. If the outcome should be misery or should she blame you, you can promptly resolve the situation by returning her. Fortune helps those who are brave and refuses the fearful].
\(^{74}\)Troilus’s unwillingness to act has often been noted. McCall suggests that Chaucer has dramatised in Troilus’s attitude towards Fortune Lady Philosophy’s arguments about the weakness of the ‘schrewes’ who are Fortune’s victims. His lack of confidence in human freedom as well as in God’s governance represents precisely the opposite of how one should behave according to her. McCall, ‘Five-Book Structure in Chaucer’s *Troilus*’, p. 304. Payne also stresses Troilus’s unwillingness to act as if he was free. Payne, *Chaucer and Menippean Satire*, p. 115. Stevens too notes Troilus’s helplessness and sense of impotence against the action of Fortune. Stevens, ‘The Winds of Fortune in the “Troilus”’, p. 288.
virile attitude towards Fortune, which, however, always seems instrumental in assisting in his persuasions. It is in Troilus and Pandarus’s discussions on the subject of Fortune’s wheel that Chaucer further develops and elaborates the juxtaposition between the two already present in his source.

The conversation about Fortune’s wheel between Troilus and Pandarus begins relatively early on in the poem, and many have looked at it in the context of Chaucer’s borrowings from the Consolation, as their discussions are strongly reliant on Boethian material. After falling in love with Criseyde in the temple, as in the Filostrato, Troilus suffers in secret the effects of this unexpected passion, until his friend Pandarus happens to hear his sighs. After questioning him at length, he convinces Troilus to confess that he is in love, but the young Trojan wishes to conceal the name of his swete fo. Pandarus insists on knowing her identity, as he wants to help Troilus, but nothing can be done to improve the miserable situation he finds himself in, according to Troilus, as Fortune is his enemy. Unlike Troiolo in the corresponding passage, Troilus here blames Fortune for his unhappy situation:

Ful hard were it to helpen in this cas,
    For wel fynde I that Fortune is my fo;
Ne al the men that riden konne or go
    May of hir e cruel whiel the harm withstonde;
    For as hire list she pleyth with free and bonde.

75 Amongst the first to focus on Pandarus’s Boethian borrowings was Gaylord, ‘Uncle Pandarus as Lady Philosophy’. A more recent example is Camargo, ‘The Consolation of Pandarus’.
80 There is no corresponding complaint at this point in the Filostrato. In his dialogue with Pandaro, the only entity that Troiolo seems to consider responsible for the situation is Amore. Boccaccio, Filostrato, II, 7, p. 104. The only reference to Fortune in this discussion is uttered by Pandarus, who mentions that he loved ‘sventuratamenté’, probably meaning that his love was not reciprocated. ‘Sventuratamenté’ is the only hint of Fortune in their discussion: Pandaro’s falling in love was unfortunate or unlucky. As seen above, ventura and derivates tend to refer to good or bad luck in a colloquial fashion, thus having no direct causal implication. Chaucer possibly develops what is merely a passing reference to Fortune into a depiction of cruel Fortuna and her wheel.
Troilus believes that his desperation is caused by Fortune. She appears to be his enemy; his state of discomfort is itself proof of her disfavour, and therefore there is nothing he can do. Fortune is powerful and no man can oppose the motion of her wheel and the pain it brings. Fortune is, once more, identified as the cause of sorrow by Troilus, but here the image of her wheel is prominent. As in previous passages, Fortune is described as playing with mortals. Not only is she powerful, she is also cruel. The fact that she plays with free and bonde clearly indicates that Troilus believes that anybody at all can be chosen by Fortune as her victim; there is no sense of justice or retribution involved. This is the same image of Fortune the capricious pagan goddess that was present in the passages already discussed. Although these verses are not directly taken from the *Filostrato*, they are reminiscent of those passages in which Fortune is described as invidiosa, jealous and crudel, cruel.82

As seen before, Troilus, like his counterpart, complains about Fortune’s cruelty, but there is one significant difference between this complaint and those previously examined. Here Pandarus expresses his dissent:

Quod Pandarus, “Than blamestow Fortune
For thow art wroth; ye, now at erst I see.
Woost thow nat wel that Fortune is comune
To everi manere wight in som degree?
And yet thow hast this comfort, lo, parde,
That, as hire joies moten overgon,
So mote hire sorwes passen everechon,

“For if hire whiel stynte any thyng to torne,
Than cessed she Fortune anon to be.
Now, sith hire whiel by no way may sojourne,
What woostow if hire mutabilite
Right as thyselven list wol don by the,
Or that she be naught fer fro thyn helpyne?

Paraunter thow hast cause for to synge.\textsuperscript{83}

Pandarus begins by meditating on what emerges from Troilus’s speech: he blames Fortune out of anger. He seems to think that his young friend should adopt a different attitude. He asks whether Troilus knows that everybody is, to some degree, affected by Fortune. He implies that, since Fortune’s disfavour is common, he should not complain. This is, possibly, because knowing that we are all in the same situation should bring some comfort;\textsuperscript{84} if misfortune is something that we all must suffer, then there is little point in protesting. Pandarus is here suggesting that Troilus should act more maturely: he is showing a lack of courage. In addition, Pandarus uses the notion of the wheel of Fortune to reassure Troilus. The very nature of Fortune is to turn her wheel. Her law commands that, as he is now experiencing misery, so he will also rise and his turn to experience happiness is very likely to come, perhaps sooner than he thinks.

The idea that the wheel of Fortune does not stay still has numerous precedents,\textsuperscript{85} and it is also present in the \textit{Consolation}. Boethius complains about Fortune’s behaviour towards him as he experiences her disfavour after having been in prosperity. But Philosophy reminds him that Fortune’s favour is not everlasting. It is in the very nature of Fortune to be mutable, because ‘Yif Fortune bygan to duelle stable, she cessede thanne to ben Fortune’. Pandarus reproduces Lady Philosophy’s opinion on Fortune, thus taking up her role as advisor and consoler.\textsuperscript{87} One significant difference is that Pandarus, unlike the wiser Philosophy, does not suggest that relying upon Fortune may be an error. On the contrary, he only reassures Troilus that his time to experience happiness will come. But implicit in Pandarus’ consolation is the fact that after joy sorrow is bound to come again, as Boethius has

\textsuperscript{84}He mentioned this principle shortly beforehand: as they are both unfortunate in love, they may find solace in each other: ‘to wrecche is consolacioun / To have another felawe in hys peyne’. Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book I, vv. 708–709.
\textsuperscript{85}Patch, \textit{The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature}, p. 157, note 4.
\textsuperscript{86}Chaucer, ‘Boece’, Book II, Prosa 2.
experienced. After all, Lady Philosophy used the concept that Fortune cannot stay still to console Boethius after his fall from happiness: it was to be expected. On the contrary, Pandarus is using the same idea to reassure Troilus that he will enjoy Fortune’s favour. Philosophy’s ultimate message is not to trust Fortune, while Pandarus’s is to climb upon her wheel. According to Alan Gaylord, the Consolation suggests that, in fact, it is not possible to rise again after a fall from Fortune’s wheel:

The implication in Boethius’ work is that one does not continue to spin around and around on that wheel; once down, it appears, one stays down. “Tragedye is to seyn a dite of a prosperite for a tyme, that endeth in wrecchidnesse.”

But what ends in wretchedness in this definition taken from Boece is tragedy, and not necessarily any journey upon Fortune’s wheel. There is no reason why there should not be a rise after the first fall. The problem with Pandarus’s suggestion is that, in any case, a subsequent fall seems inevitable. It is true, however, as Gaylord suggests, that technically Troilus has not yet climbed upon the wheel of Fortune. He has already complained against Fortune, but that is merely because he has not yet achieved what he desires; he has not lost any of Fortune’s gifts yet and it is only after this discussion with Pandarus that he decides to pursue worldly love. In so doing, as Pandarus unwittingly suggested, he should be aware of the fact that after rising upon Fortune’s wheel he should expect to fall, irrespective of whether or not he may then hope to rise again. F. Anne Payne brings attention to the fact that Pandarus’s meditations on Fortune have here, as we noticed before, a precise aim: to attempt to raise Troilus from his state of desperation. She thinks that Pandarus ‘banks on the belief that Troilus will look only to the next moment in life, not to the whole pattern implied’, otherwise Troilus might despair altogether. This is not the

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88 On this point see especially Gaylord, ‘Uncle Pandarus as Lady Philosophy’, p. 586.
91 Payne, Chaucer and Menippean Satire, 92–93.
last instance in which Pandarus speaks of Fortune with a set purpose in mind, as we will shortly see.

Pandarus will indeed show awareness of Troilus’s impending misery soon after the consummation scene, when the young lover is at the apex of happiness. After inviting Criseyde to dine at his palace, Pandarus convinces her to stay the night, as a violent storm would make the journey home quite uncomfortable. Troilus is secretly hiding in the palace as well, waiting for Pandarus’s plan to unfold. The uncle furtively awakens his niece in the night to tell her that Troilus has arrived, mad with jealousy, as he believes that Criseyde, who had in the meantime accepted him as a suitor as long as he kept her honour safe, has betrayed him with Horaste. Notwithstanding her initial refusal, Pandarus manages to bring her to Troilus so that she may reassure him of her loyalty; their relationship is consummated that night. The following day Troilus thanks Pandarus for all his help and the bliss to which he has brought him, but the latter warns his young friend:

My deere frend, if I have don for the
   In any cas, God wot, it is me lief,
   And am as glad as man may of it be,
   God help me so; but tak now nat a-grief
   That I shal seyn: be war of this mischief,
   That, there as thow now brought art in thy blisse,
   That thow thiselne ceause it nat to misse.

98 Pandaro warns Troiolo in the Filostrato as well, although there he seems primarily worried that his infatuation might not last. There is no mention of Fortune. Boccaccio, Filostrato, III, 60–61, pp. 198–199.
Pandarus rejoices in Troilus’s success in love. After all, he has made it possible for his younger friend to experience a happiness that he himself has been unable to attain. But a lingering menace of future unhappiness is hinted in his reply. Although Troilus is happy now, he may yet lose that which he has so painfully achieved. Pandarus suggests that the fault for this possible fall from happiness would be Troilus’s but, at the same time, the subsequent verses remind us, once more, of the motion of Fortune’s wheel, thus possibly implying that Fortune is, ultimately, responsible for the loss of what we hold dear:

For of fortunes sharpe adversitee
The worste kynde of infortune is this,
A man to han ben in prosperitee,
And it remembren whan it passed is.
Th’art wis ynough; forthi do nat amys:
Be naught to rakel, theigh thow sitte warme,
For if thow be, certeyn it wol the harme.

Thow art at ese, and hold the wel therinne;
For also seur as reed is every fir,
As gret a craft is kepe wel as wynne.
Bridle alwey wel thi speche and thi desir,
For worldly joie halt nought but by a wir.
That preveth wel, it brest al day so ofte;
Forthi nede is to werken with it softe.\(^{101}\)

\(^{100}\)Chaucer, “Troilus and Criseyde”, Book I, vv. 617–630.
Pandarus’s message is that Troilus should hold fast to what he has achieved. He never openly states why Troilus should be so worried about his future happiness, nor how likely he is to lose what he has, but there is in these stanzas a sense of impending doom. Moreover, it was Pandarus who previously asserted that Fortune’s wheel cannot stop. It may be that Pandarus knows indeed that, just as happiness is bound to come after joy, so sorrow will follow again. And he also believes that this second sorrow will be sourer that his previous one, as there is nothing worse than the pain that derives from the loss of happiness, as he openly states here. At the same time, he does suggest that, if Troilus acts carefully, he may be able to persevere in his blessed state.

It may seem that Pandarus is suggesting that the turning of Fortune’s wheel is dependent on Troilus’s actions; if he acts carefully, he may be able to preserve his happiness. But how likely is he to succeed? Does Pandarus really hope that he will live happily ever after, or, given his familiarity with the relentless turning of the wheel of Fortune, does he know that Troilus will have to fall and is he simply warning his friend, so that the reversal of Fortune may not come as a complete surprise? After all, he does show in other passages that he is capable of lying to Troilus out of love for him, as, much later on, when they are awaiting Criseyde’s return, he does not have the heart to tell his young friend that the woman will not be back in Troy. Besides, we already noted that he has the tendency to adapt his discourse to what the situation demands. We may, then, suspect that Pandarus fails to express all he thinks because he does not want to harm his friend or, possibly, to avoid being blamed for bringing the lovers together should their happiness not last.

102In the Filostrato Pandaro too suggests, earlier on in the story, that Troiolo’s happiness may not last, but he does not explicitly warn Troilus: ‘Ma come Dio, che tutto quanto vede, / e tu che’l sai, a ciò non m’ha indotto / di premio isperanza, ma sol fede, / che come amico portoti, condotto / m’ha ad ovrar che tu trovi mercede. / Per ch’io ti priego, s’el non ti sia rotto / da ria fortuna il disiato bene, / che facci com’a savio far conviene’. [But as God, who sees all, you know well that no hope of reward urged me to act as I did. In the name of our friendship alone I tried to put an end to your sorrows. Therefore I pray you, unless evil fortune disrupts your longed for joy, act as a wise man should]. Boccaccio, Filostrato, III, 7, p. 174. The fact that the possibility that Fortune may disrupt Troilus’s happiness is only mentioned in a parenthetic clause, and no other comment is offered, shows that the concept is here given very little prominence. Chaucer greatly developed it and brought it decidedly into the foreground.

Although his motivations may be ambiguous, it is clear that we should expect Fortune’s wheel to keep turning. By mentioning Fortune at the beginning of the first stanza in a foregrounded position, her role becomes prominent. The fickleness of worldly joy expressed in these passages and seen in connection with the wheel of Fortune implies that Pandarus strongly fears that something is about to disrupt Troilus’s happiness. The reader cannot but share his opinion. We know that Troilus’s happiness will not last, and, therefore, we must heed Pandarus’s warning. Leaving Pandarus’s motivations aside for the time being, the problem of Troilus’s responsibility for what happens to him remains, and it will recur later on in the text.

As Pandarus anticipates, Troilus will indeed lose Criseyde. After he has heard the news that his beloved is to be exchanged for Antenor as a consequence of her father’s request, Troilus sorrowfully complains, and the crucial issue of whether Fortune’s wheel may stop, and hence of whether Troilus might have done something to avoid the unhappy conclusion of the love story, emerges once more. During his long lamentation he addresses, among others, those lovers who enjoy Fortune’s favour:

O ye loveris, that heigh upon the whiel
Ben set of Fortune, in good aventure,
God leve that ye fynde ay love of stiel,
And longe mote youre lif in joie endure!
But whan ye comen by my sepulture,
Remembrith that youre felawe resteth there;
For I loved ek, though ich unworthi were.  

Troilus proves to have learnt Pandarus’s teachings on the motion of the wheel of Fortune, as he mentions it here. Happy lovers are blessed by Fortune’s favour and are, therefore, at the apex of her wheel. They are in good aventure in the sense that they are experiencing an extremely favourable set of circumstances. Troilus wishes that their love may be constant, while his was not. Interestingly, here Troilus seems

to take responsibility for what happened to him: he was unworthy of such love. He implies that love can be everlasting, and hence that good Fortune may abide if one deserves it. Does this mean that Fortune’s wheel can truly stop? According to Lady Philosophy, this would not seem to be the case. Any joy based upon Fortune may be taken away at any time. But is this something that will inevitably happen, or is it merely a possibility? Allan Mitchell argues that there is no reason why Troilus should not have hoped for a happy ending for his love, but the Boethian references to Fortune make it quite clear that the reader is meant to perceive Troilus’s mistake. Perhaps someone may indeed be so lucky as to keep Fortune’s favours. But even assuming that this rare possibility could occur, Fortune’s gifts are ultimately bound to disappear, as all earthly goods are nullified in death, as Lady Philosophy points out to Boethius:

Artow now comen first, a sodeyn gest, into the schadowe or tabernacle of this lif? Or trowestow that any stedfastnesse be in mannnes thynges, whan ofte a swift hour dissolveth the same man (that is to seyn, whan the soule departeth fro the body)? For although that zelde is ther any feith that fortunous thynges woollen dwellen, yet natheles the laste day of a mannnes lif is a maner deth to Fortune, and also to thilke that hath dwelt. And therefore what wenestow dar rekke, yif thow forleete hir in deyinge, or elles that sche, Fortune, forleete the in fleynge awey?

Assuming that one may keep Fortune’s favours, this is only possible for as long as one is alive; once he passes into the next life and is parted from the body, all earthly pleasures will simply cease. No worldly love based upon the senses can truly last forever.

At the same time, one may argue that human love can go beyond the limits of this world, as did Dante and the Stilnovisti poets. A love inspired by God that

108 Surdich, ‘Il dolce stil novo’, p. 44.
elevates the soul, ultimately leading to God, can indeed be everlasting, as it transcends the boundaries of this life. The ultimate example is Dante’s love for Beatrice, who literally guides him to God, as we have seen. Such love is not at the mercy of Fortune because it is based on reason and not on the senses; it carries on into the afterlife, as it is one with love for God, which correspond to Boethius’s true good. But is this Troilus’s type of love? Davis Taylor is among those who believe so, arguing that it is precisely Troilus’s love, and his loyalty, that save him in the end, as ‘all love is part of God’s love, that sexuality and charity are in one continuum’. But even for Dante and the Stilnovisti love was not always salvific. The prime example of a damning love can be found in the case of Paolo and Francesca. Dante the character is overwhelmed by pity as he witnesses the eternal damnation that these souls experience as a consequence of love; but Dante the author, by placing them in hell, in the same circle as Helen and Paris, shows his awareness of the fact that, when passion overcomes reason, love is something that damned rather than saves. Does passion overcome reason in the case of Troilus? If we follow Dante’s view, it would certainly seem so. Like Troiolo, Troilus yields to passion and loses sight of everything else, as becomes clear when he wishes for the destruction of his city and family rather than suffer Criseyde’s departure. Moreover, in Stilnovistic poetry physical love is not, usually, the type of love that redeems, unless it is sanctified by the marital bond. That is possibly why Troilus states that he was unworthy of love. His is essentially a carnal love, and that is

109Boethius, Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio, Liber III, Prosa X.
110Taylor, ‘The Terms of Love’, p. 239.
112Dante, Inferno, Canto V.
113Dante, Inferno, Canto V, vv. 109–142.
114Dante, Inferno, Canto V, vv. 64; 67.
115Dante, Inferno, Canto V, vv. 37–39: ‘Intesi ch’a così fatto tormento / enno dannati i peccator carnali, / che la ragion sommettono al talento’. [Caught in this torment, as I understood, / were those who – here condemned for carnal sin – / made reason bow to their instinctual bent]. Dante, Inferno, trans. Robin Kirkpatrick, p. 41.
117Morgan, ‘The Freedom of the Lovers in Troilus and Criseyde’, p. 60. See also Hollander, Boccaccio’s Two Venuses, pp. 3–7. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in this influential work Hollander argues that Boccaccio himself was well aware of the distinction between an ‘immoral’, carnal Venus that he criticises in his opere minori, and in the Filostrato as well, and another, salvific Venus presiding over matrimony and the creation of a family.
precisely why it is bound to end, as are all fleeting worldly joys.\textsuperscript{119} Even should Fortune remain favourable, his love would have inevitably ended in death. Troilus has subjected himself to Fortune’s yoke by choosing to base his happiness upon carnal love, and now he must abide by the law of her relentlessly turning wheel. There is nothing he can do to stop its motion now.\textsuperscript{120} This message, already hinted at in the \textit{Filostrato}, receives further emphasis here precisely thanks to Troilus’s more frequent meditations upon the turning of Fortune’s wheel.

Once again, Pandarus’s view of Fortune’s sudden turn differs from Troilus’s ideas on the matter:

\begin{quote}
O mercy, God, who wolde have trowed this?
Who wolde have wend that in so litel a throwe
Fortuneoure joie wold han overthrowe?

For in this world ther is no creature,
As to my dom, that ever saugh ruyne
Straunger than this, thorugh cas or aventure.
But who may al eschue, or al devyne?
Swich is this world! Forthi I thus diffyne:
Ne trust no wight to fynden in Fortune
\end{quote}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{119} One could here recall what the narrator of Henryson’s \textit{Testament of Cresseid} says about unstable worldly love during his description of Venus (whose duplicity is strongly reminiscent of Fortune’s):

\begin{quote}
\textquote{Vnder smyling scho was dissimulait, / Prouocatiue with blenkis amorous, / And suddanely changit and alterait, / Angrie as ony serpent vennemous, / Richt pungitiue with wordis odious; / Thus variant scho was, quha list tak keip: / With ane eye lauch, and with the vther weip, / In taikning that all fleschelie paramour, / Quhilk Venus hes in reull and gouernance, / Is sum tyme sweit, sum tyme bitter and sour, / Richt unstabill and full of variance, / Mingit with cairfull ioy and fals plesance, / Now hait, now cauld, now blyth, now full of wo, / Now grene as leif, now widderit and ago’’. Robert Henryson, ‘The Testament of Cresseid’, in \textit{The Poems of Robert Henryson}, ed. Denton Fox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), vv. 225–238.
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{120} The following statement by Lady Philosophy perfectly applies to Troilus’s state: ‘Thus, at the laste, it byhoveth the to suffren wyth evene wil in pacience al that is doon inwith the floor of Fortune (that is to seyn, in this world), syn thou hast oonys put thy nekke undir the yok of hir. For yif thow wilt writen a lawe of wendynghe and of duellynge to Fortune, whiche that thow hast chosen frely to ben thi lady, artow nat wrongful in that, and makest Fortune wroth and aspre by thyn inpacience? […] Thow hast bytaken thisel to the governaunce of Fortune and forthi it byhoveth the to bhoveth the to ben obeisaunt to the maneris of thi lady. Enforcestow the to aresten or withholden the swyftnesse and the sweighhe of hir turnynge wheel? O thow fool of alle mortel fools!’’. Chaucer, ‘Boece’, Book II, Prosa 1.
Although he seems quite surprised by the sudden reversal of Fortune, if we place due emphasis on *so litel a throwe*, it may be that it is the swiftness of the arrival of misery rather than the reversal of Fortune itself that was unexpected. Pandarus does say that Troilus’s is indeed a strange predicament, but this idea is immediately mitigated by the subsequent lines. Such is life: Fortune is fickle and that her gifts do not last. His reaction is perfectly in line with his previous speeches about Fortune: he started by introducing the idea of the turning of the wheel to reassure Troilus that his initial misery would have been replaced by joy. When joy came, he warned him that it could not last. Now that the wheel has come full circle, all he can do is, again, reassure Troilus that his misfortune is common to all those who rely upon Fortune for their happiness. This suggests that Fortune’s wheel knows no rest (at least until a character’s death), as, it may be argued, the reader was invited to suspect all along. It is worth noting that, in the *Filostrato*, it is Troiolo, not Pandaro, who mentions Fortune here:

\[\ldots\] O Pandaro i’ son morto,
là mia letizia s’è voltata in pena,
mi soro, e’l mio dolce conforto
Fortuna insidiosa se ne’l mena,
e con lui ’nsieme il sollazzo e’l diporto.

Oh Pandarus I am but dead, my joy had turned into sorrow, woe is me, and my sweet comfort dangerous Fortune steals away from me together with my solace and my sport.

Both the idea that Fortune is responsible for the loss of Criseyde and the notion of the wheel are present here, as in Chaucer’s version, but in the *Troilus* the concept is not only more developed, it is the change of speaker that marks a significant difference. Pandarus is the one whom Chaucer entrusted with a fuller understanding of the motion of the wheel of Fortune so far; it is only fitting that he should express, once again, his belief in her power over man. Moreover, one could suspect that

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Pandarus is here also trying to dodge responsibility for the miserable conclusion to a relationship that he so vigorously strived to promote.

The previous passages show that Chaucer used Fortune, as Boccaccio did, to help with the characterisation of both Troilus and Pandarus, but he also improved his predecessor’s use of this literary technique. First, he expanded and emphasised those passages already present in the source in which Troiolo and Pandaro mention Fortune. As in the Filostrato, Troilus’s complaints about the action of Fortune show that he sees her primarily as a pagan goddess: powerful, capricious, and unjust. Her actions are unforeseeable and inexplicable. Therefore he believes that nothing he does can affect the outcome of events: he is paralysed by his own sense of impotence. His more emphatic manner of complaining about Fortune may call for the reader’s sympathy: we all tend to feel for the victim of Fortune. But any reader at Chaucer’s time would have known that such complaints betray an overreliance upon Fortune’s gifts. Only on one occasion does Troilus state that he is unworthy of love recognising, by implication, that he may be to blame for the unhappy ending of the love story,¹²³ but he fails to understand fully the extent and nature of his responsibility and he does not try to rectify the situation; he merely complains about it. Troilus’s distress is all the more significant and touching as he emerges as a hopeless victim of his own ignorance.

Pandarus, like Pandaro, seems to voice a more optimistic view of Fortune according to which we do have power to influence the outcome of events: courage and readiness to act can conquer Fortune, although it may be implied that, unlike Pandaro, when Pandarus voices such thoughts, he mostly does so to give courage to his young friend, or to convince Criseyde to accept Troilus as a lover, while he constantly worries about the downturn of Fortune’s wheel. By eliminating some passages and lines in which both Pandaro and Troiolo betray a somewhat

contradictory attitude to Fortune, Chaucer achieves a more unified portrayal of both characters. In addition, by inserting an ongoing discussion about Fortune between Troilus and Pandarus, Chaucer brings greater emphasis to the notion of her wheel. Such passages invite the reader to meditate on the inescapable circular motion that characterises the depiction of Fortune in the Middle Ages. From this perspective, she is not perceived as capricious or unjust: she simply follows her own nature. This awareness on the part of Pandarus, not emphasised in the Filostrato, has two consequences. On the one hand, it furthers the depiction of Pandarus as decidedly more conscious of the human state than Troilus: once we know the law of the wheel and that we are all, in some degree, subject to it, there is little use in complaining about it. All we can do is recognise and accept our precarious situation and try to seize what happy moments we can. That is what he believes, and what he encourages Troilus to do, with very little success. Although Pandarus’s vision of Fortune could be considered to be closer to the Boethian understanding of this concept than Troilus’s, as he does perceive the workings of her turning wheel, still his view is, in theological terms, incomplete. He never shows awareness of a power greater than Fortune. To him, her law seems to be the only law, and worldly happiness the only happiness possible, to be enjoyed while it lasts.

Moreover, Pandarus’s attitude to Fortune may be considered to mirror Chaucer’s and Boccaccio’s, in a somewhat peculiar fashion. He too uses this image as an aid to his ‘art’. Every time he mentions Fortune and her turning wheel, he does so to convince either Criseyde or Troilus to heed his advice, or, possibly, to place the blame for happiness’s frailty on Fortune (or Troilus) and reject responsibility for


125 Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature, pp. 154–158.


127 In Payne’s words Pandarus ‘recognizes that worldly joy is hung on a fragile and easily breakable thread’. Payne, Chaucer and Menippean Satire, p. 93.
events himself. Reading his speeches on Fortune, we almost tend to forget that the affair was, after all, the result of his machinations. This, however, does not mean that he has no faith in the notion of Fortune’s wheel. On the contrary, his manipulative nature is consistent with his belief in its relentless motion. By constantly bringing Troilus’s attention to his current position on the wheel of Fortune and urging him to act accordingly (irrespective of what misery may come), he is merely trying to make him live in compliance with his own philosophy. He thinks that change is inevitable, and that all one can do is to try to make the most of good Fortune and nonchalantly accept bad Fortune when it inevitably arrives. After falling from her wheel, instead of learning, as Boethius does, that Fortune is treacherous, he is ready to jump upon it again for another spin upward. That is precisely what he suggests Troilus should do, for example, when he insists that he search for a new lover immediately after hearing that Criseyde is to go to the Greeks. Payne believes that this attitude on the part of Pandarus ‘violates his charge’s needs for consistency’, as his advice to seek a new love contradicts his earlier suggestions to pursue Criseyde. In fact his advice, inconsistent as it may seem, is perfectly in keeping with his belief in Fortune’s turnings. His views of Fortune provide a reason for his behaviour and his counsels. Both Troilus’s passivity and Pandarus’s endless will to act and plot can be explained considering their views of Fortune. Both views are inherently flawed.

