

A LOVE THAT BEARS NO FRUIT:

Aubades and Unnatural Love in Troilus and Criseyde

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Chaucer's choice to include *aubades* as a literary technique in Book III of *Troilus and Criseyde*. As a convention of the medieval French literature of courtly love, *aubades* evoke *pathos* that draws the reader to sympathize with the lovers and understand such love's emotive power. Despite this, Chaucer's use of *aubades* in Book III of *Troilus and Criseyde* reveals the title characters' love as being ultimately sinister. Both characters interject into their *aubades* complaints against the cycles of nature, positioning their love in opposition to a philosophical concept of cosmic love that Chaucer celebrates elsewhere in the text. Troilus and Criseyde's choice to curse nature for opposing their love shows that their love is unnatural, irrational, and even blasphemous, because their expression of desire for each other within the *aubades* contradicts Chaucer's textual themes that love is good in that it exists in accordance with cosmic order, reason, and religion. Chaucer's use of *aubade*, therefore, ironically illustrates that Troilus and Criseyde's love is ultimately immoral as it is contrary to nature.

In lines 1415-1470 and 1695-1708 in Book III of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, the lovers interject *aubades* in complaints against nature's cycles for disrupting them from indulging in their intimate encounters. In poetry, an *aubade* is a love song announcing dawn as lovers part ways in the morning. *Aubades* are a convention of medieval French literature of courtly love, so Chaucer's employment of them in Book III places Troilus and Criseyde in a canon of lovers affectionately engaging in *fin'amors*. After all, the melodramatic diction within the *aubades* evoke *pathos* that draws the reader to sympathize with the lovers and to understand their love's emotive power. Though the *aubades* further illuminate

the passion of Troilus and Criseyde's love, Chaucer's use of this technique in Book III illustrates their love as being ultimately sinister. This discrepancy is prevalent in the irony of Troilus and Criseyde's interjecting complaints against the cycles of nature, which are products and arrangements of the philosophical concept of cosmic love celebrated throughout the text. Troilus and Criseyde's curse to nature as opposing their love shows their love is unnatural, irrational, and even blasphemous as their expression of desire for each other within the *aubades* contradict Chaucer's textual theme that love is good in that it exists in accordance with cosmic love, reason, and religion. Chaucer's use of *aubade*, therefore, is an ironic illustration that Troilus and Criseyde's love is ultimately bad.

Despite the irony existing within the context, Chaucer's use of *aubade* manifests emotive strength in Troilus and Criseyde's love. This is evident within the diction's *pathos* that draws the reader to sympathize with the lovers, distraught as daybreak forces them to part ways. Criseyde's pathetic complaint against the Night introduces the use of *aubade* in the poem:

Myn hertes lyf, my trist, and my plesaunce,
That I was born, allas, what me is wo,
That day of us mot make desseveraunce!
For tyme it is to ryse, and hennes go,
Or ells I am lost for evermo!
O night, allas! Why niltow over us hove,
As longe as whanne Almena lay by Jove?¹

Interjections like "That I was born, allas, what me is wo" and "Or ells I am lost for evermo!/O night, allas!" heighten the melodrama of the lovers' parting, and the sudden endangerment of Criseyde's happiness stirs the reader to recognize the passionate gravity of the love.² Troilus and Criseyde's emotional response to separating draws them to sympathize with "many a lovere" who woefully part ways the morning after an intimate encounter, as Troilus interjects, "'Allas, what have thise loveris the agylt,/ Dispitous day? Thyn be the peyne of helle!/ For many a lovere hastow slayn, and wilt."³ This moment in the *aubade* engages the reader's sympathies even further as Troilus and Criseyde's suffering in parting ways on account of dawn is recognizable in and shared with "many a lovere."⁴ Chaucer's employment of *pathos* within the *aubades*

may confuse readers attempting to make a moral judgment about Troilus and Criseyde's love. After all, Chaucer's language within the *aubades* demonstrates that Troilus and Criseyde's love is indeed emotively powerful and even relatable to "many a lovere" through *pathos*.⁵ This emotive power, however, does not necessarily point to a genuine goodness in Troilus and Criseyde's love. Even Troilus alludes to the tension and ambiguity between emotive power and goodness existing in his love: "If love be good, from whennes cometh my woo?"⁶ The emotive language in the *aubades* invites the reader to recognize an overt affection between the lovers, but this does not necessarily represent the goodness of love, *charity*. Rather, the emotional gravity manifested as jealousy illustrates their love as *cupidity*. Thus, Chaucer's use of *pathos* within the *aubades* has sinister implications pointing to Troilus and Criseyde's love as being ultimately bad.

