

Troilus's Laughter

KAZUSO OGOSHI

Many critics have expressed dissatisfaction with the so-called Epilogue of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Professor Curry, for instance, regarding the ending as "dramatically a sorry performance" betraying "the complete separation of the pure artist from the religious man", has concluded that "the Epilogue is not a part of the whole and is detachable at will, and one need not of necessity consider it at all in an interpretation of the drama" ("Destiny in Chaucer's *Troilus*", *PMLA*, xlv, 1930, pp. 165-8). Professor Tatlock, to take another example, also insisting on the contradiction he finds between the Epilogue and the main part of the story, has described it as an unexpected "return from the Renaissance to the Middle Ages" ("The Epilog of Chaucer's *Troilus*", *MP*, xviii, 1921, p. 146).

They both seem to have failed to grasp the key-note of the story. For Curry, the work is an experimental (and successful) dramatic application of "entirely deterministic philosophy". Troilus "fights at first against the destinal powers that would give him Criseyde for a season; he struggles against the forces which would finally take her away from him." And "it is to Chaucer's everlasting glory", he says, "that in the composition of this work of art he should have suppressed his private beliefs (as indicated in the Epilog) and that, in an age when man and artist were not easily separable, he should have been courageous enough to exercise his artistic faculties alone in the creation of *Troilus*" (op. cit., pp. 163-8). Tatlock, on the other hand, seems to have been particularly interested in "its abandonment to something new...the spirit of the Italian Renaissance" with its realism and emotionalism (op. cit., pp. 144-6). Thus, though they lay stress on different aspects of the work, they agree in considering its tenor as far in advance of medievalism.

Now that Professor Lewis, in his epoch-making essay, "What Chaucer really did to 'Il Filostrato' " (*Essays and Studies*, xvii, 1932), has dealt a fatal blow at such modernist interpretations and achieved remarkable success in explaining this love story in terms of medieval Courtly Love, there

might seem to be little need to dwell on the settled matter. But, to my thinking, Professor Lewis has erred in his turn by too much idealizing Courtly Love, ignoring its sinister undercurrents. That is the fundamental reason why, to him, the latter half of the poem is "treason" (*Allegory of Love*, 1936, p. 196). The purport of the whole work may still need to be examined.

First, we may take up the famous monologue of Troilus in Book IV, in which he, informed of the state decision to send Criseyde away in exchange for Antenor, now captive in Greek hands, tries to be reconciled to the impending loss of his love, persuading himself that it is his destiny :

... al that comth, comth by necessitee :

Thus to be lorn, it is my destinee (ll. 958-9)

Curry rightly regards the passage as being put there for "dramatic effect". The problem, however, is what a dramatic effect it is intended to produce. According to Curry it is there to give emphasis to the conception of Destiny which is the be-all and end-all of the story ; it is the motto of the whole work, though the author does not personally believe in it. That seems to be what Curry means by "dramatic effect".

The monologue is, indeed, a piece of complicated ratiocination, but certainly it is not a sheer exposition of a theory. If it were, Chaucer would have presented it in a more orderly and neat form. As it is, such a confused and confusing passage as

For if ther sitte a man yond on a see,
Than by necessite bihoveth it
That, certes, thyn opynyoun sooth be,
That wenest or coniectest that he sit.
And further over now ayeynward yit,
Lo, right so is it of the part contrarie,
As thus,—now herkne, for I wol nat tarie :

I sey, that if the opynyoun of the
Be soth, that he sitte, than sey I this,
That he mot siten by necessite ;

And thus necessite in eyther is.
 For in hym nede of sittynge is, ywys,
 And in the nede of soth; and thus, forsothe,
 There mot necessite ben in yow bothe.