3.2 Criseyde and fals felicitee

In secondary criticism on Chaucer’s Troilus the similarities between Criseyde and Lady Fortune have often been noted; both tend to be perceived as fickle, as they both change the object of their favours. But Criseyde is actually

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129Payne, Chaucer and Menippean Satire, p. 93.
131Payne, Chaucer and Menippean Satire, pp. 93–94.
132See, for instance, Robertson, ‘Chaucerian Tragedy’, p. 34; Berryman, ‘The Ironic Design of Fortune in Troilus and Criseyde’, pp. 2, 5; Newman, ‘“Feynede Loves”, Feigned Lore, and Faith in
much less concerned with Fortune and her wheel than the male protagonists of the poem. Not only does she mention Fortune on fewer occasions than both Troilus and Pandarus; she is the one and only character whose comments about Fortune are significantly reduced by Chaucer in comparison with her counterpart in the *Filostrato*. Quite surprisingly, she only mentions Fortune twice in the whole poem, during a single speech, whereas Criseida mentions Fortune at various stages in the poem, as we have seen.¹³³ What is the purpose and effect of this change? How does it affect Criseyde’s characterisation? In order to show how Fortune, as seen through Criseyde’s eyes, differs from the portrayal offered by Boccaccio’s Criseida and to what effect, I will first compare the only two passages in which Criseyde mentions Fortune with the corresponding lines in the *Filostrato*; then, I will focus on what Chaucer did to those other passages in which Criseida discusses Fortune, and, finally, on what he added to her perception of this concept. The results of this analysis will reveal that Criseyde has very little faith in Fortune’s power, unlike Criseida, and that her view of Fortune is much more in line with a Boethian understanding of this issue than her literary predecessor’s. Nevertheless, she is still far from reaching Lady Philosophy’s conclusions on the subject. Criseyde misses one final element crucial to Boethius’s thought: once she has recognised the vanity of a joy based solely on worldly things, she can find no alternative for it, as she has no belief in a higher good. I will show how this is crucial to understanding Criseyde’s failings, how it may account for her lack of self-sufficiency, and her tendency to look for external protection and submit her will to patriarchal authority. As was the case for Troilus and Pandarus, Chaucer’s modifications of Criseida’s depiction of Fortune are instrumental to the characterisation of his Criseyde.

Once news of the parliament’s decision to exchange Criseyde for Antenor has reached both lovers, they meet to discuss their options. Troilus, after being so

instructed by Pandarus, asks Criseyde to run away with him before it is too late; he fears that, should they part, they may never be able to be reunited.\textsuperscript{134} Criseyde replies with a long speech in which she lists the reasons why eloping will simply not do. It is during this exposition that she mentions Fortune, twice. She first reminds Troilus that he has a duty to his people and he cannot leave them when they most need him. Besides, the war may end soon and, if that were the case, they would regret running away. Moreover, the people would think that he is a coward and, undoubtedly, her honour would be forfeited.\textsuperscript{135} Then she adds:

\begin{quote}
And forthi sle with resoun al this hete!
Men seyn, 'The suffrant overcomith,' parde;
Ek 'Whoso wol han lief, he lief moot lete.'
Thus maketh vertu of necessite
By pacience, and thynk that lord is he
Of Fortune ay that naught wole of hire recche,
And she ne daunteth no wight but a wrecche.\textsuperscript{136}
\end{quote}

She invites Troilus to be patient and endure the present distress. Then she adds that he who does not pay heed to Fortune will indeed master her, as she torments only the wretched. These lines derive from the \textit{Filostrato}. Criseida too suggests to Troiolo that he should ignore Fortune, but the style of her delivery strongly differs from Criseyde’s:

\begin{quote}
Dunque prendi conforto, e la Fortuna
Col dare il dosso vinci e rendi stanca;
non soggiacette a lei giammai nessuna persona in cui trovasse anima franca.
Seguiamo il corso suo, fingiti alcuna andata in questo mezzo,e’n quella manca
li tuoi sospiri, ch’al decimo giorno,
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Therefore take comfort, tire out Fortune and win her over by turning your back on her. She could never conquer a strong and brave spirit. Let us
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{134}Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book IV, vv. 1500–1505.

\textsuperscript{135}Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book IV, vv. 1555–1575.

\textsuperscript{136}Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book IV, vv. 1583–1589.
sanza alcun follo, qui farò ritorno.¹³⁷
follow her course,
imagine some journey
in the meantime and
thus cease your sighs.
Without fail I will be
back on the tenth day.

The first and obvious difference that should be mentioned is that Chaucer devotes fewer lines than Boccaccio to Fortune. He removes the concept of Fortune’s course referred to in the second part of the stanza, deciding instead to expand Criseyde’s exhortation to patience in the first three lines. The four lines that Chaucer translates more closely, which I want to focus on, seem to provide largely the same meaning as the original version. Both Criseida and Criseyde urge Troilus to take comfort, or be patient, and to accept the current situation instead of opting to escape from Troy. They both assure him that Fortune will not win in the end. The differences between the two utterances might seem to be primarily stylistic, but they are more significant than they appear at first.

  The English poet says that it is possible to be lord of Fortune, instead of saying that brave people are not subdued by Fortune. By making the human figure the agent here, Chaucer decidedly stresses the power of man rather than Fortune. ‘That naught wole of hire recche’ translates ‘Col dare il dosso vinci e rendi stanca’ (tire her out and conquer her by turning your back on her). Chaucer’s version describes a general attitude of indifference towards Fortune. It is by disregarding Fortune that one may conquer her. By contrast, Boccaccio depicts the much more vivid and specific action of turning one’s back to Fortune, thus winning her over by repeatedly opposing her actions. Boccaccio’s version clearly emphasises the strength that is necessary to conquer Fortune and, by implication, Fortune’s own potency is stressed: the harder it is to conquer her, the more we perceive her power. Chaucer uses ‘she ne daunteth no wight but a wrecche’ to render ‘non soggiacette a lei

¹³⁷Boccaccio, Filostrato, IV, 154, pp. 298–299.
gia
mmai nessuna / persona in cui trovasse anima franca’. Saying that Fortune torments nobody but those who are miserable is quite different from saying that no brave spirit ever capitulated to her. Again, Boccaccio’s version emphasises the strength that is necessary to triumph over Fortune and, therefore, Fortune’s own power emerges in the process. Chaucer’s ‘ne daunteth no wight but a wrecche’ may even imply that Fortune has no true sovereignty over man, because it is only the weak who empower Fortune by allowing her to take control over them.

If we take the implications of the passage one step further, Chaucer’s account could be seen as a negation of the very existence of Fortune: it is only the wretched man who is at Fortune’s mercy because he believes in her power. Thus Chaucer here provides a very peculiar translation of Boccaccio’s lines; although the literal meaning is extremely close, the implications of the two passages are very much in opposition. Boccaccio’s verses emphasise Fortune’s strength; although he states that someone exceptionally brave may resist her, she still emerges as a powerful entity. On the contrary, Chaucer’s passage strongly undermines Fortune’s power: only the weak are affected by her.

After thus encouraging Troilus to accept, for the time being, what is happening to them, Criseyde continues her speech by promising that she will return to Troy after ten days. Despite all her arguments for the acceptance of the parliament’s decree, Troilus asks her, once more, to run away with him. She protests that he does not trust her. She renews her promise, and Troilus, too, swears to his trouthe. At this point Crisseyde declares that her love is constant because it is not based on superficial aspects of her beloved but on his moral virtue. Such love is forever, ‘And this may lengthe of yeres naught fordo, / Ne remuable Fortune deface’. This is the second, and last time, she mentions Fortune in the whole poem

and this occurrence is, again, taken from the *Filostrato*. There, however, it is Troilo who states that time and Fortune cannot disrupt their love. The first obvious effect of the change of speaker is that Criseyde, and not Troilus, will prove wrong about the strength of their love, and doubly so as she will be the one to betray him. Moreover, the change of speaker seems particularly apt because this statement, which so decidedly undermines Fortune’s powers, has little in common with Troilus’s more reverent view of Fortune. It may remind us, instead, of Criseyde’s ideas on the subject expressed shortly beforehand. By giving this remark to Criseyde, Chaucer reinforces the idea that she does not place any faith in Fortune as she, once more, denies Fortune’s sovereignty over her life and Troilus’s. It is no coincidence that she asks for God’s grace (Jupiter’s in this case), and not Fortune’s in the subsequent line. The change of speaker is consistent with the stylistic modifications of the first passage on Fortune uttered by Criseyde, thus providing a cohesive and coherent portrayal of her views of Fortune.

The only two times Criseyde mentions Fortune, she denies her power. All other passages in the *Filostrato* in which Criseida names *Fortuna* have been modified by Chaucer, in a way that shows that Criseyde has little consideration for Fortune, while Criseida has a stronger sense of her influence. Chaucer has either entirely removed these passages or made lexical choices that consistently refer to chance, rather than Fortune. A first instance in Boccaccio’s poem can be found when Pandaro tries to convince Criseida to accept Troiolo’s suit. She begs her uncle to let her lead the life Fortune has prepared for her (‘Però mi lascia tal vita menare / chente Fortuna apparecchiata m’have’). In Chaucer’s version, Criseyde makes no such statement. In the corresponding answer to Pandarus, she does not mention Fortune at all. What she does, by comparison with her counterpart in the *Filostrato*, is to complain about her unhappy situation in terms that are etymologically connected with the notion of chance rather than Fortune, understood as a definite agent or

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144Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, IV, 166, 1–2, p. 304: ‘E queste cose non possono tor gli anni / con mobile fortuna’ (And the years, with changeable fortune, cannot take these things away).
force. She bemoans her *dysaventure*,\(^{147}\) *dreadful cas*,\(^{148}\) and *sory chaunce*,\(^{149}\) and she notes that *unhappes* often befall lovers.\(^{150}\) As seen before, *dysaventure*, like Boccaccio’s *ventura*, etymologically derives from the Latin *ventūrus*, that which is to come,\(^{151}\) and is therefore not necessarily connected to the notion of Fortune; in other words the use of this term on the part of Criseyde does not reveal which force or forces she believes to have power over her life. *Cas*, like the Italian *caso*, derives from the Latin *cāsus*:\(^{152}\) it refers to an event that has happened, is happening or will happen.\(^{153}\) Again, this term makes no direct reference to Fortune, or to any force controlling the outcome of events, but rather focuses on the events themselves. Similarly, *chaunce*, deriving from the French *cheoir*, to fall or befall, which derives in turn, like *cas*, from the Latin *cādo*,\(^{154}\) refers to what happens without direct reference to Fortune or destiny. *Unhappes* is related to the same domain: *hap* derives from the Old Norse *happ*, meaning chance or luck.\(^{155}\) It is fair to say that all of these expressions stress the impression that what is happening to Criseyde is sad but accidental: she does not seem to blame a specific force for these occurrences, unlike Criseida.\(^{156}\)

Criseida mentions Fortune again after Pandaro leaves, as she meditates on whether to yield to love or not. One of the arguments against accepting Troiolo is that, even if they decide to try to keep this love secret, there are no guarantees that it

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\(^{151}\) Oxford Latin Dictionary, s. v. ‘uenio’.  
\(^{152}\) Grande dizionario della lingua italiana, s. v. ‘caso’.  
\(^{153}\) Oxford Latin Dictionary, s. v. ‘casus’.  
\(^{154}\) The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, s. v. ‘chance’.  
\(^{155}\) The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, s. v. ‘hap’.  
\(^{156}\) Interestingly, in Henryson’s Testament, Cresseid has a rather different attitude. After she has been abandoned by Diomeid, she blames Cupid and Venus for her misery (Henryson, ‘The Testament of Cresseid’, vv. 134–140), and this is precisely why she is punished by the gods (vv. 302–308). In a way, Henryson’s Cresseid has something in common with Chaucer’s Troilus. She, too, passes from happiness to misery (v. 130), and she, too, first blames external forces for it. It is only after she has lost all worldly joys, that she finally realises Fortune’s fickleness: ‘All welth in eird, away as wind it weiris; / Be war thairtoir, approchis nei ȝour hour; / Fortoun is fikkill quhen scho beginnis and steiris’ (vv. 467–469). Once she is aware of her mistake of trusting her happiness in something as fragile as earthly things, she finally takes full responsibility for her predicament (v. 574).
would stay so, because it is vain to trust Fortune (‘Assai è vano / fidarsi alla Fortuna’). Chaucer, once again, removes this reference to Fortune. There is no equivalent verse in Criseyde’s speech. She does not mention Fortune in relation to keeping the possible affair secret, but she fears the gossip of *wikked tonges* instead. This shows once more that, instead of fearing Fortune, Chaucer’s Criseyde tends to consider worldly factors. Towards the end of the poem, Criseida will blame Fortune two more times for what has happened to her. Both instances are completely removed by Chaucer. The first of these occurrences is to be found when Pandaro informs her of Troiolo’s distress after he has heard that she is to go to the Greek camp. Criseida, using a very colourful image, states that now Fortune is feeding upon her misery, and she now realises Fortune’s treachery. Criseyde, however, simply expresses her distress at hearing of Troilus’s deep sorrow. Similarly, when leaving for the Greek camp, Criseida blames both Jove and Fortune: they are taking her away against her will and they seem to be pleased by her suffering. In Chaucer’s version, her complaint is reduced to a simple, but effective *Allas*.

Martin Stevens argues that, although Criseyde recognises the action of Fortune, she ‘never seriously speculates about ultimate concerns’. On the contrary, the little importance she places on Fortune represents, in fact, a positive attitude and should be seem as a sign of wisdom. All these passages show that Criseyde, in contrast to Criseida, never once blames Fortune for what happens to her. The only two times she mentions Fortune, she denies, rather than fears, her power. When she meditates upon her miserable situation, she laments her mischance rather than blaming Fortune. These changes suggest that Criseyde is a more mature

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character than her counterpart in Boccaccio’s version. The fact that she does not recognise the power of Fortune means, as she herself suggests,\textsuperscript{165} that she is not subject to her. It may be argued that she does not believe in Fortune at all, by contrast with both Troilus and Pandarus.

Rather than complaining, as Troilus does, about the action of Fortune, she tends to bemoan the vanity of worldly happiness. This is decidedly an approach more in line with Lady Philosophy’s teachings, and a clear indication of the fact that, contrary to Stevens’s opinion, she is concerned with philosophical issues.\textsuperscript{166} Like Troilus and Pandarus’s discussions of Fortune’s wheel, her meditations upon worldly joy emerge at different stages in the poem. Such passages are Chaucer’s invention. Significantly, she expresses for the first time her doubts about the existence of perfect joy in this world in Book III, shortly before the consummation scene. After Pandarus tells her about Troilus’s jealousy in order to convince her to accept to see him, she makes a declamation about the vanity of worldly joy:

“O God,” quod she, “so worldly selynesse,
Which clerkes callen fals felicitee,
Imedled is with many a bitternesse!
Ful angwissous than is, God woot,” quod she,
“Condicioun of veyn prosperitee:
For either joies comen nought yfeere,
Or elles no wight hath hem alwey here.”\textsuperscript{167}

Worldly happiness, she states, is false, and always brings with it sorrow as well. This notion is reminiscent of the idea of the wheel of Fortune, although Criseyde never mentions it. After all, the vanity of worldly joy is precisely what we are meant to

\textsuperscript{165}Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book IV, vv. 1583–1589.
\textsuperscript{166}See, for instance, Boethius, Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolationis, Liber II, Prosa IV.
\textsuperscript{167}Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book III, vv. 813–819.
discover from a contemplation of Fortune’s wheel. In a way, her considerations of worldly happiness perfectly parallel Troilus and Pandarus’s discussions of the wheel of Fortune and whether or not its motion can be stopped. They are, too, considering whether everlasting worldly joy is possible. The main difference is that, from a Boethian point of view, Criseyde deals with this topic in philosophically more correct terms. The fact that she does not mention the wheel of Fortune but talks about worldly happiness instead shows that she is more aware of what Fortune’s wheel really represents. Once more, this suggests that she does not believe in Fortune, but is rather aware of what Fortune stands for: basing your happiness on the possession of worldly things, which cannot but be transitory, as she goes on to show:

O brotel wele of mannes joie unstable!
With what wight so thow be, or how thow pleye,
Either he woot that thow, joie, art muable,
Or woot it nought; it mot ben oon of tweye.
Now if he woot it nought, how may he seye
That he hath verray joie and selynesse,
That is of ignoraunce ay in derknesse?  

She denounces the unstable nature of happiness. Troilus is a perfect example of someone who fails to understand the fickleness of worldly joy, and it is possibly this *ignoraunce* that makes his fall from happiness so severe. On the other hand, she explains that the knowledge of the transient nature of joy is no gift either:

Now if he woot that joie is transitorie,
As every joye of worldly thyng mot flee,
Than every tyme he that hath in memorie,
The drede of lesyng maketh hym that he
May in no perfit selynesse be;

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168 In *The Consolation of Philosophy* it is only after realising the true nature of Fortune that Boethius can begin to understand what true happiness is, Boethius, *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio*, Liber III, Prosa VIII.
170 See Nair, ‘Gender and Philosophy in *Troilus and Criseyde*’, p. 48.
And if to lese his joie he sette a myte,
Than semeth it that joie is worth ful lite.\(^{171}\)

The fear of losing happiness prevents it from being complete. There can be no perfect, everlasting joy because all worldly bliss is bound to come to an end and we cannot but fear this inescapable loss. Criseyde herself is among those who fear, and Pandarus too, as seen before, dreads the fall that comes after joy.\(^{172}\) Criseyde’s conclusion is very straightforward, and it is the logical end to her arguments:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Wherfore I wol diffyne in this matere,} \\
\text{That trewely, for aught I can espie,} \\
\text{Ther is no verry weele in this world heere.} \\
\text{But O thow wikked serpent, jalousie,} \\
\text{Thow mysbyleved envyous folie,} \\
\text{Why hastow Troilus mad to me untriste,} \\
\text{That neve yet agylte hym, that I wiste?}^{173}\n\end{align*}
\]

Although in this passage she clearly shows a great awareness of the nature of human happiness,\(^{174}\) there is still something missing in her discussion of the problem: no resolution is offered. Her conclusion is declared in the first three lines of the stanza, and then she moves on to discuss Troilus’s jealousy. This shift may be perceived as appropriate, because it was precisely the news brought by Pandarus of Troilus’s jealousy that initiated her considerations on the transitory nature of happiness.\(^{175}\) His accusations of infidelity threaten her happiness and this inspires her speech. Payne believes that Criseyde’s reasons for distress undermine her philosophical speech: her exaggerated reaction belittles her anguish.\(^{176}\) Nair argues, instead, that Criseyde’s discomfort is perfectly justifiable.\(^{177}\) Whereas Payne considers Criseyde’s views as a

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\(^{174}\) Nair, ‘Gender and Philosophy in Troilus and Criseyde’, p. 48.
\(^{175}\) Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book III, vv. 792–98.
\(^{176}\) Payne, Chaucer and Menippean Satire, p. 104.
\(^{177}\) Nair, ‘Gender and Philosophy in Troilus and Criseyde’, p. 48.
mere ‘burlesque’ of Boethian discourse,¹⁷⁸ and Nair states that her failings are primarily social rather than spiritual.¹⁷⁹ I believe that the truth lies somewhere in between these two views. Criseyde’s motives could be sufficient reason for her complaint against Fortune: Troilus’s supposed jealousy may be a first sign that her hopes in him are not well placed. However, what must surprise the reader is the outcome of her speech. What is the practical consequence of her considerations? Apparently, nothing at all. The following day, she will speak to Troilus and convince him that his doubts about her loyalty are ill-founded.¹⁸⁰ And yet Pandarus manages to make the lovers meet immediately, which will lead directly to the consummation scene. If she is aware of the transience of happiness, why does she yield so soon to a love that will, eventually, bring suffering? It is true that, as we have seen, she will later suggest that her love is virtuous and, therefore, Fortune will not be able to destroy it. A love that is not based on those material aspects that fall under the governance of Fortune’s wheel is immune to her power. This might have been an acceptable argument from both a Boethian and Stilnovistic viewpoint were it not the case that she will be proved wrong. If her love was not of the salvific and virtuous type, why did she yield to it in the first place? If it was – or if she thought it was – why did she accede to Diomede’s wooing?

She will soon be forced to remember the unstable nature of joy, and of love, when she hears that she is going to be exchanged for Antenor. Once more, Criseyde complains to Pandarus:

And in hire aspre pleynte thus she seyde:
“Pandare first of joies mo than two
Was cause causyng unto me, Criseyde,
That now transmewed ben in cruel wo.
Wher shal I seye to you welcom or no,
That alderfirst me broughte unto servyse

¹⁷⁸Payne, Chaucer and Menippean Satire, p. 104.
¹⁷⁹Nair, ‘Gender and Philosophy in Troilus and Criseyde’, p. 50.
Of love – alas! – that endeth in swich wise?

Endeth than love in wo? Ye, or men lieth,
And alle worldly blisse, as thynketh me.
The ende of blisse ay sorwe it occupieth;
And whoso troweth nat that it so be,
Lat hym upon me, woful wrecce, ysee,
That myself hate and ay my burthe acorse,
Felyng alwey fro wikke I go to worse.”

Although these verses show deep distress, Criseyde is not surprised that joy should turn into sorrow; it is precisely what she had anticipated. Her joys have been transmewed into suffering. The verb itself suggests the suddenness of the succession of sorrow to joy. It is not a gradual change, but a sudden transformation. The fact that she recognises the inevitability of this outcome leads her to doubt whether she should welcome Pandarus. It was he who convinced her to love. Implicitly, she is wondering whether love had been worth pursuing, since it ended so miserably. The fact that she curses her birth suggests that it was not. But why did she yield in the first place, since she knew that the outcome of love cannot but be sorrow? Had she decided to accept love and its consequences she should not regret her decision now. The fact that she does indicates that Criseyde’s actions are not the result of careful consideration. She bends her will to that of others and follows, as it were, the flow of events instead of her own rational decisions. She seems partly aware of her own guilt, as a distinctive self-hatred clearly emerges in the last two lines of the passage.

Criseyde, though, seems to believe that there may still be a happier future for her love for Troilus, as she later explains to him:

The soth is this: the twynnyng of us tweyne

182 In Payne’s words, ‘she drifts reluctantly on the uncertain streams of chance, clutching whatever momentary assistance is offered her in the establishing of a way’. Payne, Chaucer and Menippean Satire, p. 108.
Wol us disese and cruelich anoye,
But hym byhoveth somtyme han a peyne
That serveth Love, if that he wol have joye.
And syn I shal no ferther out of Troie
Than I may ride ayyn on half a morwe,
It oughte lesse causen us to sorwe;\textsuperscript{183}

The idea of the alternation of sorrow and joy reminds us, once more, of the movement of the wheel of Fortune and of Pandarus’s comments on the subject. Criseyde uses this notion to suggest that the present unhappiness is only transitory.\textsuperscript{184} One can imagine that she is partly right; this is the worst time for her, and a happier period will indeed come, but it will be because of a new love, and not with Troilus (although Henryson would disagree).\textsuperscript{185} Criseyde, refusing to elope with Troilus, opts for a more conservative option: she will obey the decision of the Trojan parliament and go to her father in the Greek camp. In this she proves, once more, that she strives to survive not by opposing patriarchal authority but by allying herself to it. There is no proof that she is dishonest here, but she clearly overestimates her own strength. When she is among the Greeks and alone, returning to Troy seems an impossible and hopeless task.\textsuperscript{186} Once more, she chooses to find a protector and a lover rather than remain an outcast.

It is precisely this attitude on the part of Criseyde that explains why, although she knows the unreliable nature of love and happiness, she falls for Troilus anyway. Considering, once more, her first speech on happiness as well as Lady Philosophy’s arguments,\textsuperscript{187} by which it was inspired, something is revealed. Lady Philosophy, unlike Criseyde, extracts a positive conclusion from her considerations of the

\textsuperscript{183}Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book IV, vv. 1303–1309.
\textsuperscript{184}This is precisely what Pandarus did at the beginning of the love story, when Troilus complained because Criseyde did not seem to be interested in him: Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book I, vv. 841–854.
\textsuperscript{185}In his sequel to Chaucer’s poem, he imagines that Cressida will be abandoned by Diomede and die a leper. Henryson, ‘The Testament of Cresseid’, pp. 111–131.
\textsuperscript{186}Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book V, vv. 1023–1029.
\textsuperscript{187}Chaucer, ‘Boece’, Book II, Prosa. 4, 75–78.
impossibility of worldly happiness: since earthly joy cannot be complete or everlasting, we must rely on a different type of happiness:

O ye mortel folk, what seeke ye thanne blisfulnesse out of yourself whiche that is put in yowrself? Errour and folie confoundeth yow. I schal schewe the shortly the poynyt of soverayn blisfulnesse. Is there anythyng more precyous to the than thiself? Thow wolt answere, ‘nay.’ Thanne, yif it so be that thow art myghty over thyself (*that is to seyn, by tranquillite of thi soule*), than hastow thyng in thi powere that thow noldest nevere leesen, ne Fortune may nat bynymen it the. ¹⁸⁸

We must not pursue a joy based on external things, since they will inevitably be taken from us, but we must, instead, base our happiness on something that comes from within, and that Fortune cannot control. Criseyde does not provide this conclusion. She recognises that joy in this world is incomplete, but she finds no substitute for it. This is due to the fact that she can never find any happiness within herself: she has no self-sufficiency. She is, first, an abandoned widow among the Trojans, and daughter to a traitor, and then a woman from Troy among the Greeks, in love with an enemy. She constantly tries to resolve her condition as outcast by looking for external protection. It is precisely this attitude that has caused her to be associated by critics with the image of fickle Fortune, as she exchanges one protector for another. It can be argued, instead, that it is her limited understanding of Fortune and of worldly happiness that causes her to act as she does.

In the end, however, Criseyde has shown a greater understanding of the true nature of Fortune than both Troilus and Pandarus. She rarely mentions Fortune and, when she does, it is to doubt her power. She talks about chance rather than Fortune. Her discussions of the feeble nature of worldly joy show her superior philosophical awareness of the problem by comparison with Boccaccio’s Criseida, which greatly contributes to the more complex and problematic portrayal overall of this character by Chaucer. She is wiser than her counterpart, and yet she commits the same

mistakes in the end. Criseyde is fully aware that any gift Fortune brings cannot last, but, at the same time, she fails to see the complete Boethian truth. Although she recognises the impossibility of reaching true happiness in this world, she fails to find a suitable alternative. What she worries about is her *sikerness*,¹⁸⁹ but in order to be safe she constantly pursues male protection. As Lady Philosophy teaches, the farther we are from self-sufficiency the more we are at the mercy of Dame Fortune.¹⁹⁰ Ironically, in *Boece* Chaucer often uses the same term, *sikerness*, to indicate the state of spiritual stability reached by those who base their happiness in the higher good.¹⁹¹ In the end, her condition is as precarious as that of Troilus: he blindly pursues worldly love; she continuously looks for external protection.¹⁹² It is not the pursuit of passion that enslaves her, but the need for a guardian. In the end, both Troilus and Criseyde are slaves to love, and, as a consequence, to Fortune, although for different reasons. Ultimately, their predicament is equally precarious, as they both fail to see that what they wish for is, inevitably, unstable.

### 3.3 The Narrator, Fortune and the Structure of the *Troilus*

The narrator, unlike the characters whose vicissitudes he portrays, is not a pagan and he could, therefore, provide a more Christian portrayal of Fortune. But does he? As seen before, Filostrato’s understanding of Fortune as expressed in his poem is close to the Boethian vision, although in the poem itself his references to Fortune lack the philosophical coherence that one might have expected. Chaucer’s narrator too talks about Fortune in a variety of ways, but his utterances can be divided into three categories. In some cases Fortune is described as a wilful agent who determines the outcome of events, thus possibly undermining the character’s responsibility for what happens. In other instances it is her course that is considered, reinforcing the idea that she acts following a circular pattern which corresponds to

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¹⁹²Nair, ‘Gender and Philosophy in *Troilus and Criseyde’*, p. 47.
the traditional movements of her wheel and which, in turn, encompasses the motion of the very plot of the *Troilus*. The third group is smaller, but the occurrences are more significant because they are entirely original. In these passages the narrator undertakes a more philosophical explanation of the issue of Fortune.