The indignant and jealous tone prevalent throughout the *aubades* signals that the love between Troilus and Criseyde is not humbling and enlightening like charity, but is rather an example of cupidity, which ultimately leads to vice rather than virtue. Scholar Gerald Morgan states that acts of charity are by nature lawful, and acts of cupidity are unlawful.⁷ This idea is evident in Troilus and Criseyde's melodramatic indignation at parting ways; the love they share seems more like cupidity rather than charity, for it manifests an extreme sense of desire, which Morgan defines as "the movement towards the object that stems from a sense of affinity with it and a realization of its absence."⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas further clarifies that this desire is not even "essentially love," but is rather more like "an effect of love."⁹ When Troilus and Criseyde's romantic contact is classified as desire under the guise of love, the reader recognizes that their affections are not a genuine and good love, but rather an instance of cupidity. No matter how much of the *aubades'* *pathos* engages the reader's sympathies in Troilus and Criseyde's affectionate desire for one another, the shame and secrecy of the lovers' encounters illustrate something sinister plaguing their love. Scholar John M. Hill asserts that:

The love between the two reaches an emotional, joyous sufficiency that is beautiful [...] But so long as it remains cloistered and secret, it does not broaden out

to a public and social world [...] Thus it lives only on the bedroom side of ethics.”¹⁰

The reader now recognizes that the lovers' extreme emotional response to dawn is less like a pathetic song of mourning and more like a tantrum over how the course of nature impends them in two ways: the coming of dawn prevents Troilus and Criseyde from feeding their appetites of desire for each other, and it also threatens to bring to public light their scandalous romantic contact. The reader understands that Troilus and Criseyde's love is ultimately a scandal overshadowing any instance of pathetic “emotional, joyous sufficiency” expressed through the *aubades*, and any moment of potential charity now seems more like cupidity.¹¹

Though the emotive language of the *aubades* does not point to the love between Troilus and Criseyde as being ultimately good, the *pathos* that encourages the reader's sympathies should not be dismissed as solely pointing to the love's deficiency. Though the intimate encounter the *aubades* illuminate may not be morally constructive for the lovers, here Chaucer seizes the opportunity to instruct his readers in virtue where his characters are lacking. As Chaucerian scholar, D.W. Robertson, Jr. points out:

When the tragic protagonist is treated with some sympathy, the audience can participate in his experiences, sharing, for the moment, his hopes and fears [...] The more readily we sympathise with the victim, the more easily we may recognize the fact that the fall establishes a tempting precedent for almost anyone to follow. The serpent lurks about us in unexpected places [...] The tragedian points him out for us; and his work is more effective when he can show him in the guise of commonplace events and superficially attractive individuals.¹²

Chaucer's use of *pathos* within the *aubades* is not meant to lead the reader to support Troilus and Criseyde's love, but rather to invest sympathies with these tragic figures in order to better learn from their fall. The “serpent” Robertson describes is perhaps the scandal and desire Troilus and Criseyde misinterpret as genuine love. Chaucer, here, calls the reader to recognize this folly by keeping his reader simultaneously invested in the tragic characters through *pathos* and

also removed from them in order to learn from them, with the help of frequent narratorial interventions, in a constructive rather than in an exclusively condemning way.¹³ Robertson further illustrates this call to observe tragedy through a morally constructive light by stating, “through some sort of cupidity [...] doom has a certain inevitability. It may be objected that the tragic protagonist cannot be a sinner, since he is sometimes treated with sympathy, as he is in the *Troilus*. But in the Middle Ages it was widely recognized that we are all sinners.”¹⁴ The reader, as a sinner, identifies with Troilus and Criseyde in their folly in fact, “many a lover” can sympathize.¹⁵ Sympathy, however, does not equate to condoning, as Gerald Morgan clarifies: “although the lovers do elicit our sympathy, we should not be blinded to the moral judgment that we are still required to make.”¹⁶ Despite this, as D.W. Robertson, Jr. reflects, balancing a sympathetic and a morally critical attitude towards the characters is difficult, especially as Chaucer’s own sympathy to the lovers often “is tempered by a consistent irony.”¹⁷ This “consistent irony” is a favorite vehicle of Chaucer’s to invite the reader to make moral evaluations.¹⁸ Irony involves the analysis of contradictions, and Chaucer thus ironically engages the reader’s sympathy through the *aubades* in order to evoke conviction after all. Despite the *pathos* in the *aubades* that invests the reader’s sympathy, closer reading of the prevalent irony reveals the *aubades* ultimately point to the badness of Troilus and Criseyde’s love, for details in the *aubades* ironically contradict values of love Chaucer praises throughout his text. It is thus illustrated that the love is incompatible with what Chaucer asserts as good in terms of love.