But thow mayst seyn, the man sit nat therfore,
 That thyn opynyoun of his sittynge soth is;
 But rather, for the man sit ther byfore,
 Therefore is thyn opynyoun soth, ywis.
 And I seye. though the cause of soth of this
 Comth of his sittynge, yet necessite
 Is entrechaunged both in hym and the,

(ll. 1023-43)

clearly shows, as Professor Patch had admirably demonstrated ("Troilus on Predestination", *JEGP*, xvii, 1918), Troilus's desperate, and vain, endeavour to console himself. The colloquial style full of repetitions and interruptions (see especially ll. 1027-30) is surely that of a character on the stage in an emotional turmoil. It must be in this sense alone, if the passage is to be called dramatic. We should remember also that Professor Patch found in the passage Chaucer's sense of humour which accompanied him wherever he went : the poet is looking down at his hero's struggle from some height. Seeing that the author here bases Troilus's fatalistic argument upon that of the Speaker in Boethius' *Consolatio*, ultimately to be refuted by Lady Philosophy, it may safely be said that the height Chaucer stood on in this case was the one afforded by that final conclusion of Boethius upholding human free will. Thus, Chaucer remains serene within the frame of medieval order; he would have been surprised to be told such a jargon as "the separation of the pure artist from the religious man". Certainly, there is a note of fate permeated throughout the work. But it is by no means humanity in general, but a very special system of codes of behaviour called Courtly Love, that is doomed.

Professor Tatlock finds Chaucer's treatment of love in this work extraordinarily novel; he supposes it may have been even shocking to the medieval reader, and refers it to the Italian Renaissance tradition. But medieval Courtly Love itself was not so pure and spiritual as he seems to pre-

suppose. However well disguised, "Courtly Love was never Platonic in its implications The union longed for, sought and envisaged is a physical one ; the ultimate goal to which love impels the lover is the physical enjoyment of the beloved" (A. J. Denomy : "An Inquiry into the Origins of Courtly Love", *Mediaeval Studies*, vi, 1944, p. 180). Chaucer's description of the consummation of love of Troilus and Criseyde,

Hire armes smale, hire streght bak and softe,
 Hire sydes longe, fleshly, smothe, and white
 He gan to stroke, and good thrift bad ful ofte
 Hire snowisshe throte, hire brestes rounde and lite, (III, 11. 1247-50)

may never have been shocking to those medieval readers who were already familiar with such a Courtly Love poem as

Las! e viure que'm val,
 s'eu no vei a jornal
 mo fi joi natural
 en leih, sotez fenestral
 cors blanc tot atretal
 com la neus a nadal,
 si c'amdui cominal
 mezuressen egal? (Bernart de Ventadour,

quoted by J. A. Denomy in the above article with the following translation of his : "Alas, what is the use of living for me if I do not ever see my pure sincere joy in her bed under the casement window, her body as white as the snow at Christmas time, so that both of us in like measure may vie with each other.")

Denomy goes even so far as to declare that "Courtly Love is essentially a love of concupiscence". If so, it is, of course, unforgivable from the Christian point of view. The point, however, is not whether Courtly Love is a pursuit of lust or not. Physical or spiritual, the codes of Courtly Love are fundamentally an "unmoral and unsocial system" as Professor Kittredge has pointed out (*Chaucer and his Poetry*, 1915, p. 143). Troilus was in every way faithful to them, and that is itself the cause of his later sufferances. Dr. Dorothy Everett says, "This love . . . which Chaucer hymns so beautifully, and for which he feels so much sympathy, *must* fail when

it is put to the test (of real life) It is the frailty of human love, in that form of it which was the ideal of the age, which is the theme of the poem" ("*Troilus and Criseyde*", *Essays on Middle English Literature*, 1955, p. 137).

And that was the lesson Troilus learned on "the holughness of the eighth sphere"; it was a spiritual awakening to him: .

And down from thennes faste he gan avyse
This litel spot of erthe that with the se
Embraced is, and full gan despise
This wrecched world, and held al vanite
To respect of the pleyn felicite
That is in hevene above ; and at the laste,
Ther he was slayn, his loking down he caste.

And in hymself he lough right at the wo
Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste;
And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so
The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,
And sholden al oure herte on heven caste.

(V, ll. 1814-25)

Nothing fits better this pathetic medieval love story as an Epilogue. I wonder how Professor Root could hear "a peal of celestial laughter" (*The Book of Troilus and Criseyde*, 1926, Introduction, p. 50). Chaucer tells us,

And *in* hymself he lough . . .

All I can discern is the peaceful, gently smiling face of Troilus,

Calm of mind, all passion spent.