After the consummation scene, and after Pandarus has warned Troilus that his happiness may be fleeting, we are told that the time has come, once more, for Troilus to see his beloved, ‘for that Fortune it wolde’. The Trojan lords reject Hector’s proposal to keep Criseyde, notwithstanding the Greeks’ demand, ‘For infortune it wolde’; Troilus is willing to kill himself after he believes Criseyde has died of sorrow as a consequence of her impending departure, ‘Syn love and cruel Fortune it ne wolde / That in this world he lenger lyven sholde’; and, towards the end of the poem, although Troilus fights ferociously with Diomede, ‘Fortune it naught ne wolde / Of oothers hond that eyther deyen sholde’. All these lines are directly translated from the *Filostrato*, except for the one featuring *infortune*, but while Boccaccio uses a variety of expressions in his passages, Chaucer consistently uses constructions with *wolde*, thus creating a precise and easily recognisable pattern that results in greater unity and coherence in comparison with Boccaccio’s lexical variety. Literally, all of these expressions identify Fortune as a primary agent in crucial moments in the story. This strongly reminds us of Troilus’s attitude towards Fortune, which could pose a problem. If this passive attitude can be expected from a pagan, it is decidedly less acceptable from the Christian narrator.

A closer look at these passages shows that such an interpretation may be not entirely correct. In the first occurrence, the fact that Fortune allows for the lovers to

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spend some happy time together is, in fact, a reference to Fortune’s wheel, in keeping with the narrator’s initial associations between her course and the plot of his story; the lovers are at the apex of their happiness, at the top of the wheel, and it is only a matter of time before they start their inevitable descent. In the second case, although it is literally stated that *infortune* makes the Trojan lords reject Hector’s proposition, these lords are present as agents of this decision, so Fortune’s role in the matter appears at least ambiguous. The statement that both Fortune and love want Troilus to die is very likely to be an example of internal focalisation. Troilus will not, in fact, kill himself; therefore this thought mirrors the limited perspective of the character rather than the view of the omniscient narrator who already knows what will happen. After all, this kind of expression is rather typical of Troilus, as further shown by the fact that he voices very similar sentiments in the succeeding stanza. The last passage is, in fact, the only one in which the will of Fortune seems directly to oppose the character’s choices. Troilus tries to kill Diomede in the field, but he does not succeed; Fortune is deemed responsible for this outcome.

There are two other instances in which Fortune appears as an agent, but in a slightly different fashion. In both cases, the construction with *wolde* is abandoned, but it is replaced by verbs still expressing a wilful intent. Both lines are original to Chaucer’s version and, in both occurrences, Fortune’s actions almost seem to mock the characters. The first instance can be found when Troilus, as he waits for Criseyde’s return, imagines seeing her before him, but it is all an illusion. And this is the narrator’s comment: ‘Fortune his howe entendeth bet to glaze!’ Similarly, when Troilus and Pandarus wait for Criseyde’s return at the gate, the narrator observes that it will be to no avail, as ‘Fortune hem bothe thenketh for to jape!’ At this stage in the poem, the reader knows well that Criseyde will not return, and the narrator focuses on Troilus’s self-delusion, stressing, at times, the pathetic aspect of the situation. In both passages Fortune’s attitudes to the characters is to be seen, in

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197 Which will be discussed later.
this light, as an element introducing irony by forcing the reader to perceive suddenly the gap between Troilus’s hopes and what will indeed happen.

Other passages focus on Fortune’s course rather than Fortune’s will. It may be argued that there is little difference between the two, as Fortune can be perceived as an agent in both cases. But by focusing on Fortune’s course what is underlined is the fact that Fortune does not act utterly randomly on whimsical impulses, but rather follows a precise pattern. It is this course that seems to determine the very structure of the story as a whole, as the reader is constantly reminded throughout the poem. The circular movement of the wheel of Fortune and the idea of the wheel in general is very often suggested within the poem, more or less explicitly. As a result, this concept of recurring and inescapable cycles of happiness and sorrow emerges as a strong leitmotif within the poem, and it also conveys a deeper sense of the power that Fortune has over the lives of the characters. The image of the wheel becomes the very structure of the story, as appears clearly from the very beginning.

As he discarded Boccaccio’s Proemio, thus eliminating the pseudo-biographical context of the Filostrato, Chaucer opted for a decidedly more direct opening into the poem’s matere. At the very beginning, the narrator inserts an anticipation of Troilus’s story and of the structure of his poem. As noted by Windeatt,

The structure of the whole action in rise and fall Chaucer takes over broadly from Filostrato, for it is Boccaccio who first discerns this pattern in the story, but it is Chaucer who then crystallizes and articulates the generic potential of the structure within which the old story is now perceived. Boccaccio does not open Filostrato with Chaucer’s anticipation of the arching structure of the Troilus narrative in rise and fall (‘fro wo to wele and after out of joye’), and it is only Chaucer, not Boccaccio, who refers to the poem at its close as tragedye.201

201Windeatt, ‘Classical and Medieval Elements in Chaucer’s Troilus’, p. 120.
But Chaucer does more than anticipate the structure of his work. As we have seen, Boccaccio’s proem contained important passages relating to the concept of Fortune and to Filostrato’s understanding of her function, but Chaucer compensates for the removal of these passages about Fortune with a beginning that strongly foregrounds her role in the whole poem. It is precisely the image of the wheel of Fortune that opens the *Troilus*:

The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,  
That was the kyng Priamus sone of Troye,  
In loyynge, how his aventures fallen  
Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie,  
My purpos is, er that I parte fro ye.  
Thesiphone, thou help me for t’endite  
Thise woful vers, that wepen as I write. 

Troilus’s *double sorwe*, which anticipates his transition from the suffering due to his unrequited love for Criseyde, to the happiness of their time together, to the renewed pain for her departure from Troy and subsequent betrayal (‘fro wo to wele, and after out of joye’), is nothing but a full turn on the wheel of Fortune. 

Although Fortune is not explicitly mentioned, this is clearly an image of her wheel and its relentless motion. The fact that the narrator opens the *Troilus* with this image alerts the reader to the importance that Fortune will have in the poem, as it places it in a foregrounded position. Chaucer’s opening invites the reader to pay attention to Fortune and her revolving wheel in the *Troilus*. But beginning the poem in this fashion does more than that. It already seals Troilus’s inescapable end. 

Ironically, while the characters repeatedly wonder about the possibility of worldly joy, the narrator already knows that their happiness will be short-lived, as he reminds the reader in the very first line. He will do the same at various stages throughout the

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203 Koff, ‘Ending a Poem before Beginning It, or The “Cas” of Troilus’, p. 166.  
204 Kittredge recognises how in the *Troilus* ‘the catastrophe is announced at the outset’, and he observes that ‘the suspense consists not in waiting for the unexpected, but in looking forward with a kind of terror for the moment of predicated doom’. Kittredge, ‘Troilus’, p. 3.
poem. Thus, Fortune’s wheel becomes an ominous reminder of Troilus’s inevitable downfall. After all, in the Middle Ages, Troy’s destruction was a well known historical fact that could not be altered by any writer dealing with the story; so was Troilus’s death.\footnote{Boitani, ‘Antiquity and Beyond’, pp. 2–3.}

As a matter of fact, the first passage in the poem in which Fortune’s course is explicitly mentioned does not refer to Troilus, but to his city. Just after the beginning, subsequent to the description of Calkas’s flight from Troy and Criseyde’s situation in the city, the narrator, widening for a moment the scope of his interest, devotes a few words to the war:

\begin{quote}
The thynges fellen, as they don of werre,
Bitwixen hem of Troie and Grekes ofte;
For som day boughten they of Troie it derre,
And eft the Grekes founden nothing softe
The folk of Troie; and thus Fortune on lofte
And under eft gan hem to whielen bothe
Aftir hir course, ay whil that thei were wrothe.\footnote{Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book I, vv. 134–140.}
\end{quote}

Incidentally, this passage clearly shows that Fortune’s course is nothing but her traditional alternation of sorrow and joy, which is, ultimately, a way of describing the motion of her wheel (here Fortune wheels Trojans and Greeks according to her course). This is the corresponding stanza from the \textit{Filostrato}:

\begin{quote}
Le cose andavan si come di guerra,  Things often fared as they do in war,
tra li Troiani e’ Greci assai sovente;  between Trojans and Greeks; at times the
tal volta uscieno i Trojan della terra  Trojans emerged vigorously victorious
sopra li Greci vigorosamente,  upon the Greeks in battle, and often the
e spesse volte i Greci, s’el non erra  Greeks fought fiercely, if history does not
la storia, givano assai fieramente  err, even on the trenches, plundering
\end{quote}
fino in su’ fossi e d’intorno rubando, nearby, and burning down castles and
castella e ville ardendo e dibruciando.207 villas.

Chaucer closely translates the first two verses from Boccaccio’s version, then he reports more freely the idea that victories in battle alternate between the Greeks and the Trojans. Although this idea was already present in the Filostrato, Boccaccio did not ascribe these fluctuations to Fortune. Chaucer, on the other hand, prefers to eliminate Boccaccio’s rather crude detail about the Greeks looting and burning castles and villas, and he chooses, instead, to elaborate on the concept of these varying successes in battle by ascribing them to fickle Fortune. Both Greek and Trojan victories and failures are thus associated with the motion of Fortune’s wheel: she brings them up high and casts them down again, according to her custom. Not only does Chaucer insert a reference to Fortune that was not present in his source; he also produces an extremely vivid image of her wheel and its motion, connecting it clearly to the predicament of Troy.

In a later passage, Troy’s and Troilus’s Fortunes are more explicitly linked. When Troilus and Criseyde are enjoying their brief, happy time together, the narrator comments that ‘Fortune a tyme ledde in joie / Criseyde and ek this kynges sone of Troie’. 208 Fortune will lead them in happiness for a tyme, which gives very well a sense that their happy period is measured and limited; it is bound to run out. But what is particularly interesting is the circumlocution used instead of Troilus’s name. Why do we have instead of the name, as for Criseyde, ‘this kynges sone of Troie’? The fact that he is son of a king is brought to the attention of the reader, and this may be important considering that, especially in Chaucer’s times, the concept of the fall from Fortune’s grace was traditionally seen in connection with the fall of princes.209 Mentioning here, just after Troilus’s happiness has been ascribed to Fortune, that he is the son of a king strengthens the suggestion that his happiness is

207Boccaccio, Filostrato, I, 16, pp. 74–75.
208Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book III, vv. 1714–1715. These verses are original to Chaucer’s version.
very much transitory. Moreover, the rhyme joie/Troie is at least peculiar.\textsuperscript{210} It is almost an oxymoron, in the sense that these two words, connected here by the strong bond of the rhyme, can be perceived as almost antithetical. Troy in the popular imagination was primarily associated with its miserable and tragic fall, and especially so at Chaucer’s time;\textsuperscript{211} joie brings to mind quite different associations. This is a reminder of the history within which the love story is set: joy cannot last long within the walls of a Troy under siege. This sentence, which literally describes the happiness of the lovers, strongly foreshadows its inevitable end.

It is precisely after Troilus has lost Criseyde that Fortune’s course is mentioned again:

\begin{verbatim}
Gret was the sorwe and pleynte of Troilus,
But forth hire cours Fortune ay gan to holde.
Criseyde loveth the sone of Tideüs,
And Troilus moot wepe in cares colde.
Swich is this world, whoso it kan byholde;
In ech estat is litel hertes reste.
God leve us for to take it for the beste!\textsuperscript{212}
\end{verbatim}

This passage is translated from the \textit{Filostrato}, but with some significant differences:

\begin{verbatim}
Grandi furo i lamenti e’l rammarichio, Great woe and sorrow followed, but fortune ma pur fortuna il suo corso facea; kept following her course; she loved colei amava con tutto il disio Diomedes with all her desire, while Troilus Diomedè, e Troiolo piangea; was left to cry; Diomedes would offer praise Diomedès si lodava di Dio, to God, while Troilus would suffer; many a
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{210}As Andrew points out, this rhyme is recurrent in the poem. See Andrew, ‘The Fall of Troy in \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight} and \textit{Troilus and Criseyde}’, pp. 84–85. Although he believes that this is due to the fact that the ‘pessimistic and retrospective’ view of Troy coexisted with one associating London and Troy in a positive spirit, which would justify the rhyme, I still think that the associations here are primarily negative and anticipate the tragedy to come.

\textsuperscript{211}Andrew, ‘The Fall of Troy in \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight} and \textit{Troilus and Criseyde}’, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{212}Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book V, vv. 1744–1750.
Both narrators state that Fortune is following her course, but the conclusions of the
two stanzas are quite different. While Filostrato describes Troiolo’s and Diomede’s
opposing states of minds, Chaucer’s narrator comments on Fortune’s disfavour
towards Troilus: such things happen, as common experience shows. All we can do is
to accept our unstable situation and pray that God may help us in facing whatever
befalls.

What emerges from the previous passages is that both Troilus’s and Troy’s
predicaments seem to follow Fortune’s course. They are both subject to the motion
of Fortune’s wheel and the reader is reminded of this fact throughout the poem.
Moreover, Troy’s impending fall and Troilus’s fall from happiness are clearly
connected in the poem, as they have been in literature since the very first beginning
of the story of Troy. 214 It has even been argued that Troilus’s moments of joy and
sorrow correspond in the Troilus to analogous states of the city itself. 215 This
inevitably gives the poem a sense of impending doom. The fact that we already
know from the beginning that Troilus will die and Troy fall has often been used by
critics arguing in favour of a deterministic reading of the poem. 216 But the
connection emphasised by the narrator between Troy and Troilus through the image
of Fortune’s wheel does not necessarily imply that an inescapable fate is at work
here. Why this is not the case can be seen more plainly after considering what the
narrator has to say about Fortune and her wheel.

213 Boccaccio, Filostrato, VIII, 25, p. 415.
215 John P. McCall, ‘The Trojan Scene in Chaucer’s Troilus’, in Chaucer’s Troilus: Essays in
216 On this point see especially Curry, ‘Destiny in Chaucer’s Troilus’, p. 129.
A first clue about the narrator’s view of Fortune can be found by comparing the following passage with the corresponding lines in the *Filostrato*:

But al to litel, weylaway the whyle,  
Lasteth swich joie, ythonked be Fortune,  
That semeth trewest whan she wol bygyle  
And kan to fooles so hire song entune  
That she hem hent and blent, traitour comune!  
And whan a wight is from hire whiel ythrowe,  
Than laugheth she, and maketh hym the mowe.

From Troilus she gan hire brighte face  
Awey to writhe, and tok of him non heede,  
But caste hym clene out of his lady grace,  
And on hire whiel she sette up Diomede;  
For which myn herte right now gynneth blede,  
And now my penne, allas, with which I write,  
Quaketh for derede of that I moste endite.  

Ma poco tempo durò cotal bene,  
mercé de la Fortuna invidiosa,  
che’n questo mondo nulla fermo tene:  
ella gli volse la faccia crucciosa  
per nuovo caso, si com’egli avviene,  
e sottosopra volgendo ogni cosa,  
Criseida gli tolse e’ dolci frutti,  
e’ lieti amor rivolse in tristi lotti.  

Chaucer here expands Boccaccio’s depiction of Fortune as she forsakes Troilus. The first two lines are extremely close to the Italian version, while in the third verse there is a significant difference. Instead of stating that Fortune does not allow for anything to remain still in this world, Chaucer departs from the source by saying that she seems truest when she prepares to betray someone, and he then goes on to expand on this concept. Those whom she ensnares and betrays are fools. The description of Fortune laughing after throwing someone off her wheel shows her power. The peculiar image already present in Boccaccio’s version of Fortune turning her beautiful face from Troilus is reproduced by Chaucer, and it is developed by showing that she now favours Diomede. Although Chaucer’s portrayal is extremely

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218 Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, III, 94, p. 216: [But this happiness did not last long due to jealous Fortune, who does not allow anything to remain unchanged in this world. She turned her wrathful face towards him with under the new circumstances, as she so often does. Revolving everything upside down, she took Criseida and her sweet gifts away from him, turning happy love into sad mourning].

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colourful and seems thus to stress Fortune’s power, we must remember that she is not here described as an all-powerful force: the passage mentions the fool as the exemplary victim of Fortune. This could imply that a wiser man may not be subdued by her. Interestingly, fools are not referred to in the source, and this concept reminds us instead of Crisye’s attitude to Fortune. Therefore, although the narrator is, like Pandarus, aware of the notion of Fortune’s wheel and often mentions it within the poem, he also seems to know, like Crisye, that Fortune is far from being all-powerful, as Troilus would have her. Those she ensnares are fools.

This suggests that, like Crisye, the narrator has a more philosophical understanding of Fortune than the male characters of his story. As a Christian, he can be expected to have a better understanding than his heroine as well. There are two passages within the poem in which the narrator discusses Fortune in more philosophical terms. Neither of these passages derives from the Filostrato. After Crisye has had dinner at Pandarus’s house, she intends to leave, but, as the narrator anticipates, Fortune will decide otherwise:

But O Fortune, executrice of wierdes,
O influences of thise hevenes hye!
Soth is, that under God ye ben oure hierdes,
Though to us bestes ben the causez wrie.
This mene I now: for she gan homward hye,
But execut was al bisyde hire leve
The goddes wil, for which she moste bleve.

We are here assured that Fortune’s wheel does not act in isolation but serves under God’s Providence and according to His dispositions. This is a way of solving the medieval problem of the persistence of the concept of Fortune: by assimilating it into a Christian vision of life and making her subservient to God, the notion of

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Fortune becomes acceptable. As previously seen, a similar solution was found by Dante. Fortune is here described as a kind of agent in the service of the Christian God. It is men who fail to see the true causes of events, while, in truth, everything comes from God. Since Fortune is here no longer acting according to the law of the wheel, she ceases to be Fortune, at least in the way that the pagan characters of the story understand this concept. It is appropriate that the Christian narrator should know better than his characters and recognise the true cause behind all things. But how, precisely, does Fortune fit into God’s creation? How does she carry out the divine plan?

A closer analysis of the previous excerpt may reveal something more about this conception of Fortune. The narrator opens the passage with an apostrophe to Fortune, executrix of wierdes, of destiny. The subsequent clause is another apostrophe to the influences of the heavens, that is to say to the movements of the celestial spheres. It would seem that both factors contribute to shape our lives. Both the movements of the skies, deriving from the motion of the first movere, and Fortune converge to bring about events in the lives of mortals. This interpretation would suggest that Fortune is a distinct agent. Although she is under the control of God, what she actually is and to what degree she is an agent in her own right remain obscure. But another reading of these verses is possible. The second apostrophe may be considered as a reinforcement of the first. If we consider both apostrophes as having the same referent, then ‘influences of thiste hevenes hye’ is used as a synonym for Fortune. The second clause can then be seen as having a corrective function to the first: Fortune is, in truth, nothing but the multiple influences of the heavens. Then ‘ye’ in the following verse refers not to two sets of causes (Fortune and the influences of the skies), but merely to the latter. The subsequent statement that, beasts that we are, we misunderstand the causes of events, is a further comment.

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224 Middle English Dictionary, s. v. ‘werde’. This word occurs also in Boece, both with the meaning of Fates and destiny. Chaucer, ‘Boece’, Book I, Metrum 1 and Metrum 4.
on the first line: what we call Fortune is in fact nothing but the movements of the
skies, deriving directly from God. This description of Fortune is more in line with
medieval theology than any description present in the *Filostrato*.225

In the light of these meditations, one may wonder why the narrator mentions
Fortune at all in this passage and elsewhere. It is true, as seen before, that he greatly
reduces the perception of an all-powerful Fortune that was present in the *Filostrato*,
but why does he keep talking about *Fortune* since he knows that she is nothing but
the movements of the skies? If she is simply a metaphor, why does she have such
prominence not only in the way in which the characters perceive events, but, as we
have seen, also in the very structure and fibre of the story?226 And why is this
structural prominence enhanced, and not reduced, by comparison with the source?
Another passage in which the narrator describes Fortune in more philosophical terms
may offer some clues. Here the narrator reinforces the idea that God’s Providence
supersedes Fortune but, this time, this notion is not directly related to Troilus’s
predicament but to Troy’s fall. After Criseyde’s departure and her failure to return
by the tenth day, as she had promised, Troilus still hopes that she might have a good
(and honest) reason for remaining among the Greeks.227 His fear of her betrayal first
emerges after a dream in which he sees Criseyde kissing a wild boar.228 Notwithstanding Pandarus’s reassurances that there is no truth in dreams,229 Troilus
asks his sister Cassandra to interpret it for him.230 In order to explain the meaning of
the dream and who the boar is, she begins telling him old stories in order to show
him ‘how that Fortune overthrowe / Hath lordes olde’.231 This long excursus, which
has the final result of showing that Diomede is the boar, closely mirrors the *De

226For a discussion of the recurrence of circular images in the story and their connection to the wheel
In this sense, Chaucer here adds to Boccaccio’s portrayal of Fortune in the *Filostrato* using another, and extremely popular source by the same author. It is this miniature *De casibus* by Cassandra that prompts the following description of Fortune by the narrator:

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Fortune, which that permutacioun
Of thynges hath, as it is hire comitted
Through purveyaunce and disposicioun
Of heighe Jove, as regnes shal be flitted
Fro folk in folk, or when they shal be smytted,
Gan pulle awey the fetheres brighte of Troie
Fro day to day, til they ben bare of joie.
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In this manner, and in the light of Cassandra’s former history, the narrator connects the imminent end of Troy to the *de casibus* tradition. The time had come for Troy to fall, as many other cities and empires, after reaching their climax, have declined or have been altogether destroyed. The law of the wheel is the same for all earthly things: it affects in the same way the love story and the story of the city. This explains why the connection between Troy’s and Troilus’s *Fortunes* is so strongly emphasised throughout the poem: the glory of Troy, as much as the love affair, was based upon material things, or it would not have been subject to Fortune’s fickleness. Therefore Troilus and Troy do not share the same tragic doom, as it has often been argued. What they share are the same faults. Both Troilus and his city were, as the narrator points out, enslaved by the wheel of Fortune, as McCall convincingly argues. Troy was doomed in the moment Paris raped Helen and the city decided to protect him. This was considered, in medieval times, a demonstration

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232 Giovanni Boccaccio, *De casibus virorum illustrium*. Larry Scanlon recognises the obvious allusion to the *De casibus*: Larry Scanlon, ‘Sweet Persuasion: The Subject of Fortune in Troilus and Criseyde’, in *Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde: Subgit to Alle Poeysye*, p. 211.

233 For the popularity of the *De Casibus* see Budra, *A Mirror for Magistrates and the De Casibus Tradition*, p. 15.


236 On this point see McCall, ‘The Trojan Scene in Chaucer’s *Troilus*’, p. 101 and 105: ‘like Troy, Troilus is playing a game of chance for worldly bliss in which all depends on the roll of the dice’.
of the lustful appetites of the Trojans. Troilus embodies the sins of his own city, as he shows himself to be subject to similar impulses. Both he and Troy fell under the yoke of the wheel of Fortune because of their choices and actions, because of their sins. Their fall became inevitable because they made it so. They were free before choosing to base all their hopes in worldly possessions. The distinctive use of the wheel of Fortune to describe the structure of the Troilus on the part of Chaucer, does not, therefore, serve to superimpose a deterministic view on the poem. On the contrary, it underlines that freedom is lost when we regard worldly possessions as the higher good. This ultimately explains why Fortune is so prominent in the poem: it is the narrator’s way of escaping literary determinism. Troy and Troilus had to fall simply because all knew it had happened historically. But this does not mean that an inescapable destiny is at work here. Placing both Troilus and Troy under the sovereignty of Fortune’s wheel shows that they are ultimately responsible for what happens to them.

What emerges from the preceding considerations is that Chaucer’s narrator offers a decidedly clearer and more coherent portrayal of Fortune than Filostrato ever does. When describing Fortune as a wilful agent, this narrator uses a more unified vocabulary than his Italian counterpart, by favouring constructions with wolde, thus creating an easily recognisable motif. In most of these instances, Fortune is not, in fact, invested with an unlimited power (which would be decidedly unchristian): these passages are either produced by internal focalisation – thus mirroring a character’s perspective rather than the narrator’s – or betray the prominence of human agents, except in one case. In other passages the narrator

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239 Filostrato shows awareness of Boethian conceptions of Fortune when he considers her as maestra in the proem, as seen in the previous chapter, but his knowledge is still inferior in understanding to Chaucer’s narrator. Although Boethius, too, recognises a corrective function of Fortune, this is still at an early stage in his understanding of the issue: he has yet to comprehend fully why Fortune cannot be trusted, why the wise person is immune to her and what the higher good is.
240 Fortune does not allow Troilus to kill Diomede in battle. This occurrence can be explained if we consider Fortune as a metaphor for the movements of the skies, as emerged from the previous passages. If she is nothing but the movements of the skies, which derive from God’s Providence, then it is as a result of God’s plan that Troilus will not kill Diomede. This is further supported by the fact
draws a connection between the development of the story and Fortune’s wheel but, again, she does not have complete responsibility for what happens, as he knows that she ensnares only fools. Finally, the narrator reveals his philosophical awareness of the issue of Fortune: she is nothing but the movements of the skies, which derive, ultimately, from God. This reading, perfectly in line with medieval theology, is very similar to Boccaccio’s portrayal in the *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia*. Chaucer has, ironically, made his narrator conform more with Boccaccio’s understanding of Fortune than Filostrato himself does. Ultimately, the narrator’s emphasis on Fortune that emerges throughout the poem has the function of connecting Troilus’s fall to that of Troy. This shows how both the young Trojan and his homonymous city were, in fact, not doomed to be destroyed by an inescapable destiny but, on the contrary, they were defeated by their own appetites.

4 The Problem of the Epilogue: Troilus’s Eternal Abode and the Price of Worldly Love

The epilogue of *Troilus and Criseyde* has traditionally puzzled critics, and it still makes for a fine Chaucerian riddle. After he has been slain by Achilles,

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that the narrator ascribes to God’s will Troilus’s death at the hands of Achilles (Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, Book V, v. 1805). In this case, it may be then possible to consider Fortune, as seen above, as a metaphor for God’s Providence.

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Troilus’s spirit flies up to the eighth sphere, and from there he looks downwards, realises the vanity of the things of this world, and laughs at those who cry for his death. Now he fully understands the transient nature of ‘the blynde lust, the which that may not laste’ and that, instead of busying ourselves in trying to achieve worldly happiness, we should cast our eyes up to heaven.  In death, he seems to realise his mistakes and reach a wisdom he never achieved in life. Then he fades out of sight to go ‘ther as Mercurye sorted hym to dwelle’. We are not told his final destination. Of those critics who read the Troilus in Boethian terms and, as a logical consequence, take seriously this final condemnation of worldly joy (as this study does), some think that it is obvious that, in accordance with such a reading, Troilus is bound for hell. Others take his final ascent as a sign of the fact that he is presumably going to heaven. Much has been made of Troilus’s ascension in the epilogue, and many speak of a final, comical movement upwards after Troilus’s tragic fall, describing it as a kind of ‘divine comedy’. It is almost inevitable to think of Dante’s work when one considers Troilus’s mysterious final abode. I believe that, as open-ended as the poem is, there is no indication that Troilus is damned. Everything points to his final, complete understanding of his mistakes. In Dante’s work, it is a primary characteristic of the damned to fail to understand their own errors. Troilus has, finally, achieved awareness of his mistakes and is fully conscious of the frailty of all worldly things. Such an attitude would seem to suggest that this character is to be saved rather than damned. There is nothing in the text to indicate that he is bound for hell. And yet, accepting a moral and Boethian reading of the Troilus calls for an explanation of why Troilus should be spared the

245 Robertson believes, for instance, that Troilus’s own acts are indications enough of the fact he is damned, Robertson, ‘Chaucerian Tragedy’, p. 501.
248 As Virgil explains to Dante while they are entering hell, the damned have lost ‘il ben de l’intelletto’, the gift of reason. Dante, Inferno, Canto III, v. 18. Ignorance and blindness are typical of Dante’s sinners.
249 It is true that one may argue that he is a pagan, and therefore he should be bound for hell regardless of his virtue or lack thereof (this is Virgil’s tragedy in Dante after all), but such a reading would defy any moral interpretation of the Troilus.
torments of hell. One could easily imagine, as was suggested in the previous chapter, where Dante would place Troilus: he would be keeping company with Paolo and Francesca, hurled about by the winds of the circle of the lustful, where Paris and Helen also abide.\(^{250}\) However, this is not necessarily the only option possible, nor the most likely, as we shall shortly see. Chaucer was familiar with the works of Dante and it can quite safely be assumed that he was aware of Boccaccio’s allusions to the Italian poet dispersed throughout the *Filostrato*. There are in the *Troylus*, too, hints and references to Dante’s works, and Dantean readings of the poem have been offered by critics.\(^{251}\) Some passages in particular can lead to a solution to the mystery of Troilus’s final abode, as they link the circular structure of the *Troylus* to Dante’s great *Commedia*.

Book II, like Book I, opens with one of the numerous references to the structure of the poem as a whole on the part of the narrator:

Owt of thise blake wawes for to saylle,
O wynd, o wynd, the weder gynneth clere;
For in this see the boot hath swych travaylle,
Of my connyng, that unneth I it steere.
This see clepe I the tempestous matere
Of disespeir that Troilus was inne;
But now of hope the kalendes bygynne.\(^{252}\)

In the first book the narrator presented Troilus’s *disespeir*, that is to say the first part of his double sorrow. This second book is going to be about hope. Troilus is beginning to believe that he can conquer Criseyde and to take action in order to achieve his goal, with the help of Pandarus. Hope is therefore the feeling associated with the movement upwards from the lower end of the wheel of Fortune towards the

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\(^{250}\)Dante, *Inferno*, Canto V.

\(^{251}\)See, for instance, Richard Neuse, ‘*Troylus and Criseyde*: Another Dantean Reading’, in *Chaucer’s Troylus and Criseyde: Subgit to Alle Poesye*, pp. 199–210; Karla Taylor, ‘*Inferno* 5 and *Troylus and Criseyde* Revisited’, in *Chaucer’s Troylus and Criseyde: Subgit to Alle Poesye*, pp. 239–256.

\(^{252}\)Chaucer, ‘*Troylus and Criseyde*’, Book II, vv. 1–7.
apex, which will correspond to the consummation scene. Although there is no explicit reference to Fortune, the very beginning of the second book reminds the reader, once more, of the overall structure of the poem and of the stage at which Troilus is at present. The metaphor of the boat is partly taken from the beginning of *Purgatorio*: 253

To course over better waters the little bark of my genius now hoists her sails, leaving behind her a sea so cruel; and I will sing of that second realm where the human spirit is purged and becomes fit to ascend to Heaven. 254

To course over better waters the little bark of my genius now hoists her sails, leaving behind her a sea so cruel; and I will sing of that second realm where the human spirit is purged and becomes fit to ascend to Heaven. 254

The cruel sea is, in Dante’s case, a metaphor for hell as described in his previous *cantica*. His *ingegno*, his poetic style, has to rise in order to match the higher matter he is about to deal with. Purgatory is no longer a realm of utter damnation and despair, like hell. The lack of hope in the realm of the damned was carved in the very door of hell: 256 the souls dwelling there will never see the light of God. Purgatory, on the other hand, although characterised by harsh punishments, is also a realm of hope: all souls, after completing the expiation of their sins, will be finally admitted to paradise. The relevance of this passage to the opening of the second book of the *Troilus* is clear: both beginnings bring back hope after utter desperation. Thus Troilus’s journey from desperation to happiness is undoubtedly likened to Dante’s journey from hell to heaven and, more specifically, to the process of purification of purgatory.

And this is not the only reference to Dante’s second cantica. Just after the consummation scene, at the crucial moment when the descent down the wheel of Fortune is about to begin, there is an extremely significant, although often neglected, reference to Fortune. When morning comes, the lovers have to part. In the Filostrato, Troiolo blames Fortune, but this complaint is, interestingly, not present in the Troilus. Since Chaucer tends to expand Boccaccio’s references to Fortune, as we have seen, why should he neglect to mention her explicitly at this significant moment in the plot? The wheel is indeed about to turn, but Troilus is not aware of it. Instead of a subjective complaint about Fortune, here we have something which is, arguably, more effective: we have a celestial sign. It is Fortuna Major that signals, after the rooster sings, the departure of the lovers. It is generally agreed that Fortuna Major is taken from Dante, and critics have debated whether Chaucer was aware of what constellation the Italian poet was referring to.

Fortuna Major is one of sixteen figures in the astrological science of geomancy. As such, it is not a constellation per se, but rather a configuration of dots that was associated with a specific planet and a sign of the zodiac (the sun and Leo). In the passage that inspired Chaucer, Dante says that it was that time of day when geomancers, if looking at the sky, would recognise their Fortuna Major, meaning that there was a constellation in the sky that had the same shape as this figure. Dante’s critics agree that the poet is here referring to six stars in the constellations of Aquarius and Pisces. Some Chaucerians believe that Chaucer refers to the same stars, while others think that he uses Fortuna Major to indicate the rising of the planet associated with this figure: the sun.

261 Curry, ‘“Fortuna Maior”’, p. 95.
262 Dante, Purgatorio, Canto XIX, vv. 1–6.
265 Curry, ‘“Fortuna Maior”’, p. 96.
Perhaps it is not the astronomical significance that needs to be emphasised here. As simplistic as it may seem, the very name of the constellation cannot but remind us of Fortune, and it is hardly a coincidence that, just after the long-awaited union of the lovers, and immediately before the wheel of Fortune will turn once more by casting the lovers from bliss to desperation, Fortune should be mentioned. By considering not what this figure was for Dante from an astronomical perspective, but what it marked in his poem, further confirmation of this hypothesis can be found. In Purgatorio, two astronomical references are used to signal two allegorical dreams of Dante at crucial moments in his ascent of the mountain of purgatory. Fortuna Major signals the time of his second allegorical dream of the femmina balba, a fowl woman who symbolises, as Virgil suggests, the excessive love of worldly possessions. The dream occurs immediately before Dante enters the last three cornici of purgatory, those dedicated precisely to the sins of incontinence: avarice, gluttony and, finally, lust. Is it a mere coincidence that a constellation indicated as Fortuna Major here marks the passage towards that area of purgatory where sins caused by an excessive attachment to worldly possessions are expiated? Is it another coincidence that Chaucer chooses the same expression to indicate something in the sky that marks the consummation of the carnal love between Troilus and Criseyde? This is a further confirmation that they are at the mercy of Fortune. Moreover, not only does this reference to Dante connect the lovers to the sin of lust, but, interestingly, it suggests that their sin is not so grave as to deserve hell. Although their act is a sin, it is of the degree of those expiated in the very last cornice of purgatory. Troilus and Criseyde are not like Paolo and Francesca. After all, they commit no adultery. Troilus’s love is not so grave a sin. His mistake, like that committed by those punished in Dante’s purgatory, is an excessive love for a worldly object. These references suggest that, although Troilus does sin, the

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266Dante, Purgatorio, Canto IX, vv. 13–18; Canto XIX, vv. 1–6.
267Dante, Purgatorio, Canto XIX, vv. 58–63.
268In Canto XVII of Purgatory Virgil explains to Dante that we all have a natural inclination to love. The sinners in Purgatory are punished because they have misdirected such love. In particular, those in the last three cornici of purgatory, where the sins of avarice, gluttony and lust are expiated, are guilty of an excessive love for worldly things. Dante, Purgatorio, Canto XVII, vv. 91–139. For further discussion of the connection between Dante’s instinctive and elective love and Pandarus’s speeches, see Gaylord, ‘Uncle Pandarus as Lady Philosophy’, pp. 588–590.
degree of his *peccato* is not such as to condemn him to hell. The appropriate final destination for him is the last *cornice* of purgatory, which is also the closest to heaven.

How should this conclusion affect our reading of the poem? How does it qualify the Boethian interpretation offered so far? I think that the Dantean and the Boeathian perspectives on Troilus’s love are not only compatible, but that they reinforce and complement one another. Boethius’s work is not directly concerned with the afterlife and the consequences of the choices we make in this world for our eternal soul. Lady Philosophy does say that excessive love of fallible worldly things is a mistake, but she does not speak of carnal love in terms of committing a sin:

> But what schal I seye of delyces of body, of whiche delices the desirynge ben ful of anguyssch, and the fulfilynges of hem ben ful of penance? How grete seknesses and how grete sorwes unsuffrable, ryght as a maner fruyt of wykkidnesse, ben thilke delices wont to bryngen to the bodyes of folk that usen hem! Of whiche delices I not what joie mai ben had of here moevynge, but this woot I wel, that whosoevere wol remembren hym of hise luxures, he schal wel undirstonden that the issues of delices ben sorweful and sorye.\(^\text{269}\)

The desire of carnal love is full of anguish, its fulfilment full of pain. The outcome cannot but be sorrow. Troilus’s journey throughout the poem seems to be a perfect commentary on Lady Philosophy’s words. For all her wisdom there is, however, one thing Lady Philosophy cannot know: what the transient joy brought by love is, and that is something Troilus knows well. This is what Chaucer’s poem shows us in addition to Lady Philosophy’s teachings: the joys of love. But still, in accordance with Boethian philosophy, the outcome of Troilus’s entirely worldly love cannot but sorrow. And Troilus’s pain before, during, and after the fulfilment of his desires, is most certainly stressed in the poem. John Leyerle suggests that it is precisely Troilus’s suffering that allows him to ascend to heaven:

The self-absorbed Troilus mocks what he does not understand, and for a time he suffers unrequited love for Criseyde; this is his first sorrow. She loves him for a time, but her sliding heart lets slip the bond. Again he suffers unrequited love for Criseyde; this is his second sorrow. He dies, and his soul ascends to the stable love of the heavens. In the process sorrow is revealed as a means to higher love, as the narrator observed “sundry peynes bryngen folk to hevene” (III, 1204), both worldly and divine.270

Although this suggestion is extremely interesting, the quotation by the narrator refers to Troilus’s thoughts while he is finally holding Criseyde in his arms.271 Not only is this an example of internal focalisation, it is also ironic: the apex of worldly passion is no Christian heaven. Troilus’s pain is not a means of expiation, but the inevitable consequence of the kind of love that he has chosen. Yet the emphasis on his pain is extremely important in the light of the epilogue of the poem. Troilus is not given an eternal punishment for his sin because that is not what his sin deserves. Not for Dante, nor for Boethius. The problem with the carnal love he chooses is not that it will lose him his eternal soul, but rather that it is bound to bring him misery in this world. His misery and his pain, as we have seen, become inevitable the moment he submits himself to Fortune’s wheel. And it is the wheel itself that becomes his worldly punishment for his errors.

There are numerous suggestions in the poem that Troilus suffers deeply; he is, effectively, tortured by the very movement of the wheel of Fortune. There is one passage in particular that suggests a connection between the motion of Fortune and torture. At the nadir of his descent down the wheel, when he has returned to his palace after escorting Criseyde to the hands of the Greeks, he wishes for death (which is typical of those at the bottom of Fortune’s wheel)272 and curses the pagan gods, himself, fate, nature and every creature except for his lady but, interestingly, he does not curse Fortune. Then he lies in bed:

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270Leyerle, ‘The Heart and the Chain’, p. 201.
272For the close connection between Fortune and Death in medieval literature and iconography see especially Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature, pp. 117–120.
To bedde he goth, and walwith ther and torneth
In furie, as doth he Ixion in helle,
And in this wise he neigh til day sojorneth. 273

This passage is translated from the *Filostrato*. In the original, Troiolo too turns restlessly in his bed, but Ixion is not mentioned. 274 The scene vividly expresses Troilus’s anxiety and anguish due to the situation he finds himself in. The fact that his distress is described with a circular motion (*torneth*) and is associated with Ixion is particularly relevant. Ixion, the first man to have shed kindred blood, murdered without mercy his father-in-law, but was afterwards pardoned by Zeus, who accepted him as his guest. He betrayed his host, by succumbing to his lust for Hera, and was therefore condemned to spin eternally on a winged wheel. 275 It is no mere coincidence that Troilus is compared to Ixion. He, too, is spinning on his wheel, Fortune’s wheel, because he, too, has yielded to lust. The connection is even more appropriate considering that Ixion’s wheel in medieval literature was associated with the wheel of Fortune, as Patch and others have demonstrated, 276 and it is interesting to note how both Ixion’s wheel and Troilus’s turning on the wheel of Fortune can be seen as a punishment. That the wheel of Ixion is an instrument of torture is self-evident, but it is more than that: there is proof that it derived from the Greek torture of the wheel. 277 Troilus’s wheel, too, can be perceived as a form of torture that he suffers as a consequence of his choices. After all, the breaking wheel was a well-known device in medieval Europe, and was renowned for its cruelty. 278 The association of the wheel of Fortune with torture is clearly implied in this passage. Troilus is here suffering profoundly the loss of Criseyde, but the real cause of his sorrow is his own error: the choice of the wrong kind of love as the sole object of his

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desires. Torture, in this sense, comes as a punishment for his crime. It is fitting with Boethian thought that Troilus should suffer for choosing worldly love, and it is appropriate that Chaucer uses Fortune’s wheel to explain the nature of his mistake. Simultaneously, the wheel of Fortune is the means by which Troilus pays for his sin. His deep pain in this world is the appropriate and inevitable consequence of his mistake which is, both in Dantean and Boethian terms, misdirected love.

It could be argued that this kind of moral reading of the poem does not account for the very moving and involving description of Troilus and Criseyde’s love by the narrator, but it is precisely the passion, realism and humanity of the love story that makes the moral at the end all the more effective. It is not a stern reproach of lust, but a tragic recognition of the limitations of human love. Besides, we must be able to identify with the characters and share their passions or there could be no catharsis. Only by realising the sweetness of worldly love, as well as its dangers, can the reader truly experience and understand the events and emotions described and, ultimately, learn from them. As observed by Dieter Mehl, ‘Chaucer seems to have realized that to engage the reader’s minds in a process of imaginative exploration and sympathetic evaluation can be a more effective means of instruction than anything that can be achieved by over-explicit and unquestioning didactic poetry’.  

5 Conclusion

As Boccaccio does in the Filostrato, Chaucer uses Fortune in his poem to sharpen the characterisation of Troilus, Criseyde and Pandarus. In both works the characters constantly misunderstand the true nature of Fortune – according to the dominant medieval conceptions of this issue – thus providing tangible proof of their serious moral errors. However, the effect is achieved differently in the two poems. In

the *Troilus*, each character shows a coherent, though still erroneous, understanding of Fortune. While in the *Filostrato* the characters have a tendency to contradict their own earlier statements about Fortune, here depicting her as a goddess, there as an agent at the service of God, and elsewhere as mere chance, in the *Troilus* each character displays a more consistent and unified understanding of what Fortune is. For Troilus, Fortune is a capricious pagan goddess. His belief betrays his chronic paralysis. His emphatic speeches on Fortune call for the reader’s sympathy, much more so than Troiolo’s, and it is precisely our heightened emotional response that makes us more painfully aware of his error. For Pandarus, Fortune is the law of the wheel, to be recognised, accepted, and followed by making the most of it, which shows his practical nature and his matter-of-fact attitude to life. Moreover, his speeches on Fortune constantly aim at persuading Troilus and Criseyde to follow his counsel; he too employs Fortune as a literary tool, in a sense. However, the fact that he uses such arguments to elicit a precise response on their part does not mean that he does not believe in Fortune’s wheel. On the contrary, his tendency to scheme and plot is explained by his beliefs. He constantly urges his friend and niece to make the most of the present circumstances, which is, according to him, the best one can do. Criseyde does not believe in the power of Fortune. This Trojan heroine is the only character of the poem who is aware of the limitations of worldly happiness, but she fails to find a better alternative. It is her lack of self-sufficiency that makes her Fortune’s thrall.

They all err, but in different ways, displaying a different degree of misinterpretation. Troilus is, in a sense, furthest from the Christian truth: he binds his head before a pagan god. Pandarus understands the law of the wheel, but he fails to base his happiness on something more stable than worldly joy, as Lady Philosophy would advise him to do. Criseyde, instead of talking about Fortune, complains about the unstable nature of worldly joy, which is precisely what Boethius learns from understanding the true nature of Fortune, but she lacks the ability to see what true happiness is. In this way, Chaucer uses the characters’

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understanding of Fortune and her wheel to show three different ways in which we may err in the pursuit of happiness.

The narrator, on the other hand, provides a depiction of Fortune that complies with medieval Christian thought: Fortune is nothing but the movements of the skies that, in turn, derive directly from God. Thus, the erroneous portrayals of Fortune by the characters are juxtaposed to the Christian view of the narrator. This seems to be a rather effective pedagogical depiction: we have here four exempla of different stages on the path to understanding what Fortune truly is, which can ultimately be seen as mirroring different stages of Boethius’s journey towards understanding the true nature of Fortune. Like Troilus, he first simply complains about Fortune’s cruelty towards him; then he considers the law of her wheel, which corresponds to Pandarus’s view of Fortune. It is by contemplating the flawed nature of human happiness, as Criseyde does, that he ultimately understands what true happiness really is and realises that Fortune has no power over the virtuous. Ultimately, like the narrator of the Troilus, he finally sees that everything that happens in this world derives from God’s Providence. Thus the Troilus itself can indeed be seen not so much ‘as a study of a particular case of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’, but rather as a study of how one can understand, and misunderstand, Fortune.

But Fortune in the Troilus is more than an instrument of characterisation. The circular motion of her wheel becomes the very plot of the poem. The reader is constantly reminded, more or less explicitly, of the movement from sorrow to joy and back to sorrow again that Troilus undergoes. This constant awareness of what is going to happen to the characters may erroneously suggest the inevitability of Troilus’s predicament. Chaucer shows that there is a strong connection between Troilus’s end and the fall of his city, but at the same time their destruction is not pre-
determined. Troilus and Troy are not victims of a blind, inescapable destiny; on the contrary, they are both subject to Fortune’s wheel. Troilus is at the mercy of Fortune because he has surrendered to his passion for Criseyde in the same way in which Troy will fall because of Paris’s rape of Helen and the decision by Troy’s leaders to protect him. Thus Fortune becomes a means of transcending the perceived determinism that seems to characterise the story of Troilus.

Ultimately, the movement of Fortune is Troilus’s worldly punishment for his mistakes. It is precisely by undergoing the torture that consists in a full circle on her wheel described throughout the poem that we are fully shown the consequences of choosing worldly love, as Troilus does. The message of the *Troilus* is that pain is a natural and inevitable consequence of human love. As appealing as such love may be, there is a price to pay for relying on something so transient. By exalting both the pleasure and the pain involved in Troilus’s story, Chaucer effectively warns us: if we decide to climb upon Fortune’s wheel, we do so at our peril. The poem is not a stern condemnation of human passions, but a rational warning. Human love comes at a price: pain, both in this world and in the next. In the end, however, Troilus’s love is not enough to condemn him to hell. The question that remains for the reader to answer is whether such love is worth what it costs.
CHAPTER THREE: “’TIS BUT THE CHANCE OF WAR”:
CHAOS AND OCCASION IN SHAKESPEARE’S TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

A ‘political and philosophic and poetic problem, [a] hybrid and hundred-faced and hydra-headed prodigy [that] at once defies and derides all definitive comment’. ¹

That is how A. G. Swinburne described Troilus and Cressida in 1880, only one amongst a variety of picturesque comments that this play has inspired. Amongst other things, it has been defined as a tragedy, a comedy, a problem play, a ‘modern’ play, ‘a savage comedy’, ² ‘a tragic tale wagging a satiric dog’, ³ a ‘kind of experiment’, ⁴ ‘a telling inventory of human depravity’, ⁵ ‘an intelligence test which [Shakespeare] enjoys watching people fail’. ⁶ According to Carolyn Asp, ‘The play is problematic in a way no other play of Shakespeare’s is’. ⁷ It is often said that characterisation in the play is utterly unsatisfactory, ⁸ that it ‘has no story, or is as near to having none as a Renaissance play can be’. ⁹ Its language is frequently regarded as peculiar and interesting but, behind the outward façade of witticism, there is no substance, at least according to some:

¹A. G. Swinburne, as quoted in Jane Adamson, Troilus and Cressida, Twayne’s New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), p. 29.
⁴Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, p. 111.
⁶Adamson, Troilus and Cressida, p. 127.
In *Troilus* the game seems to be to deny [...] that we would ever find anything at any moment in history beyond scraps of idiotic dialogue and meaningless event. [...] The point to recognize is that we are puzzled because there is nothing to be puzzled about, because behind the glitter and coruscation of the language and the rapid charade of the language there is nothing that adds up.\(^\text{10}\)

Or, in Paul Yachnin’s words: ‘*Troilus* is the Bilbao Guggenheim of Renaissance plays; it should be a tragedy about the destruction of young love by war and the earth-shattering murder of Hector, but it is in fact a *tour de force* of form-making that looks like nothing on earth’.\(^\text{11}\) In short, an unusually high degree of critical uncertainty about *Troilus and Cressida* and its dramatic merits has marked the reception of this play.

Written between 1598 and 1602, after *Hamlet* (and more likely nearer the later date),\(^\text{12}\) it was little known and even less performed in the seventeenth century. The place and date of its first performance are unknown,\(^\text{13}\) but it is likely that it was first staged at one of the Inns of Court, and only subsequently adapted for an unrecorded performance at the Globe.\(^\text{14}\) There is no evidence that this play was ever again performed until the twentieth century.\(^\text{15}\) It was Dryden’s version that was preferred in the eighteenth century.\(^\text{16}\) In this new version, Dryden meticulously rectified all those aspects of the original play that he evidently considered defects and proofs of the fact that *Troilus and Cressida* was ‘in all probability, one of [Shakespeare’s] first endeavours on the Stage’.\(^\text{17}\) In his preface to the play, he describes how he ‘undertook to remove that heap of Rubbish, under which many

\(^{11}\)Yachnin, ‘Shakespeare’s Problem Plays and the Drama of His Time’, p. 46.
\(^{12}\)Muir, introduction to *Troilus and Cressida*, p. 5; Adamson, *Troilus and Cressida*, p. 2; Harris, ‘The enterprise is sick’; Pathologies of Value and Transnationality in *Troilus and Cressida*, p. 3.
\(^{13}\)Muir, introduction to *Troilus and Cressida*, p. 1.
\(^{14}\)Muir, introduction to *Troilus and Cressida*, pp. 8–9.
\(^{15}\)Muir, introduction to *Troilus and Cressida*, p. 9.
\(^{16}\)Muir, introduction to *Troilus and Cressida*, p. 9.
excellent thoughts lay wholly bury’d’, by reforming the ‘obsolete’ language, finding a solution for the appalling lack of punishment for the unfaithful Cressida, improving the characterisation of most of the protagonists, ‘which were begun, and left unfinish’d’, and reordering the sequence of the scenes (he removed them ‘from the places where they were inartifically set’). As Adamson put it, ‘it is hard to imagine a more comprehensively uncomprehending redaction of the play’, and yet Dryden’s modifications clearly show us which aspects of Troilus and Cressida he considered most unusual and disturbing. These are largely the same features that surprise more modern critics, as we have seen: the complexity of the language; the recurrent juxtaposition of contrasting scenes in terms of location, values and themes; the constant inconsistencies of the characters; and indeed the ending. These are probably some of the reasons why the play was often considered strange, and largely ignored until after the Second World War, and why it is now generally considered interesting, although, as we have seen, exceedingly problematic.

Reading the play, one can easily get the feeling that things do not quite add up; there is no one and nothing that remains unquestioned. In Troilus and Cressida, the old chivalric values, as well as the courtly ideals of love, are systematically called into question. There seems to be no value or philosophy that proves successful, no organizing principle that prevails. I think that, ultimately, in the world of the play, there is no room for a divine power, and this is possibly why nothing else can make sense. In stark contrast with Chaucer’s version, no Christian God seems to hold on to the strings of reality. With no God, how can one decide what is right or wrong? How can one measure justice and honour? The ultimate measuring rod failing, everything becomes arbitrary. Hence characters are unable to find stable

22 Adamson, Troilus and Cressida, p. 5.
23 For an overview of early reception of the play, see Adamson, Troilus and Cressida, pp. 2–6.
values to rely upon, and they have no certainties to hold on to as the world around them is engulfed by the ‘chance of war’, which results in unrestrained chaos. It is precisely this ‘chance’ that seems to preside over the action of the play, in stark contrast with the marked presence of Providence in Chaucer’s version.

And here is where the issue of Fortune comes into play. The world of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* is by no means the same pagan world in which Shakespeare’s play is set. The characters may be pagan in both cases, but the Chaucerian narrator makes sure that we are aware that there are higher forces at work, even when the characters ignore them. In the case of Shakespeare’s play, there is no narratorial voice to suggest the existence of such powers, and one gets the impression that, indeed, there are no supernatural forces at play. What about Fortune then? What happens to her as she moves from the setting of the *Troilus* and its Boethian undertones to the chaotic world of *Troilus and Cressida*, in which chance plays such a major role? If in the poem Fortune was the characters’ misconception of God’s Providence, what can she be in the kind of world in which this play is set? She cannot be a god, for there is none, nor an emissary of Providence, as there is no supreme power overseeing things. As was often the case in the Renaissance, in the world of the play Fortune does not appear with the wheel, suggestive of a logical pattern she no longer follows, but with the sphere, wind, sail, and boat of Occasion. She is no longer spinning in circles; she is now adrift on the ocean waves, in the middle of a storm. She is no longer the emissary of God and the morally charged revealer of the fickle nature of worldly goods; she is rather Fortune with a forelock, who must not be ignored by the wise and morally virtuous, but rather, should be grabbed by the brave and ‘virtuous’ in a strictly secular and military sense – in the Renaissance and Machiavellian sense. It is this Fortune that the characters of the play have to deal with, and the way they do so tells us as much about them as it does about the world they inhabit. If there is no Providence at work,

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26For an overview of Occasion in the Renaissance see Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, pp. 193–231; Wittkower, ‘Chance, Time and Virtue’; Chew, ‘Time and Fortune’. In this study I use the capitalised terms Occasion and Opportunity as synonyms.
27This will be further explained in the discussion of the Greek council scene.
no divine force, then there is nothing determining the outcome of events but Occasion, and the ability of the individual to seize it. Although Fortune may appear to be explicitly referred to less frequently than in both Boccaccio’s and Chaucer’s versions, and despite the utter lack of attention given to her by critics, she has a fundamental role in the play. Fortune may be less prominent, but no less important, once one recognises her for what she has become: the Occasion of Renaissance emblem books.

1 The Armed Prologue and the Chance of War

The opening of *Troilus and Cressida* is in stark contrast with the beginning of Chaucer’s poem. Instead of the Chaucerian omniscient narrator talking about the double sorrow of Troilus due to love, we have a decidedly more epic, armed Prologue describing the Greek armies as they besiege Troy. We are presented with sixty-nine Greek princes as they arrive, clearly signalling that this is not solely the story of Troilus, one prince, but the telling of the vicissitudes of many, with wider social and political implications. In Chaucer’s version, as we have seen, the reader is immediately made aware of the structure of the story, as well as of its connection to the turning wheel of Fortune: we know from the outset that Troilus is to undergo a turn on Fortune’s wheel. Here no such anticipation is made. Whereas in the poem the wheel of Fortune provided a structure for the story (and such structure was also present, although less emphasised, in the *Filostrato*), here no such regular pattern is suggested. The effect of this change is two-fold. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in *Troilus and Criseyde* the emphasis on the circularity of the plot has the effect of underscoring those moral teachings intrinsically connected with the motion

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28 In a 2001 article, Clayton MacKenzie noted the influence of emblem books on Shakespeare’s depictions of Fortune and expressed his surprise at the relatively small amount of critical works on Fortune in Shakespeare. MacKenzie, ‘Fortuna in Shakespeare’s Plays’, p. 260. Nobody, to my knowledge, has analysed the representation of Fortune in *Troilus and Cressida*, and I believe that the way to do it is precisely by taking into account Mackenzie’s suggestion.

29 For the importance of emblem books to the Renaissance view of Fortune in general, and Shakespeare’s in particular, see MacKenzie, ‘Fortuna in Shakespeare’s Plays’, pp. 360–363.
of Fortune’s wheel. At the same time, this circular structure of rise and fall provides an intelligible pattern according to which one can view the events to come – thus rationalizing the course of events itself. Shakespeare’s armed Prologue plunges us in medias res and leaves us to ‘the chance of war’.30 This opening complies with the conventions of epic literature, but it also accentuates, from the very beginning and in stark contrast with Chaucer’s poem, the feeling that what is about to take place is arbitrary. The Prologue provides no logical framework according to which events can be understood, giving the impression that they merely follow an unpredictable pattern. All there is, on both Greek and Trojan sides, is an ‘expectation’ that ‘sets all on hazard’.31 There is no sense of an overseeing power; on the contrary, it is clear from the very beginning that chance will play an important role in the play. The Prologue does not give any hints as to what is going to happen in the story. It is true, the audience would have no doubt been familiar with what was about to take place, as both the love story and the Homeric legend were extremely popular in Elizabethan England.32 The story of Troilus and Cressida in particular had often been referred to in Shakespeare’s earlier plays.33 The lack of any reference to the

30Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, Prologue, 31.
31Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, Prologue, 20–22.
33The Troilus-Cressida love story is mentioned by characters in The Merchant of Venice (V, i, 1–6); As You Like It (IV, i, 75–85), The Twelfth Night (III, i, 51–2), All’s Well that Ends Well (II, i, 99–100), Much Ado about Nothing (V, ii, 20–21), Henry V (II, i, 75–8), The Taming of the Shrew (III, iii, 111), The Merry Wives of Windsor (I, iii, 53–54), without considering those cases in which the word ‘pander’ is used as a verb (Hamlet, III, iv, 80), as an insult (The Merry Wives of Windsor, IV, ii, 84; Cymbeline, III, v, 96; King Lear, II, ii; 16) or as a common name to indicate a go-between, helper, or procurer (Henry V, IV, v, 15; The Merry Wives of Windsor, V, v, 142; Cymbeline, III, iv, 28–29; Pericles, Prince of Tyre, IV, ii, and v; The Winter’s Tale, II, i, 57). The Troy myth and its fall often features in the canon, appearing in Hamlet (II, ii, 426–554); The Rape of Lucrece, vv. 1366–1533; All’s Well that Ends Well (I, iii, 50–59); Cymbeline (IV, ii, 378); King Henry IV part two (I, i, 80–85); King Henry VI part two (I, iv, 12–19 and III, ii, 119); King Henry VI part three (II, v, 120); Julius Caesar (I, ii, 119–120); Richard II (V, i, 11); Titus Andronicus (I, i, 153–159; III, i, 69; IV, i, 20–21; V, iii, 80–84). Hecuba is mentioned in Much Ado about Nothing (II, iii, 142); Merry Wives of Windsor (I, iii, 7); King Henry IV part two (II, iv, 159); King Henry VI part one (II, iii, 20); King Henry VI
events that the audience is going to witness seems precisely to emphasise the sense of arbitrariness and, simultaneously, of expectation. It is as if the spectators were asked to forget what they already knew about these stories and let the events unfold before their eyes as if happening for the first time. We are, as it were, drawn onto the battlefield together with the other participants to this war. They were truly unaware of what was to happen. Like the armed Prologue, we too are taking part: everyone is involved.

And the audience of 1602 (or thereabouts) was indeed likely to feel particularly concerned with war. The England of those years has been described as a besieged country: the fear of attack was something very real at the time, with the ongoing Nine Years’ War in Ireland and the constant fear of an imminent Spanish invasion. As Eric S. Mallin suggests, ‘the neurosis of invasion made England something of a Troy, a nation ten years at war without strong hope of either victory or truce’. And it was not due to fear alone that war was a major concern. In the summer of 1599 for instance, while London was being prepared to withstand an expected invasion by Spanish forces, rich and poor alike were called to arms, from every ward in the city, as well as from the fields in the countryside, and the economic and psychological strain was very much real and present. It is not surprising that the war subplot should be emphasised in Shakespeare’s version of the


story of Troilus, and given no less weight than the love story, which is so inescapably affected by it.

The fact that this play merges the Chaucerian tradition of the story of Troilus’s love for Cressida and the Homeric tradition of the siege of Troy, bringing together, and giving equal weight to the war and the love plot, is itself very significant for a study of Fortune in the play. Frederick Kiefer, in his excellent *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, identifies two separate literary traditions of Fortune that influenced Renaissance plays: one is represented by French and Italian *novelle*, in which Fortune is considered in connection with the love-death *topos*, and the other by the *de casibus* literature and Seneca, which tended to consider Fortune in connection with myth or history. This play, then, would seem the perfect place to look for representations of Fortune, as both traditions could potentially merge here, in a story in which, like in no other, war, history, myth, and love are deeply intertwined. However, as we will soon find out, both love and war are far from being treated in traditional terms in this play. The way in which the Prologue speaks of both is, from this perspective, particularly interesting.

The Greek princes have their ‘high blood chafed’. They are proud, we are not sure why exactly, since the ‘quarrel’ that is the issue of the war is described in such terms: ‘The ravished Helen, Menelaus’ queen, / With wanton Paris sleeps’. The Prologue does not seem to sympathise with either Greeks or Trojans. He does not say that the Princes have come, outraged by Paris’s ignominious act of betrayal, to restore Menelaus’s honour. He does not speak, either, of the great love between Helen and Paris, so uncontrollable that it defied all bonds of kinship and honour. In fact, in the prologue there is no talk of honour or justice at all. The only vow that is made is that by the Greeks to ‘ransack Troy’, in itself not a very chivalrous proposition. The only bravery referred to is, ironically, that of the Greek

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37 See especially Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, p. 158.
'pavilions'.\textsuperscript{41} We never get a sense that justice resides on either side of the battlefield. We never get a feeling that this war is fought for something worth fighting for. The epic posture of the armed Prologue is decidedly in contrast with his way of talking about the war and its causes. If the cause of the war is mere lust and pride, and the people fighting it only care about what they can ransack, then we are presented with lusty Trojans on the one side and bloodthirsty and greedy Greeks on the other. In the end, both love and war are reduced to blind and base passions that, together with the ‘chance of war’,\textsuperscript{42} seem to be the only generating forces behind the action of the play. Even the audience is invited to ‘do as [their] pleasures are’.\textsuperscript{43} With no moral and theological order in place, individual impulses and desires are the only motivating forces. If basic instincts (which, traditionally, enslave men to Fortune) and random chance are all that are at work here, this indeed seems a perfect play in which to try to trace the operations of the goddess of chance. After all, she is bound to hold sway in both love and war in a world where, as previously suggested, no other supernatural force seems to be present. The aim of the present chapter is to find out the extent of Fortune’s power, and whether man is allowed to oppose or influence her actions. Like the armed Prologue, we too will ‘leap over’ the first scenes and begin with the most explicit and detailed reference to Fortune in the play: the speech on Fortune by Agamemnon, commented upon by both Nestor and Ulysses. This scene provides the key concepts for understanding how Fortune is conceived in the play: as the Renaissance Occasion.\textsuperscript{44} Subsequently, I will try to determine which characters are most successful in seizing Occasion in love and war respectively, the reasons why they succeed or fail, and what this tells us about them and the world they inhabit.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41}Shakespeare, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, Prologue, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{42}Shakespeare, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, Prologue, 31.
\item \textsuperscript{43}Shakespeare, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, Prologue, 30.
\item \textsuperscript{44}Of course, as we have seen in previous chapters, the notion of Occasion has its roots in pagan antiquity and was also present in the Middle Ages. What I am suggesting here is that, of the many traditions and varied iconographies associated to Fortune that were inherited by the Renaissance from earlier times, that of Occasion was by far the most popular and became the way in which most people at the time thought of Fortune. For a more detailed discussion of Fortune in the Renaissance see, among others, Kiefer, \textit{Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy}; Wittkower, ‘Chance, Time and Virtue’; Chew, ‘Time and Fortune’; Samuel C. Chew, \textit{The Pilgrimage of Life: An Exploration into the Renaissance Mind} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).
\end{itemize}
2 The Greek Council Scene: The Reproof of Chance

When we are first shown the Greek camp, we are confronted with a somewhat convoluted speech by Agamemnon addressing the understandably unhappy Greek princes. After seven years of siege, Troy still stands, and yet Agamemnon insists that they should not be discouraged. The present distress must be seen as a trial set by the gods:

Why then, you princes,
Do you with cheeks abashed behold our works,
And call them shames, which are indeed nought else
But the protractive trials of Great Jove
To find persistive constancy in men?
The fineness of which metal is not found
In fortune’s love: for then the bold and coward,
The wise and fool, the artist and unread,
The hard and soft, seem all affined and kin.
But in the wind and tempest of her frown,
Distinction with a broad and powerful fan,
Puffing at all, winnows the light away,
And what hath mass or matter by itself
Lies rich in virtue and unminglèd.  

Agamemnon speaks of misfortune as a trial set by God. It is not Fortune’s love, but her ‘frown’ that reveals who is worthy. Although the idea that misfortune could be useful, due to its capacity to enlighten people, was also present in the Consolation, as we have seen before, the imagery of these lines evokes a different literary tradition. Here there is no mention of Fortune’s wheel; it is her ‘wind’ and ‘tempest’ that are the instruments of her actions. Fortune has traditionally been associated with

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46Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, I, iii, 16–29.
47Boethius, Anicci Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio, Liber II, Prosa VIII, p. 35.
the storm since antiquity, and that tradition survived through the Middle Ages as well.\textsuperscript{48} Boethius too speaks of Fortune’s waves.\textsuperscript{49} But it was in the Renaissance, especially in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, that this set of images regained new prominence,\textsuperscript{50} as Fortune became increasingly associated with the notion of Occasion,\textsuperscript{51} gradually assimilating her attributes to the point where the two figures became interchangeable.\textsuperscript{52} This is not to say that the other traditions of Fortune were forgotten. The image of her wheel, for instance, was still popular;\textsuperscript{53} it was often present in the literature and visual arts of the time, and was commonplace in Elizabethan theatre,\textsuperscript{54} including Shakespeare’s.\textsuperscript{55} But it was the image of Fortune as Occasion that became increasingly prominent, and gained new associations. While the wheel of Fortune still had a strongly Boethian, cautionary message,\textsuperscript{56} possibly also due to the influence of the \textit{Mirror for Magistrates} (first printed in 1559),\textsuperscript{57} the image of Fortune as Occasion, amidst the stormy waves, had markedly more optimistic connotations.\textsuperscript{58} In her new guise, Fortune is still capricious, she still

\textsuperscript{48}Patch, \textit{The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature}, p. 104.
\textsuperscript{49}Boethius, \textit{Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio}, Liber I, Metrum V, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{50}Kiefer, \textit{Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy}, p. 193.
\textsuperscript{51}According to some, this is primarily due to the revival of classicism prevalent at the time (Raymond Chapman, ‘The Wheel of Fortune in Shakespeare’s Historical Plays’, \textit{The Review of English Studies} 1, no. 1 (1950), p. 2), but, although this is likely true, one must note that Renaissance Occasion is not identical to the classical representations. Various iconographic elements are new. The sail, for instance, was acquired by Occasion only in the Renaissance. See Buttay-Jutier, \textit{Fortuna}, pp. 87–124.
\textsuperscript{52}Many critics agree on this point. See especially Kiefer, \textit{Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy}, pp. 193–217, Cassirer, \textit{The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy}, p. 77; Buttay-Jutier, \textit{Fortuna}, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{53}See for instance the vivid depiction of Fortune’s wheel in Marlowe’s \textit{Edward the Second}: ‘Base Fortune, now I see that in thy wheel / There is a point to which, when men aspire, / They tumble headlong down. That point I touched, / And, seeing there was no place to mount up higher, / Why should I grieve at my declining fall?’, Christopher Marlowe, \textit{Edward the Second}, ed. Charles R. Forker (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), V, vi, 58–62.
\textsuperscript{54}MacKenzie, ‘Fortuna in Shakespeare’s Plays’.
\textsuperscript{56}For instance Fluellen in \textit{Henry V} shows himself to be extremely familiar with Fortune’s wheel and her moral implications: ‘Fortune is painted blind, with a muffler before her eye, to signify to you that Fortune is blind; and she is painted also with a wheel, to signify to you, which is the moral of it, that she is turning and inconstant, and mutability, and variation. And her foot, look you, is fixed upon a spherical stone, which rolls and rolls and rolls. In good truth, the poet makes a most excellent description of it. Fortune is an excellent moral’. William Shakespeare, ‘The Life of Henry the Fifth’, in \textit{Complete Works: The RSC Shakespeare}, III, vi, 23–28.
\textsuperscript{57}Budra, \textit{A Mirror for Magistrates and the De Casibus Tradition}, p. 11. For a history of the various editions of the \textit{Mirror} see Budra, \textit{A Mirror for Magistrates and the De Casibus Tradition}, pp. 3–13.
\textsuperscript{58}Kiefer, \textit{Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy}, pp. 198–199.
distributes happiness and sorrow, but there is no pattern associated with her favours. The inescapable cycles of woe and bliss no longer determine her actions. She is truly unpredictable, like the course of a ship in a tempestuous sea and, as in the case of a ship, a good helmsman can hope to oppose the storm with his skill and safely guide her to the desired port. The fact that both sets of images were still available to Shakespeare (and he uses both in his plays), means that one may consider why he chooses one or the other in different contexts.

In this specific case, although the storm is the only attribute of Occasion that is mentioned, it is Agamemnon’s attitude to Fortune that clearly shows he is thinking of the Renaissance Occasion. Like Boethius, he suggests that virtuous men will resist Fortune’s actions, but it is not a Christian virtue that he has in mind, as appears clearly from the adjectives used to describe those who will survive the storm: it is the ‘bold’, ‘wise’, ‘artist’ (meaning educated), and ‘hard’ man that will not be overwhelmed. For Boethius, misfortune was to enlighten by showing that the goods of this world are vain. Conversely, in Agamemnon’s speech, Fortune’s action separates the virtuous from the weak. ‘Rich in virtue’ is not intended in a moral sense. The virtue described here is a markedly military one; it is prowess, the distinctively lay virtù described by Machiavelli as the foremost attribute of the successful prince. As he discusses the actions of those princes that came to power thanks to their virtue, Machiavelli underlines that being able to seize a favourable opportunity is the most important skill a good prince must possess. Ultimately, for Machiavelli, virtù means the set of skills that enables the prince both to recognise when Opportunity is to be seized and how:

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60 Boethius, Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio, Liber II, Prosa VIII, p. 35.
62 As Paul Strohm argues, Machiavelli should be considered more as exemplifying a popular tendency rather than as the inaugurator of this view of Fortune. See Strohm, Politique, pp. 1–4. It is in this light that my references to Machiavelli throughout this chapter should be seen.
Ed esaminando le azioni e vita loro non si vede che quelli avessino altro de la fortuna che la occasione, la quale dette loro materia a potere introdurvi dentro quella forma che parse loro: e sanza quella occasione la virtù dello animo loro si sarebbe spenta, e sanza quella virtù la occasione sarebbe venuta invano. […] Queste occasioni per tanto feciono questi uomini felici e la eccellente virtù loro fe’ quella occasione essere conosciuta: donde la loro patria ne fu nobilitata e diventò felicissima.⁶³

And when we examine their actions and their lives, they do not seem to have been obliged to Fortune for anything but opportunity, which provided them with the material that they subsequently shaped according to their own heart’s desire. Without the opportunity, their prowess would have been ineffective; and without their prowess the opportunity would have been wasted. […] Such opportunities made those great men successful, and their memorable prowess ensures that the opportunities were not wasted; and so their countries became glorious and wealthy.⁶⁴

Agamemnon is here speaking of the secular, military, Machiavellian virtue, which has its roots in the Roman concept of *virtus*.⁶⁵ He is clearly thinking of Fortune in terms of the Renaissance conception of Opportunity.

Nestor’s commentary on his commander’s speech emphasises the references to Occasion and secular virtues:

In the reproof of chance
Lies the true proof of men. The sea being smooth,
How many shallow bauble-boats dare sail
Upon her patient breast, making their way
With those of nobler bulk!

⁶⁵Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, p. 201.
But let the ruffian Boreas once enrage
The gentle Thetis, and anon behold
The strong-ribbed bark through liquid mountains cut,
Bounding between the two moist elements
Like Perseus’ horse. Where’s then the saucy boat,
Whose weak untimbered sides but even now
Co-rivalled greatness? Either to harbour fled,
Or made a toast for Neptune. Even so
Doth valour’s show and valour’s worth divide
In storms of fortune. For in her ray and brightness
The herd hath more annoyance by the breese
Than by the tiger; but when the splitting wind
Makes flexible the knees of knotted oaks
And flies flee under shade, why then the thing of courage,
As roused with rage, with rage doth sympathize,
And with an accent tuned in selfsame key
Rechides to chiding fortune.66

Nestor first speaks of chance, rather than Fortune, but, like Agamemnon, he is here clearly thinking of Fortune in her guise as Occasion. The imagery of the passage leaves no doubt: the ‘wind and tempest’ of Agamemnon’s speech are well understood by Nestor, who develops the hint into an elaborate metaphor of sailing ships in the ‘storms of fortune’ to comment on Agamemnon’s main point. The sea, the boats, the wind, and the storm of Opportunity are all traditional elements of Occasion in the Renaissance.67

The first artistic representation of what was to become such a popular image is considered to have been Giovanni Rucellai’s Impresa sculpted on the Palazzo Rucellai in Florence in 1460 (see Figure 1).68 A naked woman, with forelock, stands in a boat, holding the mast in the right hand and the lower section of the sail, inflated

66Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, I, iii, 32–53.
68Buttay-Jutier, Fortuna, pp. 88–89.
by the wind, in the left hand. Emblem books made this image of Occasion extremely popular in the Renaissance. She is usually depicted with forelock and sail, sometimes with a rudder or a razor, her feet on a sphere or, in some cases, on a dolphin (alternatively, the dolphin is in the water nearby) or, less often, on a boat, amidst the stormy waves and winds. Although the ship is not always present, the sail (or a long veil) usually is, and it is fair to assume that this type of image was traditionally associated with the idea of sailing, as shown by Corrozet’s ‘L’yimage de fortune’ in his *Hecatomgraphie* (1540) (see Figure 2). The emblem depicts a naked woman, holding a long veil and a broken mast, standing amongst the waves, with one foot on a sphere and the other on a dolphin. The following text is Corrozet’s gloss on the image:

Tell me, O fortune, for what end thou art holding the broken mast wherewith thou supportest thyself? And why also is it that thou art painted upon the sea, encircled with so long a veil? Tell me too why under thy feet are the ball and the dolphin?

This is Fortune’s answer:

It is to show my instability, and that in me there is no security. Thou seest this mast broken all across, – this veil also puffed out by various winds, – beneath

69 Buttay-Jutier interestingly argues that this image is not a merging of Fortune and Occasion, but rather of Occasion and Venus as it was represented in Florentine iconography at the time (with the sail and the dolphin). She also argues that the woman in the boat is not ‘Fortune’, but rather ‘buona ventura’. Buttay-Jutier, *Fortuna*, p. 124. I am not sure that such a subtle distinction can apply to this specific image. Besides, others have argued that the sail and dolphin of the Renaissance Occasion derive from a confusion or fusion between Occasion and Venus. As Kiefer argued, ‘Fortune’s acquisition of the sail and dolphin would never have become so popular were it not for the conflation with Occasion’ (Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, p. 204). The fact remains that, no matter the origin of this specific image, this *impresa* is one of the first examples of what was to become the Renaissance Occasion-Fortune.


72 As quoted in Green, *Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers*, p. 262.
one foot, the dolphin amid the waves; below the other foot, the round unstable ball, – I am thus on the sea at a venture. He who has made my portraiture wishes no other thing to be understood than this, that distrust is enclosed beneath me and that I am uncertain of reaching a safe haven; – near am I to danger, from safety ever distant: in perplexity whether to weep or to laugh, – doubtful of good or evil, as the ship which is upon the seas tossed by the waves, is doubtful in itself where it will be borne. This then is what you see in my true image, hither and thither turned without security.73

The sailing ship tossed on the stormy waves becomes itself an image of Fortune. A ship is often present in the background in similar emblems (see Figure 3 and 4),74 and in some cases Fortune or Occasion herself, as in Rucellai’s Impresa, stands in the ship (see Figure 5 and 6).75 In others, the woman is not even present and, as in the last lines by Corrozet, it is man that is in the ship upon the tempestuous or calm sea (see Figure 7 and 8).76 A very interesting example can be found in Jean Cousin’s Le Livre de Fortune (1568). Plates LXI and LXIII juxtapose propitious Fortune – a ship crowded with people on calm sea – and ‘Fortuna Naufraga’, where the sea is no longer calm and the ship is sinking (see Figure 9 and 10).77

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73As quoted in Green, Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers, p. 262.
75Giles Corrozet, ‘L’ymage d’occasion’, in Hecatomgraphie, as shown in Kiefer, Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 215. Another beautiful example can be found not in an emblem book but in a marble engraving in the floor of the Duomo of Siena, the Allegoria del colle della Sapienza, by Pinturicchio, dating from 1505. See Bruno Santi, Il pavimento del Duomo di Siena (Firenze: Scala, Istituto Fotografico Editoriale, 1982), p. 14. It depicts wise men that have arrived at Wisdom’s hill, travelling on a boat conducted by Fortune. Fortune appears on the left hand side of the picture. The wise have already disembarked and she is standing, looking away from the hill into the sea, one foot on a sphere placed on the shore, the other on the boat. The mast is broken and she holds the sail with one hand and a cornucopia with the other. For a detailed analysis of this allegory see Marilena Caciorgna, ‘Allegoria del monte della Sapienza’, in Studi interdisciplinari sul pavimento del Duomo di Siena: iconografia, stile, indagini scientifiche; atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Siena, Chiesa della SS. Annunziata, 27 e 28 settembre 2002, ed. Marilena Caciorgna, Roberto Guerrini, and Mario Lorenzoni (Siena: Cantagalli, 2005).
76See plates CLVII, CLXI in Cousin and Lalanne, The Book of Fortune.
77Plates LXI and LXIII in Cousin and Lalanne, The Book of Fortune.
Cousin’s favourable and unfavourable Fortune, associated with a ship on a calm sea and a sinking vessel in a tempest, readily reminds us of Nestor’s words. Although this could not have been a source for Shakespeare,\textsuperscript{78} still it shows that Nestor’s metaphor was likely to be readily associated by the audience with the notion of Occasion. It was a common image, and as, MacKenzie pointed out, its popularity ‘reflects the explorative and mercantile aspirations of an age in which sea power largely defined the prosperity and prestige of nations’.\textsuperscript{79} Unlike Cousin, Nestor envisages that some ships may indeed remain afloat, in line with the positive message suggested by Agamemnon. For Nestor, too, the ‘virtuous’ man who can win over Fortune is clearly not one whom Boethius would have considered so. His main virtue is courage, but Nestor describes this man as ‘a thing’ of courage. He is almost dehumanised so as to emphasise his beastly strength. This interpretation is confirmed in the subsequent lines: rage is this man’s main attribute. It is with rage than he overcomes ‘chiding fortune’. Again, this is reminiscent of Machiavelli. He, too, describes the almost brutal strength that is necessary to subdue Fortune:

Io iudico bene questo, che sia meglio essere impetuoso che ripettivo: perché la fortuna è donna ed e necessario, volendola tenere sotto, batterla e urtarla. E si vede che la si lascia più vincere da questi, cha da quegli che freddamente procedono: e però sempre, come donna, è amica de’ giovani, perché sono meno rispettivi, più feroce e con più audacia la comandano.\textsuperscript{80}

I must add that it is better to be bold than cautious; for Fortune is a woman and must be mauled and beaten if you want to keep her in subjection. And it can be

\textsuperscript{78}The volume containing Cousin’s emblems, dated 1568, remained unpublished until it was rediscovered by Ludovic Lalanne in 1883. Although Shakespeare could not have seen it, this book offers an impressively complete collection of images of Fortune, revealing its varied and complex attributes and associations in the Renaissance.

\textsuperscript{79}MacKenzie, ‘Fortuna in Shakespeare’s Plays’, p. 260. One only needs to think of \textit{The Merchant of Venice} for a clear example of the connection between Fortune and sea-commerce. Antonio’s loss of his ships at sea, representing all of his wealth, precipitates the plot: he is unable to repay his loan to Shylock, who, as per their unusual contract, requires a pound of flesh from the merchant. Interestingly, although the connection between the sea and Fortune is obvious in this play, she is here also used as a plot device. Clearly the newer appearance of Fortune does not prevent her from assuming her traditional role as instrument of tragedy (or comedy, as when, at the end, the ships reappear). Shakespeare, \textit{The Merchant of Venice}.

\textsuperscript{80}Machiavelli, \textit{Il Principe}, p. 167.
seen that she gives in more readily to the bold than to the timid. Again like a woman, she prefers young men, because they are less cautious, more ardent, and more daring in their demands. 81

Like Agamemnon, Nestor speaks of a Machiavellian type of virtue as the quality necessary to subdue Fortune, and more emphatically so. The comment on Cousin’s ‘Fortitudo in Fortunam, not in homines’ suggests too that ‘strength and high-mindedness are required against Fortune’. 82 This attitude towards Fortune was becoming increasingly popular, in stark contrast with the Boethian and Stoic solution of distancing oneself from the need for earthly possessions. 83 It may be possible to say that, in the Renaissance, both attitudes co-exist. As we have seen from the cautionary nature of the emblems, it is dangerous to embark upon Fortune’s ship. Lesser men will be swept away by the fury of the storm. But brave men, as Nestor and Agamemnon suggest, will prove their strength by surviving it. The discourse on Fortune is no longer strictly connected to a Christian or Stoic attitude towards worldly things. It becomes a matter of ‘honour and renown’. 84 The fact that for Nestor Fortune divides valour’s ‘show’ and ‘worth’ indicates the extremely important connection between Fortune and false appearances, which is one of the main concerns of the play. From this perspective, Fortune can be seen as a revealer of truth, in a fashion that is closely connected to one of the traditional functions of Time in the Renaissance. 85 The unworthy barks will sink in the storms of Fortune. One may wonder, however, whether Agamemnon and Nestor themselves possess the skills necessary to remain afloat.

81 Machiavelli, The Prince and Other Political Writings, p. 134.
82 Cousin and Lalanne, The Book of Fortune, p. 29.
83 Another representation that, as Wittkover argued, is strongly reminiscent of Machiavelli’s passage is an engraving by Marc Antonio Raimondi: Herculean Vice chastising vicious Fortune, Wittkower, ‘Chance, Time and Virtue’, Pl 52a, see Figure 11.
84 Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, II, ii, 198.
Ulysses does not seem to think so, although his criticism is not explicit. When offering his opinion about Agamemnon’s and Nestor’s speeches, he depicts in very emphatic terms a world where the proper social order is not respected, which he believes to be the cause of the current failings in the war (and which implies that the current leadership is indeed deficient). Although he does not here mention Occasion directly, he uses the imagery that has been so far consistently associated with it. In his famous speech on degree, he describes the state of chaos ensuing when the proper order of things is not respected:

But when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues, and what portents, what mutiny,
What raging of the sea, shaking of the earth,
Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors.

[...]
The bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
And make a sop of all this solid globe:
Strength should be lord of imbecility,
And the rude son should strike his father dead.
Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong.
Between whose endless jar justice recides,86
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce a universal prey,
And last eat up himself. Great Agamemnon,
This chaos when degree is suffocate, follows the choking.87

86 Or ‘resides’, in the Arden edition. Editors do not seem to agree on this, see Adamson, *Troilus and Cressida*, pp. 47–48. The difference is of little relevance to the present discussion.
Ulysses uses a very similar image to that presented by Agamemnon and Nestor. He too speaks of ‘raging of the sea’ and ‘commotion in the wind’, but he sees the chaotic state that was used in the previous speeches to describe a world dominated by Fortune in a different light. Disorder spreads from the sea to the land. No ship seems to be able to survive this endemic confusion. It is not only the ‘saucy’ boat that is ‘made a toast for Neptune’; the enraged waters will make a ‘sop of all this solid globe’. This current state, in which everyone and everything seem to be at the mercy of a universal chaos, is not perceived by Ulysses as an opportunity to prove oneself, but rather as a symptom that something is deeply wrong, that societal order is crumbling. In particular, Ulysses seems to suggests that the military virtues applauded by Agamemnon and Nestor are in fact something very dangerous that would further universal destruction. In his speech, strength is associated with ‘imbecility’, force with injustice, power and will with a wolfish appetite that will end up devouring the whole world, and, ultimately, destroy itself. This is indeed the other side of the coin. Machiavelli’s virtù was seen by some as the one thing that might provide a weapon against Fortune, while others considered it as something that disrupts society and puts everything at the mercy of Fortune: if the proper order of things is not respected and individualism becomes the prime motive for action, all is lost. Ulysses juxtaposes the Elizabethan ideal of societal order with the newer individualistic political trends expressed by Agamemnon and Nestor. This character appears to offer a more conservative option to that provided by his leader.

Although, in the chaotic world of the play, this very rational speech may well appear to the reader to provide the first sensible set of values one may rely upon, and Ulysses has indeed been considered by critics as the ‘noblest of politicians’, still the idea of a well-ordered world under a wise and ordained monarch is hard to imagine in the chaotic circumstances. Ulysses’s appeal to order seems out of place and, similarly, the worldview he expresses was increasingly becoming outdated at

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88Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, p. 108.
the time the play was written.\textsuperscript{89} The chaos, confusion and instability that characterised the last years of Elizabethan England made Ulysses’s warnings particularly relevant to a contemporary audience.\textsuperscript{90} On the one hand, his frightening depiction of universal chaos would have been very much present and tangible. On the other, his desire for order could have been felt as a nostalgic reminder of a social stability that seemed all but lost. Muir interestingly notes that Ulysses’s speech will be the very last example of praise of a divinely ordained social order to appear in Shakespeare’s works.\textsuperscript{91} It is wishful thinking on his part, in other words. Ulysses recognises and rejects Agamemnon and Nestor’s solution of seizing Occasion by virile strength. He seems to reject a Machiavellian answer to the current chaos. He expresses the desire for a well-ordered society, but his own actions later on in the play will reveal the difficulty of realizing such a vision. In the present scene, all Ulysses does is to reveal the problem that afflicts the Greek camp, but he fails to provide a solution, as his speech is interrupted by the arrival of Aeneas.

We will return to Ulysses and his way of dealing with Fortune throughout the play later in the chapter. For now, suffice to say that the Greeks’ debate has shown that Fortune in the play is seen in her guise as Occasion. The world the characters live in is entirely at the mercy of Fortune, which accounts for the universal disarray of which the whole play is an emblem. Fortune here, lacking the control of any supernatural power, tends very much to coincide with chance and a general state of chaos. Still, the references to Occasion suggest the typically Renaissance notion that one may influence the outcome of events if he is able to recognise and seize favourable opportunities. Achilles and Nestor believe that the way to do so is to use

\textsuperscript{89}Gayle Greene, ‘Language and Value in Shakespeare’s \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 21, no. 2 (1981), p. 271. According to Adamson, the likelihood of the catastrophic outcome depicted in the speech would have seemed remote to the spectators. She also believes that Achilles’s refusal to obey orders and his mocking of his superiors can hardly justify Ulysses’s distress, which ironically undercuts his speech on cosmic disorder. See Adamson, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, pp. 41–42. However, as Mallin notes in ‘Emulous Factions and the Collapse of Chivalry’, p. 148, disobedience and factionalism were increasingly prominent problems by the end of Elizabeth’s reign.


\textsuperscript{91}Muir, introduction to \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, p. 25.
brute force. Ulysses clearly disagrees. Different characters in the play display different methods in which they try to seize Opportunity by the forelock. Only very few of them prove successful.

3 Seizing Occasion in Love: Troilus vs. Diomedes

Both the love and the war subplots present us with two main antithetical characters. In each case the person that the audience is likely to sympathise with is ultimately defeated by his opponent. Diomedes is to Troilus what Achilles is to Hector. And, like Achilles, Diomedes is successful in achieving his main goal, showing a talent for seizing Occasion that his rival would not seem to possess. But the end result alone is not enough to judge who is better able to seize Occasion, or, most importantly, why. In order to do so, let us first turn our attention to the character of Troilus. Deciding whether or not he is a successful individual is a rather complex matter. In Act IV, Scene V, Ulysses describes Troilus to Agamemnon as a ‘true knight’, and some critics tend to consider him as such, regarding Ulysses’s words as an accurate depiction of the Trojan prince. And yet one must remember that Ulysses distances himself from his own statements, saying that he is merely reporting what he has heard from Aeneas. In fact, the character of Troilus (as many in this ambiguous play) has provoked very different reactions. Charles Boyle believes he is ‘not passion’s slave’, which, according to him, is a good thing, and he regards him as the emblem of constancy in love. Winifred Nowottny considers Shakespeare’s Troilus as representative of the perfect poet and of the poetic imagination, the only character who is able to find meaning in the chaotic world of the play, and the one who is supposed to ‘show us the way’. As a matter of fact, in late Elizabethan England the character of Troilus was emblematic of constancy in

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93Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, IV, v, 110–112.
love, as much as Cressida had become the emblematic fickle, unfaithful woman. This tradition began with Henryson and his Testament and had, by then, become commonplace. Marjorie Garber suggests that the characters of Troilus and Cressida were for an Elizabethan audience as much of a cliché as Romeo and Juliet are today. Carolyn Asp believes that Shakespeare too followed in the tradition that viewed Troilus as the ideal lover in his works preceding Troilus and Cressida, where a more complex rendering of the characters is provided. To support their statements, both critics point to the three main occurrences in which Troilus is mentioned in other Shakespeare’s plays: Twelfth Night (III, I, 45–46), The Merchant of Venice (V, I, 3–6), and As You Like It (IV, I, 83–92). These passages do indeed show the popularity of this love story, but they also reveal something else: Shakespeare, contrary to what both Asp and Garber suggest, always seems to have perceived Troilus’s role as ‘the archetypal lover familiar from medieval romance’ as a problematic legacy.

In The Merchant of Venice Troilus is not necessarily represented as the ideal lover. At the beginning of the final act of the play, in a moment that provides a pause in the dramatic action, the newly wed Lorenzo and Jessica talk about love:

96 Garber, Shakespeare after All, p. 540: 560–561.
97 The date of Henryson’s poem remains unknown, but it usually assigned to the last quarter of the fifteenth century. A. C. Spearing, ‘The Testament of Cresseid and the “High Concise Style”’, Speculum 37, no. 2 (1962), p. 212.
98 For a detailed, although dated, description of how the characters had become stereotyped after Chaucer see Rollins, ‘The Troilus-Cressida Story from Chaucer to Shakespeare’; see also Donaldson, The Swan at the Well, esp. p. 101.
99 Garber, Shakespeare after All, p. 540.
100 Asp, ‘Transcendence Denied’, p. 259.
102 Probably written 1596–1597, Jay L. Halio, introduction to The Merchant of Venice, p. 27.
103 Probably written between the last half of 1599 and the first half of 1600. Michael Hattaway, introduction to As You Like It, p. 62.
104 Garber, Shakespeare after All, p. 540.
105 The example from Twelfth Night is the least revealing. Feste the clown, after having received a donation from Viola disguised as Cesario, asks for more money (as is his custom) with the following witty remark: ‘I would play lord Pandarus of Phrygia, sir, to bring a Cressida to this Troilus’ (Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, III, i, 50–51). No doubt, this statement has more to do with Feste than it does with Troilus and Cressida. Still, one could possibly find interesting that this love story is somehow here connected with money and greed, since mercantile value has such a prominent role in Troilus and Cressida.
LORENZO:
The moon shines bright. In such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees
And they did make no noise, in such a night
Troilus methinks mounted the Trojan walls
And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night.\textsuperscript{106}

In all likelihood a reference to Chaucer’s version,\textsuperscript{107} this is only the first of a series of love stories that are mentioned by the couple. Interestingly, all their exempla fail to have a happy ending, most of them involving some kind of betrayal.\textsuperscript{108} At the end of this literary excursus their own, newly written story follows:

LORENZO:
In such a night
Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew
And with unthrift love did run from Venice
As far as Belmont.

JESSICA:
In such a night
Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well,
Stealing her soul with many vows of faith
And ne’er a true one.

LORENZO:
In such a night
Did pretty Jessica, like a little shrew,
Slander her love, and he forgave it her.

\textsuperscript{106}Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, V, i, 1–6.

\textsuperscript{107}Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, p. 212, note to lines 4–6.

\textsuperscript{108}See Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, pp. 211–212, note to lines 1–14.
JESSICA:

I would outnight you, did nobody come.

But hark, I hear the footing of a man.\(^{109}\)

Troilus’s love for Cressida is listed together with Dido’s love for Ulysses and Medea’s for Jason.\(^{110}\) If Troilus is not necessarily explicitly considered as a negative example as a lover, it is undeniable that all of the ancient stories here mentioned are far from being happy ones. Lorenzo and Jessica, in jesting, include their love story in the literary tradition of betrayed lovers, preparing the audience for the ironic closure of the play, where the issue of infidelity becomes central. What emerges here is not so much that Troilus is a perfect lover, but rather that his love story is exemplary in a less positive fashion.

Something similar surfaces in *As You Like It* when Rosalind, pretending to be Ganymede pretending to be Rosalind, argues with Orlando about love. In line with his previous, rather dull, romantic poetry, Orlando says he will die if Rosalind refuses him. She argues that nobody ever died for love:

> The poor world is almost six thousand years old and in all this time there was not any man died in his own person, videlicet, in a love-cause. Troilus had his brains dashed out with a Grecian club, yet he did what he could to die before, and he is one of the patterns of love; Leander, he would have lived many a fair year though Hero had turned nun, if it had not been for a hot midsummer night, for, good youth, he went but forth to wash him in the Hellespont and, being taken with a cramp, was drowned, and the foolish chronicles of that age found it was Hero of Sestos. But these are all lies: men have died from time to time – and worms have eaten them – but not for love.\(^{111}\)

Not even Troilus died for love. His brains were ‘dashed out with a Grecian club’ notwithstanding the fact that he did what he could to die for Cressida’s love. For all


\(^{111}\)Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, IV, i, 75–85.
his crying and complaining (at least in Boccaccio’s and Chaucer’s versions), his
desperation did not kill him, nor did Diomedes. Rosalind does say that Troilus is
‘one of the patterns of love’; but if he is the lover *par excellence*, then this is indeed
proof enough that love alone does not kill. If it could kill any, it would have killed
him. If Troilus is the archetypal lover, then his story is here used, in a sense, to
disqualify the power of love itself, and most certainly to undermine Orlando’s
simplistic ‘poetical’ attitude to love. Ultimately, Rosalind as Ganymede proves
extremely sceptical about the validity of these ancient myths: they are all lies.
Perhaps she does not so much doubt the stories themselves, as what people (and
literary tradition) have made of them. Her attitude is very peculiar, and she cannot be
said to speak for her author, but the fact that the possibility of rethinking traditional
stories was associated by Shakespeare precisely with the Troilus and Cressida myth
at the time he was writing *As You Like It* is particularly significant; we will come
back to this later.

These examples show that, although the character of Troilus was emblematic
of the perfect lover in Renaissance literature, even in earlier plays Shakespeare
tended to consider his love, and hence Troilus as well, in a more problematic light.
In *Troilus and Cressida*, he further explores the complexities of this character. A
number of critics agree that Shakespeare’s representation of Troilus in this play is
multifaceted, and somewhat defies previous literary representations.\footnote{See, for instance, Greene, ‘Language and Value in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*’; Heather James, ‘“Tricks We Play on the Dead”: Making History in *Troilus and Cressida*’, in Shakespeare’s *Problem Plays*, ed. Simon Barker, pp. 159–176; Bradbrook, ‘What Shakespeare Did to Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*’.}
Far from being considered the perfect lover, many regard him as a rather insensitive and self-
obsessed one,\footnote{Davis-Brown, ‘Shakespeare’s Use of Chaucer in *Troilus and Cressida*’, pp. 21–27.} caring more about his ideal love and the construction of his own
image as a *true* lover rather than about Cressida herself.\footnote{Asp, ‘Transcendence Denied’, pp. 263–264.} It has been observed that, especially in comparison with Chaucer’s Troilus, the Shakespearean character is
decidedly less concerned with chivalric code and much more careless about
Cressida’s reputation. When it comes to this character’s perception of Fortune, similar differences with his Chaucerian precedent can also be found, and these too can tell us something about him. Shakespeare’s Troilus complains less than Chaucer’s about the action of Fortune, which, as we have seen, was the main signal of this character’s passivity in the poem. Yet, he can still be construed as a passive figure. His submissiveness, too, can be deduced from what he says about Fortune and Occasion.

In the very first scene, while talking with Pandarus about his love for Cressida and his pains at disguising it in public, Troilus says something that could remind a Chaucerian reader of Fortune’s wheel. The previous night Cressida looked beautiful, and he would have liked to say so to Pandarus, but he could not:

I was about to tell thee – when my heart
As wedged with a sight, would rive in twain,
Lest Hector or my father should perceive me
I have, as when the son doth light a scorn,
Buried this sight in wrinkle of a smile:
But sorrow that is couched in seeming gladness
Is like that mirth fate turns to sudden sadness.\(^{116}\)

The ‘mirth’ that is turned ‘to sudden sadness’ is precisely what is traditionally associated with someone falling down Fortune’s wheel, although Troilus readily ascribes it to fate rather than Fortune. But his simile may strike us as slightly unclear. How is ‘sorrow couched in seeming gladness’ like happiness that is suddenly and unexpectedly turned into sorrow? The two situations are similar insofar as they both represent two states of false happiness. The simulated happiness of one who is truly sorrowful is obviously false. The happy person who, by a change of Fortune, is suddenly and unexpectedly plunged into desperation is decidedly unhappy. More specifically, the ‘mirth’ that precedes the catastrophe can indeed be

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\(^{115}\)Davis-Brown, ‘Shakespeare’s Use of Chaucer in *Troilus and Cressida*’, p. 23.

considered as false happiness from a Boethian perspective: it is the illusory and transient bliss of the person who relies on worldly things, as any reader of Chaucer would have known. At the same time, one may argue that the two states described by Troilus present significant differences. In the first place, ‘seeming gladness’ implies that the character involved is willingly concealing his emotions. He is, no doubt, aware of the fact that his feigned happiness – his counterfeited smile – is a lie. The man who is a thrall of Fortune is usually not aware of the frailty of his happiness.

The ‘mirth’ turned ‘to sudden sadness’ could remind us of Chaucer’s Troilus and his fall from happiness, which was an event greatly emphasised in the Chaucerian poem. In this light, the two sides of the simile can possibly be seen to represent the two Troiluses. It is almost as if Shakespeare’s Troilus unwittingly compared himself to his predecessor, saying that they are the same in their suffering. However, the action associated with Shakespeare’s Troilus has the lover as its agent: he is the one hiding his pain from public view (and one may well argue that it is a hint of Troilus’s deceptive nature). The second half of the simile has fate as its agent. This is very much in line with Troilus’s perception of his situation in the poem: he believes himself to be a victim of superhuman forces he has no power to control. But how effective Shakespeare’s Troilus is as an agent remains to be seen. The very fact that he cannot tell the difference between the two predicaments he speaks of may well indicate that he is not as wise as his witty sentences would suggest at first. By considering Troilus’s attitude towards Fortune in the rest of the play, one can understand something more about his ability successfully to influence the outcome of events.

However, Troilus’s relationship to Fortune, I would argue, can only be understood by looking at how he uses the Renaissance imagery related to the maritime Occasion. Shortly after talking to Pandarus, while Troilus is momentarily

117 Incidentally, this attitude can be seen in stark contrast to Hamlet’s genuine sorrow at the beginning of his play. As he himself puts it, he ‘know[s] not “seems”’. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I, ii, 76.
alone on the stage, he wonders about his situation and, in the process, constructs an interesting metaphor to illustrate his thoughts:

Tell me, Apollo, for thy Daphne’s love,
What Cressid is, what Pandar, and what we?
Her bed is India; there she lies, a pearl;
Between our Ilium and where she resides
Let it be called the wild and wand’ring flood;
Ourself the merchant, and this sailing Pandar
Our doubtful hope, our convoy and our bark.

While he is still waiting to conquer Cressida, he considers himself to be at the mercy not so much of the medieval Fortune, as Chaucer’s Troilus would have done, but rather of Occasion, as he describes his state as that of one who has to cross the stormy sea, which is an image strongly reminiscent of the Occasion of Renaissance visual arts, as we have seen. Interestingly, he wants Pandarus to be his boat, whereas Occasion was, traditionally, at the helm of her ship onto which man would venture. Thus, Troilus replaces Occasion with a person, which, in a sense, is appropriate to a world where man, with free will, can determine the outcome of events. This can remind us of Agamemnon and Nestor’s discussion of Fortune. But, perhaps, the truly virtuous man in a Machiavellian sense should guide his boat himself rather than entrusting it to someone else. This is, as we shall shortly see, something Troilus is extremely reluctant to do.

Troilus speaks again of sailing ships during the debate over whether or not to surrender Helen to the Greeks. In this scene, Troilus is diametrically opposed to Hector. The older brother wants to return the woman to her husband, while Troilus, together with Paris and Helenus, refuses to yield this ‘inestimable’ prize. This discussion has been at the centre of many critical essays. Leaving the problem of

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honour and value aside for the moment, let us focus on two usually overlooked references to Fortune and Occasion uttered by Troilus. This is how he describes the rape of Helen:

It was thought meet
Paris should do some vengeance on the Greeks;
Your breath of full consent bellied his sails;
The seas and winds, old wranglers, took a truce,
And did him service; he touched the ports desired;
And for an old aunt whom the Greeks held captive
He brought a Grecian queen. 120

Although Troilus does not explicitly mention Occasion, the imagery he uses is strikingly similar to the one in the passage just quoted. He clearly thinks of conquering women in terms of sailing through dangerous seas to reach the desired shore. Of course, in Paris’s case, he indeed had to travel by boat, but Troilus’s lines are endowed with a metaphorical meaning as well that reveals that Troilus tends to think of conquering a woman as seizing Occasion. His words, however, disclose something he does not seem to be aware of. Paris conquered Helen. The waters were quiet, so one may well say that Occasion smiled upon him. He took advantage of the favourable circumstances and seized his Grecian queen. In this light, Paris may appear to be someone able to seize Occasion by the forelock. But Paris had help; the Trojan princes (and probably Priam himself) provided the wind for his sails. His conquest does not seem to be the result of any particular skill or effort. Seas and winds were indeed calm, but because of a real ‘truce’ between Greeks and Trojans. This may have provided an opportunity for political revenge, but one has the impression that Paris had it too easy: the winds that pushed his sails were not his own; he took advantage of a truce to kidnap the Greek king’s wife. Here one might recall Nestor’s earlier words already quoted above:

In the reproof of chance

Lies the true proof of men. The sea being smooth,
How many shallow bauble-boats dare sail
Upon her patient breast, making their way
With those of nobler bulk!\(^{121}\)

Paris would indeed seem to be a ‘shallow bauble-boat’. If ever there was an opportunity not to be seized, this was the case: he obtained his queen, but broke the truce and caused his city to be besieged, which will, eventually, bring it to its utter destruction. Of course, Troilus does not know that, yet. He still applauds Paris’s actions. As fond as he is of this emblematic image of Opportunity, once more he shows that his understanding of it is a somewhat distorted one. Perhaps, for all his enthusiasm for brave actions, he fails to see what is truly required to seize Occasion and that, sometimes, not seizing it may be the wiser choice to make.

He continues by blaming Hector, and those in agreement with him, because they once applauded Paris’s act, while now they wish to return Helen. This is how he wonders about their change of heart:

[...] why do you now
The issue of your proper wisdoms rate,
And do a deed that never fortune did,
Beggar the estimation which you prized
Richer than sea or land?\(^{122}\)

These lines are extremely interesting, as this is a somewhat peculiar way of referring to Fortune. Fortune, indeed, does not change her mind about the value of her gifts; it is the victim of Fortune who does, or should, see that what he prized ‘richer than sea or land’ was not worth as much once it has been lost. This is precisely the didactic function of bad Fortune as identified by Boethius: bad Fortune enlightens.\(^{123}\) What is peculiar here is that Troilus equates Hector (and the rest of the Trojan assembly that

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\(^{121}\)Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, I, iii, 32–36.
agree with him) with Fortune, and not with the victim of Fortune. This is something that Troilus tends to do. Just as he replaced Occasion with his good friend Pandarus at the helm of the ship that should guide him to Cressida, here he substitutes Fortune with Hector and those on his side. In strong contrast with his medieval counterpart, Troilus places paramount importance in the action of man rather than in the power of Fortune. As a matter of fact, he does not seem to have any faith in Fortune, the gods, or any kind of superhuman power.

Only when he hears that Cressida is to be exchanged for Antenor, for the first time, does he blame external forces. As he speaks to her, stating that there is nothing they can do to avoid her departure, he blames the envy of the gods:

TROILUS:
Cressid, I love thee in so strained a purity,
That the blest gods, as angry with my fancy,
More bright in zeal than the devotion which
Cold lips blow to their deities, take thee from me.

CRESSIDA:
Have the gods envy?

PANDARUS:
Ay, ay, ay, ay; 'tis too plain a case.\textsuperscript{124}

Blaming the envy of the gods, as we have seen in previous chapters, is similar to blaming fickle Fortune; in both cases an utterly unexpected and sudden negative turn of events brings the speaker to blame an evil external force, one that is not perceived to act according to reason but, rather, to punish the person concerned for an earlier state of happiness. In a sense, the envy of the pagan gods was an ancestor of the turning of Fortune’s wheel. Here, however, one gets the impression that Troilus is speaking in metaphors, getting carried away, as he so often does, by his own poetic

\textsuperscript{124}Shakespeare, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, IV, iv, 23–28.
imagery. Thus he seems rather to be mentioning a traditional literary motif (readily recognised by Pandarus), rather than actually blaming the gods. E. Talbot Donaldson is also reluctant to credit Troilus’s sudden interest in the action of the gods: ‘Nothing earlier in the play and nothing later suggests that Troilus had any special reverence for the gods, whose power – and malignancy – he sees at work behind the decree’. Besides, immediately afterwards, Troilus describes their predicament as an ‘injury of chance’ and continues speaking of ‘injurious time’:

We two, that with so many thousand sights
Did buy each other, must poorly sell ourselves
With the rude brevity and discharge of one.
Injurious time now with a robber’s haste
Crams his rich thiev’ry up, he knows not how.
As many farewells as be stars in heaven,
With distinct breath and consigned kisses to them,
He fumbles up into a loose adieu,
And scants us with a single famished kiss,
Distasted with the salt of broken tears.

Using both the expressions ‘injury of chance’ and ‘injurious time’ to describe the present situation, Troilus clearly shows that he thinks of chance in terms of the sequence of events in time, which is equivalent to speaking of Opportunity. Opportunity was associated with time since antiquity, as was the case in the Renaissance. These connections will be further explored when discussing Ulysses. For now, suffice to say that the association between time and Opportunity in the present passage shows that Troilus blames Occasion, instead of a more generic Fortune seen as a pagan, blind goddess (as Troiolo tends to do), which would have

127Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, IV, iv, 33.
been more in line with his previous statement about the envy of the gods, had he meant it. The audience may here get the impression that behind the parting of the lovers lie entirely human actions: it is Calchas’s fault. As a matter of fact, Calchas can be perceived as seizing Occasion by the forelock, as he takes the perfect opportunity to ask for his daughter to be returned: now that the Greeks have captured Antenor, there is someone who can be exchanged for her.\(^{131}\) Moreover, the fact that the Greeks asked for Cressida several times before, and their request had always been rejected until now,\(^ {132}\) lessens the sense that there is a cruel destiny or Fortune at work, suggesting that this is very much the consequence of human actions. It is, then, fitting that Troilus should blame Fortune seen as Occasion, rather than the figure with the wheel or the blind pagan goddess. The fact that Troilus speaks of the injury of time and chance, instead of Fortune, furthers the impression that there is no higher force at work here, in contrast with his own previous statement. Events simply follow their course, unchecked by higher forces. All one can do is recognise the opportune moment to act and try to seize it if he has the strength to do so. Ironically, at the present time, Troilus has no intention whatsoever of taking any action, unlike his Chaucerian counterpart, who tries to convince Criseyde to run away with him.\(^ {133}\) Maybe he thinks that this is not a time for action, as his words would seem to imply: time is against him. If there is no opportunity, there is nothing to be seized. But can this character seize opportunity when it presents itself?

Soon after Cressida’s departure, Troilus has to go to the Greek camp to watch Hector’s duel with Ajax. What better opportunity to try to see Cressida? Unfortunately, it is Diomedes, and not Troilus, who makes his way towards Calchas’s tent first. As he leaves the company of Hector, he states that he has important business ‘the tide whereof is now’.\(^ {134}\) Speaking of the tide in this context

\(^{131}\)Calchas speaks of ‘The advantage of the time’. Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, III, iii, 2.
\(^{133}\)For a detailed comparison of the two scenes see Donaldson, *The Swan at the Well*, pp. 106–110.
\(^{134}\)Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, V, ii, 80.
is equal to speaking of Occasion. One only needs to think of Brutus’s famous lines on the subject:  

There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.  
On such a full sea are we now afloat;  
And we must take the current when it serves,  
Or lose our ventures.  

Clearly, Diomedes thinks that now is the propitious time to act. And he proves right. He truly seizes the perfect moment to talk to Cressida and extort a vow from her, thus dissuading Troilus from seeking her any further. His behaviour towards Cressida seems indeed to suggest that he is the ‘virtuous’ kind of man that Agamemnon and Nestor believe can overpower Fortune. While speaking to her, he refuses to be her ‘fool’. Unwilling to be manipulated by her, he manages instead to steer her in the direction he wishes. One may suggest Cressida herself can, in this scene, be considered as an embodiment of Fortune, due to her fickleness and duplicity. If she is here to be seen in the guise of the ‘donna’ described by Machiavelli, Diomedes proves to be well able to master and subdue her. In a way, the time-contraction of the play in comparison with Chaucer’s poem makes Diomedes’s perfect timing all the more crucial and evident.

While Ulysses and Troilus are secretly observing the discussion between Diomedes and Cressida, Ulysses interestingly points out that time is ‘right deadly’ to Troilus, meaning that he is in danger among the Greeks, and he cannot confront

135 Kiefer reads these lines in connection with Opportunity, while discussing the importance of this issue for the character of Brutus, Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, pp. 244–252.  
Cressida or Diomedes now. Time is indeed Troilus’s enemy. It may be that his failure is due to no fault of his own. Even according to Machiavelli, in order to succeed a prince must be given a propitious moment to act. Possibly, Troilus never had the chance. If the time is not right, there is nothing even the virtuous man can do. And yet, had he decided to go to Calchas’s tent before Diomedes, the story might have had quite a different outcome. Maybe there was a time to act, but he did not even envisage the possibility of doing so. Why not? As a matter of fact, for all his talk of the workings of time and Occasion, he never seems to think that he should take any action himself. As we have seen before, Pandarus is the one he entrusts with the power to act on his behalf in wooing Cressida. Adamson rightly notes that he has both Pandarus and Ulysses operating as his ‘Charon’. Troilus speaks of Fortune and Occasion in terms that draw attention to the problem of agency. He does not believe in any external force; he tends to consider human agents instead. In this play, at least in Troilus’s eyes, all action has human causes. This is in stark contrast with Chaucer’s Troilus. At the same time, for all his familiarity with the imagery connected with Occasion, he constantly fails to realise that one must act to seize it. He either recruits others to act on his behalf, or fails altogether to perceive the propitious moment for action. Sometimes one gets the impression that he is simply not willing to take any initiative. In this, he proves to share a crucial flaw with Chaucer’s Troilus: his passivity.

Shakespeare’s Troilus seems to become willing to act independently once he has had proof of Cressida’s betrayal. In the very last scenes, he no longer relies on anyone to guide his ship. As he fully embraces his role as a vengeful knight and bravely plunges into battle seeking Diomedes, he finally acts. However, his actions prove ineffectual. One may argue that it is indeed too late. What is he to

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142It is telling that, after Aeneas has made his way to Cressida’s house to inform Troilus of the imminent exchange, Troilus asks him to tell the others that they met ‘by chance’ when, obviously, they did not (Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, IV, ii, 70).
143As Adamson effectively puts it, ‘he needs no Charon now’. Adamson, *Troilus and Cressida*, p. 150.
144Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, V, iii, 43–47.
achieve now? All he can hope for is vengeance, for Cressida, and for Hector, and yet this does not happen on stage (nor in the literary tradition of the story, as the audience would have known well). Interestingly, Troilus’s very last line echoes something he said at the beginning of the play. ‘Hope of revenge shall hide our inward woe’\(^\text{145}\) may remind us of his earlier ‘sorrow that is couched in seeming gladness’.\(^\text{146}\) Troilus ends the play as he began it: hiding his sorrow. At the beginning, he hid the pain he felt due to unfulfilled love with feigned happiness. Ironically, the happiness that he did achieve with love indeed proved fake from a Boethian perspective, exactly like ‘the mirth fate turns to sudden sadness’.\(^\text{147}\) At the end of the play, he is again hiding his sorrow (a ‘double sorrow’ one may say, both for Cressida’s betrayal and for Hector’s death) with hope for revenge. This hope seems even frailer if considered in conjunction with his earlier statement. If ‘sorrow’ is juxtaposed with ‘inward woe’, then his ‘hope for revenge’ is, like his earlier ‘seeming gladness’, not real: it is a false hope, never to be fulfilled.

4 Seizing Occasion in War: Ulysses, Achilles and Hector

As we have seen before, during his famous and much discussed speech on degree, Ulysses suggests that social order is the only thing that may prevent utter chaos in a world entirely dominated by blind chance. He also seems quite pessimistic about the possibility of seizing Occasion by means of virile strength. Does this mean he does not believe in Fortune, or Occasion? Not necessarily. All we know for sure from his words in the speech is that he is against brute force and, ideally, would like to live in a world safely ordered under a good leader. However, since that is not the case and the world is in a state of chaos, Ulysses tries to cope with these far from ideal circumstances by actively seeking a remedy for the present situation. He is, in fact, one of the characters who most keenly tries to rectify the

\(^{146}\)Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, I, i, 39.
\(^{147}\)Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, I, i, 40.
state of affairs in the Greek camp. In the way in which he operates to this end, one can see that he is indeed aware of the notion of Occasion. In order to be successful in the present circumstances, he appears careful in seeking the opportune moments to act. Contrary to what Agamemnon and Nestor suggested, and fitting with his traditional role as the cunning man *par excellence*, he does not wish to subdue Occasion by brute force but by using his mind. As we will see, this is the alternative way to that chosen by Achilles, who only relies on virile strength, and, indeed, the two characters are strongly juxtaposed in the play. A further solution is that adopted by Hector. The Trojan hero, however, does not think very often of how things happen in terms of Occasion, which is in itself significant. He seeks to act by respecting chivalric codes. This shows that, in contrast with both Ulysses and Achilles, he is not a ‘Renaissance’ man, in the sense that he lives according to values that were becoming vestiges of the past by the time of Shakespeare’s play. The degree to which each of these three heroes proves successful, and the hows and whys, tells a great deal about the world they inhabit and, possibly, something about the hopes and fears of late Elizabethans.

Ulysses’s ability to seize Occasion is particularly apparent shortly after his ‘degree speech’. As mentioned before, his disquisitions are interrupted by the arrival of Aeneas, who brings a challenge to a duel from Hector, open to any Greek that is ‘true in love’.  

Ulysses immediately sees the potential dangers of this proposition. As he had just revealed, he believes that the main menace to social stability in the Greek camp is Achilles’s attitude: he has no respect for his superiors and his socially disruptive behaviour is infecting the whole camp. He is directly threatening the chain of command. Were he to take part in the duel against Hector (which was implicitly directed to him) and win, his pride would surely grow. Were he to lose, the morale of the Greeks would undoubtedly suffer. It is a lose-lose situation. Ulysses immediately finds a way to use Hector’s proposition to his

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advantage. Wisely, he proposes that Ajax should meet Hector in the field instead. Should he win, all the better for the Greek army; should he lose, their troops would know that they have better fighters. Besides, leaving Achilles aside would be the perfect opportunity to curb his pride.\textsuperscript{152}

Ulysses’s cunning attempts to turn the circumstances to his advantage have often been considered by critics as immoral, and as a violation in practice of his degree speech.\textsuperscript{153} He is, after all, subverting the natural order of things and transforming what should have been a duel about honour into a Machiavellian machination. At the same time, one may consider matters from another perspective. Ulysses is willing to do all he can, setting moral issues aside, to defeat Achilles’s pride and improve the situation in the Greek camp. Since Agamemnon is not the ideal sovereign he would wish to have at the head of the chain of command, Ulysses is ready to act in his stead.\textsuperscript{154} His desires for a perfect society do not mirror reality; hence he does what he can in the present circumstances. Leaving aside for the moment the matter of his morality – which has so much exercised critics – let us focus on how he proposes to put forward Ajax for the duel. He suggests to

\[\ldots\text{ make a lott’ry} \]
\[\text{And by device let blockish Ajax draw} \]
\[\text{The sort to fight with Hector.}\textsuperscript{155}\]

One must note here that the device of the lottery was also present in Shakespeare’s sources, but Ulysses’s decision to manipulate the results is entirely Shakespeare’s invention.\textsuperscript{156} By rigging the ballot, Ulysses substitutes his own will for what should have been Fortune’s actions, as he literally takes over the selection of the fighter,

\textsuperscript{152}Shakespeare, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, I, iii, 369–381.  
\textsuperscript{153}Garber, \textit{Shakespeare after All}, p. 546; Greene, ‘Language and Value in Shakespeare’s \textit{Troilus and Cressida}’, p. 280.  
\textsuperscript{154}According to Quinland Daniels, a ‘separation of the sources of strength within the Greek body social’ has taken place, and Ulysses represents the ‘keenness of insight’. Daniels, ‘Order and Confusion in \textit{Troilus and Cressida} Iii’, p. 290.  
\textsuperscript{155}Shakespeare, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, I, iii, 369–371.  
\textsuperscript{156}Bullough, \textit{Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare}, p. 102.
which should have been her office. It is as if he had replaced Occasion at the rudder of her ship, as he tries to steer the Greek camp out of the current distress. Incidentally, the fact that he lets others believe in the action of Fortune (or chance) while he is instead manipulating the outcome of events, may remind us of when Troilus asks Aeneas to pretend that they met ‘by chance’.\(^{157}\) In both cases, we are shown that what is commonly believed to be the action of Fortune, or chance, is in fact due to entirely human actions in the world of the play. This is a perfect example of the fact that Ulysses, as Agamemnon and Nestor preached, is willing to seize Fortune, but he chooses to do so by using Machiavellian cunning rather than virile strength.

Later on, as he finally confronts Achilles to convince him to fight, Ulysses toys with ideas that are, again, connected with the notion of Fortune. First, pretending to quote from a book he does not agree with, Ulysses mentions that its fictional author believes that no man is lord of anything, unless others recognise he is (in other words, unless he receives praise for it).\(^{158}\) Seen in connection with Achilles’s preceding discussion on Fortune (which will be discussed later),\(^{159}\) one may immediately perceive the two as linked. The thesis discussed by Ulysses is a faulty variation on the Boethian theory that no man is lord of anything given to him by Fortune; all Fortune’s gifts always belong to her and we must remember that she may take them away at any time.\(^{160}\) Starting from the same statement, the imaginary author Ulysses is reading arrives at the opposite conclusion: all depends on being praised by others (whereas in Boethius the admiration enjoyed by the fortunate is extremely frail, as all praise abandons the victim of Fortune).\(^{161}\) Ulysses does not agree with this theory; on the contrary, he sees the sudden popularity enjoyed by Ajax as an example of the application of this erroneous doctrine. He is praised, but he has no worth. This can indeed be seen in connection with the medieval theory of Fortune’s wheel. However, none of what Ulysses says is true. Ajax’s praise is not, as

\(^{157}\)Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, IV, ii, 70.
\(^{158}\)Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, III, iii, 114–123.
\(^{159}\)Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, III, iii, 75–92.
\(^{160}\)Boethius, *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio*, Liber II, Prosa II.
\(^{161}\)Boethius, *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolatio*, Liber I, Prosa IV.
Ulysses seems to imply, due to the caprice of fickle Fortune, redistributing fame as she wills, but is feigned, and of his own invention. Once again, he suggests the action of Fortune where, in fact, he is secretly in charge of what is happening (and he himself here describes once more the fight as an ‘act’ that ‘very chance doth throw upon’ Ajax).  

He continues to do so in the following lines:

O heavens, what some men do,
While some men leave to do!
How some men creep in skittish Fortune’s hall,
While others play the idiots in her eyes!
How one man eats into another’s pride,
While pride is fasting in his wantonness!
To see these Grecian lords! Why, even already
They clap the lubber Ajax on the shoulder,
As if his foot were on brave Hector’s breast
And great Troy shrieking.

There are various possible interpretations of these lines. ‘What some men do’ might refer to Ajax: he is making a fool of himself, exalted in his pride, while the Greek authorities allow him to do so. Alternatively, ‘some men’ could be those praising Ajax, and the ‘others’ are those condescending to it, or Ajax himself. Either way, the meaning of the following lines is clearer. The man creeping in Fortune’s hall is Ajax. It is precisely the universal praise that allows him to do so. The ‘others’ playing the idiots in her eyes could be those praising him, allowing him to enter her hall. Ajax is a fool to be so proud, and so are those that feed his pride, in an image that fits Fortune’s court, as she is traditionally associated with fools and flatterers.

164For Fortune and fools see Chew, *The Pilgrimage of Life*, pp. 61-65. The description of Fortune’s court at the beginning of *Timon of Athens* has interesting similarities with Ulysses’s description, especially concerning the issue of flattery. For a discussion of that scene see Lewis Walker, ‘Fortune
Here though, we are departing from tradition in that, as a matter of fact, flattery is not a consequence of good Fortune, but rather the cause of it. It is the new attitude on the part of the Grecian lords towards Ajax that creates his perceived good Fortune. Fortune is truly a human construction here, with Ulysses as the ultimate agent. His discourse betrays (although certainly not to Achilles, who is not a very subtle reader) his scheming, as cause and effect are inverted. He is speaking with a set purpose in mind, and all he says is shaped to that end. The previous examples establish a precise pattern: Ulysses consistently uses the conception of Fortune as a tool to aid in his machinations. It may even be said that he uses Fortune (as Chaucer and Boccaccio did) as a ‘literary’ device to aid in conferring a (fictional) meaning to events, so as to influence Achilles’s reading of what is happening.\footnote{Incidentally, this may remind us of Pandarus’s attitude towards Fortune in Chaucer’s Troilus.}

Ulysses also talks about time in terms that are strictly connected with Fortune, and to a very similar end:

\begin{quote}
For Time is like a fashionable host
That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand
And, with his arms outstretched as he would fly,
Grasps in the corner. Welcome ever smiles,
And Farewell goes out sighing. O, let not virtue seek
Remuneration for the thing it was;
For beauty, wit
High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
To envious and calumniating Time.\footnote{Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, III, iii, 165–174.}
\end{quote}

Were we to substitute every occurrence of ‘time’ in the previous verses with ‘Fortune’ we would have something that could have been written by Boethius or Chaucer (ignoring the differences in language, of course). Besides, Ulysses is using

\footnote{and Friendship in Timon of Athens, Texas Studies in Literature and Language 18 (1977), pp. 577–600.}
Renaissance imagery related to time in the same way and with the same purpose as his previous imagery related to Fortune: he wants Achilles to ‘read’ the situation concerning Ajax in these terms, and realise that he must act if he wants to regain his fame. This shows the extent to which the notions of time and Fortune were connected in Renaissance literature.

Many have also recognised this to be the case in Shakespeare’s works. Charles Hallet argues that ‘in order to rise on the wheel of Fortune, it is necessary, in the world Shakespeare has created, to harken to the commands of Time’.¹⁶⁷ One only needs to think of Lucrece’s lamentation against time, considered by her as an accomplice to her rape. While she lists time’s positive and negative attributes, she does not fail to recognise the connection between time and Fortune:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Time’s glory is to calm contending kings,} \\
\text{To unmask falsehood and bring truth to light,} \\
\text{To stamp the seal of time in aged things,} \\
\text{To wake the morn and sentinel the night,} \\
\text{To ruin proud buildings with thy hours,} \\
\text{And smear with dust their glitt’ring golden towers;} \\
\text{To fill with worm-holes stately monument,} \\
\text{To feed oblivion with decay of things,} \\
\text{To blot old books and alter their contents,} \\
\text{To pluck the quills from ancient raven’s wings,} \\
\text{To dry old oaks’ sap and cherish springs,} \\
\text{To spoil antiquities of hammered steel,} \\
\text{And turn the giddy round of Fortune’s wheel.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

As in Ulysses’s speech, time is here connected with the motion of Fortune’s wheel. But the connection between time and Occasion is also present in the poem. Immediately before blaming Time, Lucrece launches in a lengthy lamentation

¹⁶⁷Hallet, ‘Change, Fortune, and Time’, p. 84.
against Opportunity, and she does recognise the relationship between the two: according to her, Opportunity is the ‘servant’ of Time. In Shakespeare’s works, the notions and offices of Time, Opportunity and Fortune were inescapably connected. Kiefer too notes that Time and Occasion are often conflated by him. Looking at Ulysses’s passage more closely, one may recognise the *topos* of Time as revealer of truth, also present in the previous lines from *The Rape of Lucrece*, but with some significant differences. Firstly, in Ulysses’s case we are talking about fame, and not ‘truth’. Time does not reveal the true nature of things, but ‘calumniating time’ exalts Ajax’s fake worth. Besides, Ulysses’s speech has the sole purpose of convincing Achilles to resume fighting, and his ultimate argument is: if you want favours and fame again, you should return to the battlefield. In other words, after implying the worthless value of fame, he still suggests Achilles should seek it. Again, his reasoning is intrinsically flawed. This mirrors the fact that he is not speaking ‘truth’, he is simply trying to manipulate Achilles into fighting. His argument is not only a lie, but is also ultimately unsound.

Ulysses is like Fortune as he determines the outcome of ballots, swings the sympathies of the crowds, and is, one may say, two-faced. He effectively replaces the supposed agency of Fortune and takes an active part in forming the outcome of events, forwarding the notion that men must try to seize Occasion. He does seem to do his best to take control over her. And his awareness of the fact that there is a time to act, and a time not to act, is also shown when he recognises that time is deadly to Troilus, as we have seen before. He is able to recognise both favourable and unfavourable opportunities, and to act accordingly. But to what extent does he succeed in seizing Occasion? Troy will indeed fall, and largely due precisely to his scheming, but we are not shown this in the present play; that is another story. His primary goal here is to bring back order amongst the ranks of the Greeks by curbing Achilles’s pride. Achilles does return to fighting, but not as a consequence of

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Ulysses’s scheming (he arms himself, thus breaking his promise to Polixena, only once Patroclus is slain). All his efforts seem to have no practical consequence. Achilles is no less proud by the end of the play than he was at the beginning; order has not been restored amongst the Greek ranks. It is not his cunning, but Achilles’s fury in battle that, by the end, brings together the Greek fighters.

It would seem that reason alone is not enough to seize Occasion. At the same time, looking back at Ulysses’s ‘reason’ one may note that, as we have seen, his philosophy is intrinsically flawed. He believes that a stable political hierarchy may save the Greek camp from chaos. But this does not seem to be quite possible in the world of the play, and not only because Agamemnon is not a good leader. A further hint that there is something amiss in his logic can be seen when, talking to Achilles, he speaks of the ‘providence that’s in a watchful state’ that allows the sovereign to know everything, including Achilles’s affair with Polixena. In that passage, Ulysses speaks of the ‘soul of state’ as something ‘divine’. This conflation between kingship and Providence is rather disturbing. In a world ordained by God, this equation would be logically acceptable, but the play does not seem to endorse such a view, and one never gets the impression that Ulysses believes in God. Instead, here he seems to replace divine authority, which, as we have seen, is markedly absent in the play, with political authority. But Agamemnon does not appear to be a

176This ‘lay’ world-view entertained by Ulysses can also be seen in the way he and Nestor speak of the possible outcome of the duel proposed by Hector. Neither of them suggests that the result could be interpreted as a sign of God’s favour, which would have been the normal reaction in a Christian world. Nestor especially perceives it as a sort of experiment that would prove which side is stronger: ‘[…] for the success, /Although peculiar, shall give a scantling /Of good or bad unto the general; /And in such indexes, although small pricks /To their subsequent volumes, there is seen /The baby figure of the giant mass /Of things to come at large. It is supposed /He that meets Hector issues from our choice; /And choice, being mutual act of all our souls, /Makes merit her election, and doth boil, /As ’twere, from forth us all, a man distilled /Out of our own virtues; who miscarrying, /What heart receives from hence a conquering part, /To steel a strong opinion to themselves?’ (Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, I, iii, 336–349). One can hardly imagine a less religious reading of the outcome of a battle. There are no gods above the heads of these Greeks. But if this is the case, as it would seem to be (and Ulysses does not object to Nestor’s argument, nor does he ever seem to believe in God), then this poses a significant problem for his envisioned well-ordered society.
good leader, and that is why Ulysses is acting as the mind of the government, as it were.\textsuperscript{177} In so doing, he inevitably undermines the order he wishes to restore, and contradicts his own suggestions about the divinity of the monarchy. What he truly believes in is human reason, and he relies on it alone to re-establish order. But his reason proves no match for Occasion in the world of the play. Recognizing the opportune moment for action can only take you so far. He tries to take control of Occasion’s ship but, although he is very well capable of seizing opportunities as they present themselves, still his tactics, ultimately, do not prove effective. Perhaps reason is not what is required to succeed in the present circumstances. Brute force seems to prove more effective, as Achilles shows us.

Achilles is, in this play, the exemplary antithesis of chivalric heroism.\textsuperscript{178} Rather than obeying his superiors, he mocks them; rather than joining his comrades on the battlefield, he lies lazily in his tent; rather than fighting honourably, he ambushes his enemy and butchered him. There are various hints in the play of his lack of intelligence.\textsuperscript{179} This ‘glorified thug’,\textsuperscript{180} all muscle and no brains, is the epitome of pride. All of these rather undesirable attributes would make Achilles the perfect victim of Fortune in a medieval poem. Thersites, with a witty pun, connects Achilles’s intelligence to an ass’s,\textsuperscript{181} and asses indeed represented Fortune’s victims in some depictions of her wheel. In these images, the four men usually attached to the wheel were substituted by four figures representing different stages of a hybrid between an ass and a man, thus underlining that to subject oneself to Fortune’s wheel was to become a fool.\textsuperscript{182} It is true, Fortune sometimes favours the fool, but it is always to cast him down her wheel, eventually. Here, however, Fortune has no

\textsuperscript{177}Daniels, ‘Order and Confusion in Troilus and Cressida I.iii’, p. 290.
\textsuperscript{178}As argued by Milowicki and Wilson, ‘Troilus and Cressida: Voices in the Darkness of Troy’, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{179}See, for instance, Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, I. ii, 236; II, i, 96–99, 114–116; II, iii, 6–7; III, iii, 302–305; V, i, 47–49.
\textsuperscript{180}James, “‘Tricks We Play on the Dead”: Making History in Troilus and Cressida’, p. 168.
\textsuperscript{181}Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, III, iii, 302–305: ‘Achilles: My mind is troubled like a fountain stirred, / And I myself see not the bottom of it / [Exeunt Achilles and Patroclus] Thersites: Would the fountain of your mind were clear again that I might water an ass at it!’
\textsuperscript{182}Chew, The Pilgrimage of Life, p. 63. Chew describes some examples of this type of image. I have observed a further instance, now almost entirely erased by time, engraved in a wooden choir by Domenico Niccolò, dating 1415–1428, in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena.
wheel, and Achilles is the one character in the war subplot who achieves the goal he had set for himself from the very beginning: he slays Hector. As has been noted by Adamson, the character of Achilles in this play is more complex than in Chapman’s 1598 translation of *The Iliad*, one of Shakespeare’s sources for the war subplot. Achilles’s redeeming qualities in the source are suppressed in the play,\(^{183}\) and yet he still proves successful. On the one hand, he is presented as the source of dissent and social unrest in the Greek camp. On the other hand, he is the ultimate man of action,\(^{184}\) and the one warrior who can lead his people to victory.

Notwithstanding the fact that most characters in the play regard Achilles as a mere brute, Shakespeare gives him some lines on Fortune that surprisingly show that he is capable of articulating his thoughts, to an extent. This is what he tells Patroclus after the Greek princes, prompted by Ulysses, pass by his tent and ignore his presence:

> What, am I poor of late?
> 'Tis certain, greatness, once fall’n out with fortune,
> Must fall out with men too. What the declined is
> He shall as soon read in the eyes of others
> As feel in his own fall; for men, like butterflies,
> Show not their mealy wings but to the summer,
> And not a man, for being simply man,
> Hath any honour but honour for those honours
> That are without him – as place, riches and favour,
> Prizes of accident as oft as merit;
> Which, when they fall, as being slippery standers,
> The love that leaned on them, as slippery too,
> Doth one pluck down another, and together
> Die in the fall. But 'tis not so with me:
> Fortune and I are friends; I do enjoy

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\(^{183}\) Adamson, *Troilus and Cressida*, p. 139.

\(^{184}\) To the point that, for Daniels, he represents the power to act in the ‘Greek body social’. Daniels, ‘Order and Confusion in *Troilus and Cressida* Liii’, p. 290.
At ample point all that I did possess,
Save these men’s looks; who do, methinks, find out
Something not worth in me such rich beholding
As they have often given.\textsuperscript{185}

His description of Fortune is, apparently, traditional, in the sense that he considers
the cyclical distribution of Fortune’s favours. Once Fortune’s gifts are gone, so is the
favour of the crowds. This was a popular notion,\textsuperscript{186} and it is a prominent theme in
Timon of Athens.\textsuperscript{187} In Hamlet, too, the Player King subscribes to this principle.\textsuperscript{188}
Interestingly, Boethius the character says something very similar at the beginning of
the Consolation,\textsuperscript{189} and yet Achilles’s considerations mirror Boethius’s only on the
surface. He considers Fortune’s gifts as coming partly due to accident, and partly
due to merit, as Machiavelli does in Il Principe: ‘Nondimanco, perché il nostro
libero arbitrio non sia spento, iudico potere essere vero che la fortuna sia arbitra
della metà delle azioni nostre, ma che etiam lei ne lasci governare l’altra metà, o

\textsuperscript{185}Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, III, iii, 75–92.
\textsuperscript{186}It is also present in Cousin’s plates LXI and LXIII. These are the explanations associated with the
plates:
61. – Fortuna Favens
62. – Ubi Fortuna, ibi splendor [In the book each emblem is accompanied by a corresponding
symbol, an ornamental frame with a Latin motto]
Where Fortune is favourable and where there are riches, thither men are seen to hasten; for
which reason everybody willingly associates with the rich and opulent, and frequents grand
places, thinking that the splendours of Fortune reside there; while, therefore, the sails of our
affairs are filled with the favourable winds of Fortune, we find a great number of friends and
followers, as is denoted by the ship and the royal edifice placed here.
63. – Fortuna naufraga.
64. – Ubi infortuna, ibi squalors.
But if the ship encounters a storm, or is wrecked, then all friends flee away. Nor are there any longer
there what were such resplendent royal houses, but poor little cabins; the low and wretched roofs and
those afflicted by the spite of Fortune being willingly abandoned.
\textsuperscript{187}For a discussion of Fortune in connection with friendship in Timon of Athens see Walker, ‘Fortune
and Friendship in Timon of Athens’.
\textsuperscript{188}This world is not for aye, nor ’tis not strange / That even our loves should with our fortunes
change; / For ’tis a question left us yet to prove, / Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love. / The
great man down, you mark his favourite flies; / The poor advanced makes friends of enemies. / And
hitherto doth love on fortune tend, / For who not needs shall never lack a friend, / And who in
want a hollow friend doth try, / Directly seasons him his enemy’. Shakespeare, Hamlet, III, ii, 188–
197.
\textsuperscript{189}Boethius, Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolation, Liber I, Prosa IV.
presso, a noi’.  

Fortune controls half of what happens to us; for the rest, we are responsible ourselves. Achilles is also aware that Fortune’s gifts are slippery. Although this was commonplace in the Middle Ages, it is also consistent with Machiavelli’s thought. He, too, believed that the prince who relies solely on Fortune is bound to fall once Fortune changes. Therefore, Achilles seems rather aware of the frail nature of Fortune’s gifts. For all his pride, he does not seem to be a complete fool after all. He realises that, since Fortune is still his friend, because he has not lost her gifts, the changing favour of Agamemnon and the others is difficult to explain. However, he fails to see that their disfavour is feigned. Although he speaks of Fortune, and not of Occasion, it is clear from what he says that he thinks of Fortune in a way that is closer to Machiavelli than Boethius.

He is certainly concerned with his fame but, interestingly, not to the point of falling into Ulysses’s trap. As the audience is about to find out from Ulysses, he has reasons for his behaviour. Although he does try to keep the oath not to fight he made to his lover Polixena, he then breaks it to avenge Patroclus, his friend (or ‘masculine whore’, according to Thersites), showing that he is consistently dominated by his passions. First, he betrays his loyalty to the Greeks in the name of a Trojan lover, and then he betrays her too as he is conquered by rage and the desire to avenge Patroclus. He is a man of strong passions, and he follows such passions to the end. But he is not blinded by his emotions. He shows himself a cunning, although cruel, tactician. Once he decides to fight, he strikes to kill. When Hector and Achilles first meet in the field, the Trojan hero shows his ‘vice of mercy’, as

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190 Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, pp. 162–163, ‘To avoid eliminating human free will altogether, however, I think it may be true to say that Fortune governs one half of our actions, but that she allows us to control the other half, or thereabouts’. Machiavelli, *The Prince and Other Political Writings*, p. 132.
195 The breaking of vows is a recurring issue in the play. Greene interestingly links the problem of keeping of vows to the failing of language in the play. See Greene, ‘Language and Value in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*’.
Troilus calls it.\textsuperscript{196} He offers his enemy a chance to catch his breath, and Achilles, while scorning his courtesy, does take full advantage of it.\textsuperscript{197}

In the following scene, Achilles’s machinations strike us as diametrically opposed to Hector’s chivalry. With no consideration for honour and justice, he assembles his Myrmidons and instructs them as to how to proceed:

Come here about me, you my Myrmidons;  
Mark what I say. Attend me where I wheel;  
Strike not a stroke, but yourselves in breath,  
And when I have the bloody Hector found,  
Empale him with your weapons round about;  
In fellest manner execute your arms.  
Follow me, sirs, and my proceedings eye;  
It is decreed, Hector the great must die.\textsuperscript{198}

This is precisely what not to do if you want to be an honourable knight by chivalry’s standards: outnumber and ambush your enemy, and get your personal army to execute him for you, in the most gruesome manner possible. The onlooker cannot but think that this plan is cowardly and shameful, and yet, on the other hand, if Hector had not been so stubbornly chivalrous in the previous scene (he was winning perfectly honourably), Achilles would not have stood a chance. The Trojan warrior fights for honour, the Greek fights to win, and his attitude, although less admirable, is decidedly more practical. His plan works. He waits for the opportune moment, and attacks Hector when he is most vulnerable, as he has just disarmed:\textsuperscript{199}

\textsuperscript{196}Shakespeare, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, V, iii, 37.  
\textsuperscript{197}Shakespeare, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, V, vi, 14–21.  
\textsuperscript{198}Shakespeare, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, V, vii.  
\textsuperscript{199}Arming and disarming is most certainly a recurring theme in the play, and one that has been noted by critics (see, for instance, Adamson, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, pp. 160–161; Garber, \textit{Shakespeare after All}, pp. 542–543). One only needs to think of the armed prologue, of the very first line of the play proper in which Troilus expresses his wish to disarm (I, i, 1), of the proposal by Paris that Helen should disarm brave Hector (III, i, 139–145), and of Achilles’s desire to see Hector unarmed (III, iii, 236–240).
ACHILLES:
Look, Hector, how the sun begins to set,
How ugly night comes breathing at his heels;
Even with the vail and dark’ning of the sun,
To close the day up, Hector’s life is done.

HECTOR:
I am unarmed; forgo this vantage, Greek.

ACHILLES:
Strike, fellows, strike; this is the man I seek.

They strike Hector down
So, Ilium, fall thou next! Come, Troy, sink down!
Here lies thy heart, thy sinews, and thy bone.
On, Myrmidons, and cry you all amain:
‘Achilles hath the mighty Hector slain.’

The first reaction to reading or watching this scene is likely to be dismay. And the last line may well strike us as a lie: Achilles has not even killed the disarmed and outnumbered Hector himself. But he was indeed the mastermind behind the plan, and, perhaps, this was the only fail-safe way to take the mighty Hector down. As he said while instructing his Myrmidons, they must ‘attend [him] where [he] wheel[s]’.

The choice of verb is interesting. Achilles will guide the military action, possibly suggesting with ‘wheel’ that his men should encircle Hector, as the notes to both the Oxford and Arden editions suggest. But the verb to wheel has other interesting associations. Firstly, it reminds us of Fortune’s wheel. Here, it is not Lady Fortune that turns it, as she usually did, but it is Achilles himself. He is indeed fully in charge of what is happening. We can imagine him with another type of wheel in his hands: he is, as it were, stirring the helm’s wheel of his ship. Achilles proves, indeed, very skilled in choosing the perfect moment to strike Hector down, thus showing his

Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, V, viii, 1–14.
excellence in foreseeing, waiting for, and seizing favourable Opportunity. Far from being heroic, he is the one figure in the war subplot who proves to have what it takes to succeed. He is the man for his time and place. And this possibly says something about the type of world he lives in. Certainly the audience is not supposed to sympathise with him, but rather to abhor his total lack of fair play. His brutality, however, seems to be the only way to succeed in a world that is utterly disjointed from divine Providence. The kind of man that would have been considered as the typical victim of Fortune in the Middle Ages is here the one that is most able to subdue Occasion, thanks to the use of that sheer force that Machiavelli considered as the quality necessary to tame her.  

By contrast with Achilles’s opportunism, Hector does not seem to think in terms of Occasion. The end result of a battle is not his sole concern; honour appears to be his main guiding principle. This character who, as we have seen, behaves so chivalrously at the end of the play, is in fact rather problematic and critics do not always agree over the extent to which he can truly be considered as the ideal knight. In his death, he is the perfect chivalric hero, but his death itself and the manner of it may even be considered a proof of the failure of chivalry. Besides, he can easily be conceived as complicit in his own demise, as we have seen, and his chivalric demeanour has been variously received. Garber speaks of him as of the ‘one unambiguous old-style hero’ in the play; to Yachnin, he is the embodiment of strength and ‘moral seriousness’. To Greenfield, however, his heroism is ambiguous, while Muir summarises the problem well by noting that ‘there is something admirable, but also foolish, in his attempt to follow the customs of chivalry in an unchivalrous age’. He upholds honour and fair play in a world that, as Troilus seems to think, has no use for them. Like most characters in the play, Hector too can be perceived as contradicting himself at times. Together with his

203Garber, *Shakespeare after All*, p. 542.
204Yachnin, ‘Shakespeare’s Problem Plays and the Drama of His Time’, p. 66.
206Muir, *Introduction to Troilus and Cressida*, p. 34.
death, there are two other scenes in the play that are usually considered when
dealing with the problem of Hector’s heroism. The first is the challenge proposed by
Aeneas on his behalf: he dares any Greek ‘true in love’ to fight against him.\textsuperscript{208}
Although the idea of a duel in the name of the beloved woman sounds rather
chivalrous, Mallin notes that the proposition is both uttered and received
ambiguously. It sounds like a pretext to fight rather than a genuine reason for a
challenge,\textsuperscript{209} and especially so since the outcome, differently from Shakespeare’s
sources, is presented as something not directly relevant to the war.\textsuperscript{210} Tellingly, the
chivalrous reason for the fight is reduced by Achilles to ‘I know not what. ’Tis
trash’,\textsuperscript{211} further emphasising the different outlook of the two characters.

Another episode usually considered problematic in connection with Hector’s
heroism takes place immediately before his ambush. After sparing Achilles, Hector
meets a mysterious, unnamed knight with sumptuous armour. The Trojan challenges
him, and he flees. Hector pursues, desiring his spoils for prize.\textsuperscript{212} We are not shown
the actual fight; Hector returns on the stage after achieving his goal, observing that,
so ‘fair without’, the armour had cost the life to its ‘putrefièd core’. Tired from the
battle and of killing, he disarms, which will prove his fatal error.\textsuperscript{213} Many critics
tend to see the pursuit of the armour as something rather unchivalrous,\textsuperscript{214} but Garber
notes that ‘historians of ancient warfare and sword-fighting point out that prizes like
the “goodly armor”, taken on the battlefield, are signs of the victor’s heroism’.\textsuperscript{215}
She is among those who, still regarding the encounter as strange, believe it to be an
uncanny episode rather than a rather simple moral lesson.\textsuperscript{216} And indeed, considered
in juxtaposition with his brutal execution by Achilles, Hector’s attitude does strike
the viewer as rather chivalrous. The play undoubtedly calls for a comparison

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize{206}Shakespeare, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, I, iii, 256–279.
\footnotesize{209}Mallin, ‘Emulous Factions and the Collapse of Chivalry’, p. 159.
\footnotesize{210}Mallin, ‘Emulous Factions and the Collapse of Chivalry’, p. 176, note 47.
\footnotesize{211}Shakespeare, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, II, ii, 123.
\footnotesize{213}Shakespeare, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, V, viii, 1–4.
\footnotesize{214}Mallin, ‘Emulous Factions and the Collapse of Chivalry’, pp. 167–168; Asp, ‘Transcendence
\footnotesize{215}Garber, \textit{Shakespeare after All}, p. 542–543.
\footnotesize{216}On this point see also Adamson, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, p. 159.
\end{footnotesize}
between Achilles and Hector and, in this light, one can argue that the Trojan’s heroism does stand out.

Hector’s heroic pose also dictates his attitude towards Opportunity, which is markedly different from Achilles’s. Unlike the Greek champion, he does not think in terms of seizing the favourable moment for action, but rather in terms of honour. There is one passage in particular in which he suggests this. As we have seen, many of the characters in the play conceive of Occasion in connection with the traditional image of guiding a ship across tempestuous waters. Troilus keeps trying to find a helmsman, while Ulysses more resolutely replaces Occasion at the helm of the ship himself. And so does Achilles, and more successfully. Hector opts for another type of guide altogether. While Andromache and Cassandra are trying to convince him not to fight what will prove to be his final battle, he firmly states that his decision is immutable, no matter what miseries they have foreseen:

Hold you still, I say;
Mine honour keeps the weather of my fate.
Life every man holds dear; but the dear man
Holds honour far more precious-dear than life.  

Hector here talks about fate, in a pagan sense, as the span of his life. He is thinking about his death. That his honour ‘keeps the weather’ of his fate should, I believe, be seen as a nautical metaphor, which fits well with the earlier descriptions of sailing ships. Hector, too, is in a ship in the storm of this Trojan War. His ship, however, is steered by honour. He chooses a virtue as his helmsman. But, as it happens, honour does not prove to be a good navigator, as it is defeated by Achilles’s opportunism. As Troilus admonishes Hector, his honour is a vice in the present circumstances. In this world, it is cunning and brute force that are rewarded. Hector holds fast to his values, and the true tragedy here is that his upholding of honour determines his death and, by implication, Troy’s fall. Perhaps even more touching is the fact that he

seems well aware of the possible consequences of his moral integrity; he is ready to welcome death in the name of honour, knowing full well the costs of his potential demise to his wife, his father, and his city. The character of Hector thus becomes emblematic of a lost world, as much as Achilles is the symbol of the new, and of the price of victory in such a world. Once men are no longer stirred by honour, and the only way to succeed proves to be sheer opportunism, the individual has the choice of either remaining attached to the old values, and perish, or to renounce them, and live.

In a world with no Christian Providence, it is the virtuous man in a Machiavellian sense who has more chances to succeed. Diomedes has the upper hand in the love story; similarly, Achilles emerges victorious in war. Both in love and war, it is the man able to seize Occasion and act decisively, as Machiavelli advises, who prevails, irrespective of oaths, virtue, and valour. Hector is unwilling to forsake his old virtue for the new one, and thus perishes as a martyr in the name of chivalry. Achilles is much more apt to succeed in such a world; he is the ultimate opportunistic prince, the man for his time and place. He grabs Opportunity by the forelock and violently beats her into subjugation. But we cannot and will not sympathise with him – his murder of Hector is horrendous and we are meant to be shocked by it. We fully perceive Hector’s dilemma: whether to become a monster and win, or remain noble and risk forfeiting life, kingdom and kin. In the world of the play to be a chivalrous hero is to lose everything.

Hector’s choice is the kind of decision facing people at a time of transition between an older morality, still echoing medieval traditions and beliefs, according to which God determines the outcome of battle, the king is divinely ordained, and the societal ladder remains sacred and immutable, and a new outlook that sees preparations and tactics, weapons and training as essential to military success, with the divide between social classes beginning to become more fluid.\footnote{According to Shapiro, 1599, pp. 195–211.} In such a
world, perhaps even princes may ‘erre’.

Thus the pagan world of the play could indeed be seen as a mirror held up to late Elizabethan England and its contradictions. The court’s fascination with chivalric codes, especially in the ceremonies revolving around the queen, was becoming increasingly farcical by the end of her reign. The sovereign’s reliance upon God in battle was fading too. The Almighty alone had defeated the Spanish Armada, but in 1599, while a second attack was feared, preparations were deemed paramount. The queen was old and with no heir; Spain, Ireland and Scotland were feared to be conspiring against England, while even at court the increasingly debilitating factionalism culminated in 1601 in Essex’s rebellion and execution. Old values were indeed proving obsolete, like Hector, but the costs of abandoning them could not but be feared, as it might result in societal chaos, disorder, war, and the rise of opportunistic individuals such as Achilles. Ultimately, the play shows what it takes to succeed, to seize Occasion by the forelock and beat her into subjugation: it takes an Achilles, or a Diomedes, but we cannot help to feel that this solution is far from ideal, although the only alternative presented to us is defeat and destruction. This is, ultimately, Hamlet’s dilemma: whether, in Boethian fashion, to accept stoically ‘the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’, or whether to take action by actively opposing ‘a sea of trouble’. Hamlet does not seem able to choose; ironically, his idea of taking action against adverse Fortune seems to be to contemplate committing suicide. Similarly, the audience of Troilus and Cressida is left with no easy resolution, and a conclusion that is far from bringing closure.

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220 Essex’s letter to Lord Egerton, as quoted in James, “‘Tricks We Play on the Dead’: Making History in Troilus and Cressida”, p. 167.
221 Mallin, ‘Emulous Factions and the Collapse of Chivalry’, pp. 154–156. Mallin also delineates the similarities between Essex and both Achilles and Hector. In his skulking rebelliousness he is indeed like the Greek champion, whereas in his chivalrous enthusiasms, and in his knightly duels celebrating the anniversary of Accession Day, he is similar to Hector.
222 Shapiro, 1599, pp. 195–211.
223 Shapiro, 1599, pp. 195–211.
225 Shakespeare, Hamlet, III, i, 58–61.
5 The Ending or Lack Thereof: Myth Revisited

Ulysses’s scheming comes to nothing. Hector is brutally butchered, and not even by Achilles’s hand. Troilus, with no hope for Troy’s survival, swears vengeance against Achilles, which is unlikely to be realised. He then leaves the stage for the last time, cursing Pandarus. The audience and readers, after witnessing the failure of both chivalric love and epic heroism, and the denial of the existence of any objective value or stable moral principle, are left with a Troy still standing, albeit barely, a Troilus still very much alive, although unlikely for long, and a sick Pandarus who, in way of epilogue, kindly bestows his syphilis upon us all. As Adamson has noted, there could not have been an ending further than this is from ‘epic grandeur’. Ultimately, we are not only denied catharsis, but even any sense of closure. Troilus has to die, and Troy has to fall. This literary destiny was inescapable, both for the Trojan hero and his city, since the Homeric foundations of his story. In this play, however, he does not die. It is true, the story was so well known that everybody in the audience would have felt he was to be killed anyway, and the play does not leave him much hope of escaping his legendary destiny. But the fact that his death is left for us to imagine is still, fundamentally, an act of defiance of literary tradition; it is about as much of the conclusion of this story that could be altered. Troy’s fall was part of history and could not be challenged.

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226 Many agree on this point. See Greene, ‘Language and Value in Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida’, p. 284, Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, p. 109, Milowicki and Wilson, Troilus and Cressida: Voices in the Darkness of Troy, p. 133. 227 Greene, ‘Language and Value in Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida’, p. 280. 228 Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, V, x, 35–55. 229 Adamson, Troilus and Cressida, p. 164. 230 Adamson, Troilus and Cressida, p. 10. 231 Critics generally concur that the play does not have a formal ending. See Everett, ‘The Inaction of Troilus and Cressida’, p. 119, Mallin, ‘Emulous Factions and the Collapse of Chivalry’, p. 170, Milowicki and Wilson, Troilus and Cressida: Voices in the Darkness of Troy, p. 138. 232 Muir notes that the original audience would have known that Troilus and Troy were doomed. Muir, introduction to Troilus and Cressida, p. 38. 233 For the inescapable connection in literature between Troilus’s death and the fall of Troy see Boitani, ‘Antiquity and Beyond’. 234 The Trojan War was generally considered the founding event of Western civilization. See Garber, Shakespeare after All, p. 537. It was a popular belief that Brutus, the great grandson of Aeneas, was ancestor to the British people (similarly to how Rome traced her ancestry to Aeneas), and he founded London, initially called New Troy (Garber, Shakespeare after All, p. 537; Bayley, ‘Time and the Trojans’, p. 73; Greenfield, ‘Fragments of Nationalism in Troilus and Cressida’, pp. 201–202). The
nor could Troilus’s death any more than Caesar’s. But by ending the tale before its tragic conclusion we are effectively denied the one certainty that was left to us, and the one inescapable event we were expecting from the start.

Thus this play, ultimately, after defying all certainties in the lives of its characters, also defies literary tradition. It retells two of the most popular stories of its time while altering all they usually stood for. The myth of Troy in particular was not only extremely popular, it was connected to the origins of England, and, simultaneously, it was ‘the highest secular symbol of disaster’. Traditionally, and most notably in Shakespeare’s works, it was an expression of supreme sorrow. It usually represented the ultimate fall from Fortune’s wheel, as is also apparent in *Hamlet*. The characters as well as the events of this story were forever sculpted in the stone of myth, and Shakespeare had clearly had a chance to meditate upon this subject. He had faithfully reproduced the Troy legend in *The Rape of Lucrece*, where the fall of the great city is immortalised in a painting. While seeking ‘means to mourn’ her misfortune ‘some newer way’, Lucrece remembers this skilful image and seeks it. What better place to look for the ultimate expression of grief? There she sees Ajax, burning with his rage, Ulysses’s wise glance, and grave Nestor,

ancestry of queen Elizabeth was also traced back to Troy (Boyle, ‘Bitter Fruit’, p. 11). Although Renaissance historians not always believed the authenticity of the myth of the founding of Britain, it had become extremely popular and was generally accepted. See Mallin, ‘Emulous Factions and the Collapse of Chivalry’, p. 174, note 31.

Bayley notes that ‘In *Troilus* the game seems to deny that the famous and the legendary ever existed as time has reported them’. Bayley, ‘Time and the Trojans’, p. 59.

Everett, ‘The Inaction of *Troilus and Cressida*’, p. 119.


In the First Player’s speech on the fall of Troy, just after the dramatic description of Priam’s slaughter, there is a lamentation against Fortune: ‘Out, out, thou strumpet fortune! All you gods, / In general synod, take away her power, / Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel, / And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven, / As low as to the fiends!’ As the speech continues with the description of Hecuba’s sorrow, it stresses once more that Fortune is to be blamed: ‘Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steeped, / ’Gainst Fortune’s state would treason have pronounced’. (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II, ii, 484–488; 501–502).


encouraging with his wondrous speech the Greeks to fight, a crowd hanging from his every word.\textsuperscript{245} One cannot help but smile in reading these lines and thinking about the depiction of this character in \textit{Troilus and Cressida} and of Patroclus’s and Achilles’s lack of respect towards this elderly figure. Finally, Lucrece finds what she was looking for, a ‘face where all distress is stelled’: Hecuba’s, as she stands on Priam’s body.\textsuperscript{246} She is the emblem of ‘Time’s ruin, beauty’s wrack and grim care’s reign’,\textsuperscript{247} just as was her customary role in literature.\textsuperscript{248}

This painting shows what these characters and events usually stood for, and dramatically reveals the gap between this type of traditional representation and the portrayal offered in \textit{Troilus and Cressida}. In the painting, all is exemplary, everything and everyone has a clear, unique, and stable symbolic value, so far from the consistent instabilities of the later play. And the painting has a clear function for Lucrece: it provides her with cathartic relief, as she gives voice to Hecuba’s woe.\textsuperscript{249} This is art in its purest form; it is abstraction created ‘in scorn of nature’.\textsuperscript{250} Very interestingly, in \textit{Hamlet} Hecuba’s sorrow is, once again, connected to meditations about art. Here the gap between artistic representation and reality is sorely lamented by Hamlet, after he has witnessed the first player’s description of Hecuba’s sorrow and Priam’s slaughter:

\begin{quote}
O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his whole conceit
That from her working all his visage wanned,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in’s aspect,
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{246}Shakespeare, ‘The Rape of Lucrece’, vv. 1401–1421.
\textsuperscript{247}Shakespeare, ‘The Rape of Lucrece’, vv. 1443–1449.
\textsuperscript{250}Shakespeare, ‘The Rape of Lucrece’, vv. 1457–1470.
\end{flushright}
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing.
For Hecuba!
What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing; no, not for a king
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?\footnote{Shakespeare, \textit{Hamlet}, II, ii, 538–559.}

Hamlet is unable to give expression to his true grief as effectively as the actor portrays Hecuba’s sorrow. Once again, the fall of Troy becomes a symbol of artistic representation; it evokes precise, well-defined emotions, and ultimately, in so doing, reveals the gap between artistic representation and reality. Hamlet, comparing life to art, finds life wanting and meditates upon his own failings. Rosalind shows a similar outlook. As we have seen before, as Ganymede she too speaks of the Trojan myth, in her case focusing, however, on the story of Troilus. Still, the issues that arise from her speech are very similar to those discussed by Hamlet and implied in \textit{The Rape of Lucrece}. She mentions Troilus as an example of the fact that old stories like his ‘are all lies’.\footnote{Shakespeare, \textit{As You Like It}, IV, I, 75–85.} They are not real, not in the way they have been told and retold. Troilus did not die for love; he ‘had his brains dashed out with a Grecian club’.\footnote{Shakespeare, \textit{As You Like It}, IV, I, 77–78.} She sees the unromantic realities beneath the cloak of mythification.
In *Troilus and Cressida*, it is as if Shakespeare had taken these meditations about the myth of Troy and the problems of retelling an ancient story one step further. He has turned the one legend that was the ultimate example of heroism and pity into the most non-exemplary play. He has stripped myth of its transcendent essence and plunged the story and its characters into the uncertainties and crises of reality, leaving their faults, contradictions, and absurdities bare for all to see, effectively deconstructing the Trojan legend. He has used the exemplary stories of love and heroism to make an emblem of storylessness. Ultimately, this play is artless art, which makes for a very different portrayal from the one Lucrece looks at.

6 Conclusion

Unlike in Homer’s *Iliad*, no gods hold onto the strings of reality. Unlike in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, no divine Providence gives final meaning to the apparent chaos of life. In Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, worldly confusion is all there is, and this is precisely why Fortune becomes, once again, prominent. Troy’s fall was the ultimate evidence of Fortune’s fickleness. By Chaucer, it had been transformed into an emblem of the stability that can be found in God’s Providence as opposed to our transient reality. Shakespeare strips this story of any form of design or pattern, leaving the world of his play at the mercy of what, effectively, is just blind chance. We are shown this from the start of the play, and soon realise that, in order to succeed in a world solely dominated by arbitrariness, one must learn to seize Opportunity. The recurring images of sailing ships seen in connection with the idea of seizing Occasion leave no doubt as to the influence of emblem books on Shakespeare’s depictions of Fortune, as Mackenzie and others suggested. Furthermore, these images imply the reasons for the failure or success of individual characters in the play. As we have seen, all the main characters here

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254 Wilson and Milowiki also note the connection in Shakespeare’s works between the fall of Troy and the potential of retelling a story, although they perceive it as primarily connected to the theme of sorrow and they do not mention Rosalind’s reference to Troilus. Milowicki and Wilson, *Troilus and Cressida: Voices in the Darkness of Troy*, pp. 131–132.
considered (except Hector) are aware of the Machiavellian notion that, in order to succeed, one must seize favourable Opportunity, and each of them presents us with a different way of doing so. Troilus, who, in contrast with Chaucer’s protagonist, strongly believes in the power of man rather than Fortune, reveals his passivity in his constant attempts to have someone else act as his Charon. Ulysses, who is instead ready and willing to take action himself, is perfectly able to identify the right moments to seize Opportunity, but his overreliance on cunning rather than manly strength proves an error. Diomedes and Achilles are those who possess what is necessary to subdue Occasion, just as Agamemnon and Nestor had suggested: they know when to act and, when the time comes, they do so decisively. Their ships are those that remain afloat in the storms of Fortune. Achilles ultimately shows that, in order to succeed, he is willing to forsake vows and honour. The end result alone is what matters to him: he is the ultimate opportunist. In stark contrast, Hector remains in the play the symbol of a lost world and of an outdated way of thinking: honour and moral rectitude only bring on destruction. While for Boethius the one who stoically accepts his fate and transcends worldly reality was the one who could truly conquer Fortune, in a world that seems to be only sublunar, such a man is the least successful.

In this play, as in Chaucer’s and Boccaccio’s poems, looking at the characters’ perceptions of Fortune has revealed something important about their attitudes. Fortune here is, once more, a means to aid a character’s portrayal. In this case, however, her primary function seems to be to characterise the world these people live in. In the world of the play, blind chance is all there is. No god holds onto the strings of reality, and that is why there are no stable values to rely upon. Love and honour become a matter of point of view for the characters. Even social hierarchy fails to have a stable meaning. It is in such a context that the characters’ failures and successes are to be considered. If there is nothing to believe in and rely upon, then the only heroes who can succeed are those able to seize Opportunity, like Achilles. Ultimately, the play is a way of looking back on ancient myth from a new perspective. Old values and beliefs no longer seem to apply to the chaotic present.
time, and maybe they never did. Maybe old stories were, indeed, all lies, as Rosalind suggests, and this new version of the story strives to be as realistic and confusing as the moment of the present was for late Elizabethans. The play presents problems failing to provide answers and closure, because it is up to the audience to pass judgement on what they have witnessed. In a world where the only sure path to success is to become sheer opportunists and grab Fortune by her forelock the instant one gets the chance to do so, no matter the moral costs and social consequences, where do our sympathies lie? With the defeated and noble Hector or with the ruthless winner Achilles? This is the type of choice one has to face in a real world, as opposed to an idealised one, where moral rectitude is seldom rewarded, love often comes short of our expectations, vows are easily broken, and values are, more often than not, a matter of perspective. When sacrifice does not pay do we choose the practical way of life or the moral one? And what is moral rectitude to be measured against with no stable point of reference? With Pandarus’s epilogue the play projects such questions onto its contemporary audience and their time; as they all partake of his sickness they become all involved into the infectious chaos of the world of the play. By the end, Troy and London meet in the theatre, and it becomes apparent that looking back on Troy was also looking forward at the unstable and uncertain future of New Troy.
CONCLUSION

Looking at the representations of Fortune in the *Filostrato, Troilus and Criseyde* and *Troilus and Cressida* has revealed that this figure plays an important role in all three versions of the story of Troilus. Boccaccio, Chaucer and Shakespeare consistently employ Fortune to aid character portrayal in these works. The transformations of the main characters from one version of the story to the next are mirrored in the way they speak of Fortune. But this figure is also fundamental to how each author relates to Troilus’s myth and its literary legacy.

Boccaccio produced the first poem entirely centred on the love story between Troilus and Cressida. The apparent inconsistencies in the representation of Fortune in the *Filostrato* are not due, as has been suggested, to the lack of attention to this concept on the part of the author. Instead, the multifaceted portrayal of this figure offered both by the characters and the narrator mirrors the imprecise use of the word *Fortuna* that can usually be observed in common speech – a phenomenon Boccaccio comments upon in later works. From a philosophical and theological perspective, the characters of this poem reveal their limited understanding of causational forces in the manner in which they speak of Fortune and, in so doing, they also show us the reasons why they choose to act as they do. The way in which Troiolo, Criseida and Pandaro describe Fortune is instrumental to their characterisation. The narrator’s comments about Fortune show his apparent attempt to comply with Boethian thought as well as with Dante’s representation of love, but his true intent to seek a more worldly kind of passion emerges from a careful reading. In the *Filostrato*, Fortune is intrinsically related to the depiction of the *amore per diletto* as opposed to Boethian and Stilnovistic love. Both Troiolo and Filostrato seek carnal love, but the tale, despite the narrator’s comments, ultimately reveals the tragic outcome of a love that, because solely based on worldly things, is entirely at the mercy of Fortune.
In ‘translating’ Boccaccio’s poem, Chaucer reproduces the characters’ erroneous perceptions (from a Boethian perspective) of what Fortune is, following his source. However, Troilus, Criseyde and Pandarus show a more coherent understanding of this concept. Troilus sees Fortune as a pagan goddess, capricious, cruel and unjust, and, as a consequence, he renounces taking constructive action to influence the outcome of events. His beliefs about Fortune betray his inherent paralysis. Pandarus considers at length the motion of Fortune’s wheel. Its constant revolutions are for Pandarus an inescapable aspect of reality. Unable to perceive the existence of anything beyond worldly things, he thinks that instability must be accepted, and he encourages Troilus to make the most of whatever circumstances present themselves. Criseyde does not believe in Fortune. She understands the fragile nature of all happiness based on Fortune’s gifts, but, despite this sign of wisdom, she is unaware of the existence of a higher good. That is why she has no self-sufficiency, and ends up acting as Fortune does. She changes the object of her favours to adapt to the new circumstances she finds herself in. Chaucer also connects more explicitly than Boccaccio does Troilus’s Fortune with the Fortune of Troy, suggesting that their intertwined vicissitudes were not determined by an inescapable fate but depended upon human errors. Subjection to Fortune is due, in both cases, to a fundamental mistake from both a Boethian and Dantean perspective: misdirected love. Thus, Chaucer solves the problem of the perceived determinism in Troilus’s story: the Trojan prince lost what he had gained because of his own mistakes. In this poem, the wheel of Fortune ultimately becomes Troilus’s worldly punishment for subjecting himself to something as fleeting as human love. In the end, the reader is left pondering both the bliss and the pains that such love inevitably brings.

In *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare refashions Troilus’s love story by giving more prominence to the background of the Trojan War. In his play, he extensively uses images related to Fortune in her guise as the Renaissance Occasion to deal with agency. As emerges from Agamemnon’s and Nestor’s speeches, the present state of war is like a tempestuous sea, and it is only the brave and strong who can survive the storm of Fortune. This proves to be as true in love as it is in war.
Troilus seems unable to act as circumstances would require. He often speaks of sailing ships as a metaphor for conquering women, but he has the tendency to seek others to hold the helm of his boat in his stead. Like his Chaucerian predecessor, he betrays his unwillingness to act in the manner in which he speaks of Fortune. On the contrary, Diomedes proves able to seize Occasion by the forelock, as is shown by his awareness that one must act when the ‘tide’ allows it. He acts decisively and with perfect timing, and that is why he manages to conquer Cressida. In war, it is Achilles who prevails. The ultimate opportunist, he cunningly chooses the perfect moment to attack Hector when he is most vulnerable. He ‘wheels’ his myrmidons around the Trojan hero and strikes to kill. Ulysses’s machinations and Hector’s honour and chivalry prove equally ineffective. In the absence of any religious or moral certainty, seizing Occasion by the forelock and beating her down into subjugation is the only way to succeed. Sheer opportunism and brute force are what is required to win in the world of the play, where valour, honour and chivalry have become obsolete vestiges of a mythical past that maybe never existed. Ultimately, retelling the story of Troilus in a world entirely dominated by the actions of Occasion becomes a way of deconstructing the process of mythification. Myth, plunged into the uncertainties and confusion of reality, becomes utterly un-exemplary and un-epic. Art steps down from her pedestal and holds a mirror up to reality that shows nothing cathartic or edifying in its reflection.

Lady Fortune is markedly prominent in these three works. She is mentioned often, often blamed, and the imagery related to her is pervasive. Simultaneously, she does not seem to have any true power to affect directly the course of events. As a goddess or agent, she is, arguably, non-existent. And yet, ironically, her power to influence the manner in which the characters in these works perceive reality, as well as how the readers or audiences, in turn, perceive these characters and the worlds they inhabit is undeniably strong. Ultimately, she is nothing but a literary construction, and this is precisely where her power lies. It is not just any literary construction. The hold she has on the popular imagination and her long and pervasive literary legacy are precisely what confer meaning on her, providing her
with the powerful associations that she evokes. Art, and not causality, is Fortune’s true province; it is where she exists and breathes. From the written pages of poems and plays, the painted walls of medieval churches, the engravings of emblem books, she continues to exercise her power, capturing our attention, exciting fear and hope and making us wonder about the fleeting nature of human happiness and the extent to which we can exercise control over the course of our lives, inspiring today thoughts that are not very different from those she evoked in Boccaccio’s, Chaucer’s and Shakespeare’s contemporaries.
Illustrations

Figure 1: Giovanni Rucellai’s Impresa (1460) in Florence Buttay-Jutier, *Fortuna: usages politiques d’une allégorie morale à la Renaissance* (Paris: PUPS, 2008), p. 89.
Figure 2: Gilles Corrozet, ‘L’ymage de Fortune’, in *Hecatomgraphie* (1540), in Frederick Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy* (San Marino, Ca.: The Huntington Library, 1983), p. 214.
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Figure 5: Gilles Corrozet, ‘L’ymage d’occasion’, in Hecatomgraphic (1540), in Frederick Kiefer, Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy (San Marino, Ca.: The Huntington Library, 1983), p. 215.
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Figure 11: Marcantonio Raimondi, *Herculean Virtue Chastising Vicious Fortune* (1510), in Rudolf Wittkower, ‘Chance, Time and Virtue’, *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1, no. 4 (1938), plate 52A.
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