Chaucer’s use of *aubades* in Book III points to the love between Troilus and Criseyde as being ultimately sinister because it is a love incompatible with the laws and cycles of nature, which are products of cosmic love Chaucer esteems throughout his work. In the text of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer echoes the Boethian claim from Book II, Meter VIII of *The Consolation of Philosophy* that pure cosmic love governs the universe and implements harmony in nature:

What governs earth and sea and sky
is nothing less than love [...]
How happy is mankind

if the love that orders the stars above
rules, too, in your hearts.¹⁹

Whatever is compatible with the harmonious cycles of nature is compatible with that which is provided by a higher, cosmic force of love governing the universe. As Gerald Morgan describes, this cosmic harmony embodies love in its purest, most natural, and unadulterated form: “Natural love thus describes the ordering (or determination) of the created world to the good. It explains the purposiveness of Nature, but it is a purposiveness supplied by an external cause, and not one based on knowledge [...] It is this natural love that causes a stone to seek the earth, or flame to move upwards.”²⁰ This is especially articulated in Book III when Troilus sings *Canticus Troili*, essentially reproducing Boethius’s words in a celebration of cosmic love:

‘Love, tht of erthe and see hath governaunce
Love, that his hestes hath in hevene hye,
Halt peples joined, as him list hem gye,
Love, that knetteth lawe of companye,
And couples doth in vertu for to dwelle,
Bind this accord, that I have told and telle.”²¹

For Troilus, his romantic contact with Criseyde has instigated these new philosophical insights to be “one of his augmented attributes, as is shown in his song’s Boethian claim.”²² This enlightening praise of the nature’s harmony, however, is inconsistent with Troilus and Criseyde’s reactions to nature in their *aubades*. Gerald Morgan observes:

Indeed the complaint of Criseyde against the impetuous departure of night (III. 1422-42) is neatly paralleled by that of Troilus against the cruel intrusion of day (III. 1450-70) [...] the loves of Troilus and Criseyde are at variance with the pattern of harmony in the created universe.²³

Troilus and Criseyde’s love as being “at variance with the pattern of harmony in the created universe” in no way exemplifies their love; rather, it is something incompatible with the laws and balance of nature and also with the purity of cosmic love in general.²⁴ Troilus’s expression of love through his criticism of nature demonstrates how his actions are out of harmony with his philosophical values,

reflecting the even greater tragedy that his love is out of harmony with the natural, cosmic love he praises. Morgan continues to observe this ultimate irony:

In Troilus's complaint against Day the terms that are used draw attention to the unlawful nature of the love for which he appeals; Day is the *accuser* (III. 1450) of a joy that has been *stole* (III. 1451). Once again God is invoked: 'What hastow lost, why sekestow this place,/ Ther God thi light so quenche, for his grace?' (III. 1455) and at the very point at which his divine plan is called into question. Moreover by representing Day as inimical to the cause of the lovers (III. 1457-63) Troilus unwittingly underlines the extent to which his love is dependent on darkness and ignorance. Hence we can appreciate the irony of his vehement rebuke of the Sun's folly (III. 1464-70).²⁵

Within the *aubades*, Chaucer does not hesitate to illustrate the love between Troilus and Criseyde as something that, if it should be indulged, would corrupt and disrupt nature and would thus oppose the governance of cosmic love. The scandalous love's lack of organic construction (as the reader recognizes through Pandarus's constant meddling) has turned it rotten in opposition to nature rather than in harmony with it. Instead of teeming with peace and balance such as the love and harmony described in Boethius's account of governed nature, Troilus and Criseyde's love becomes emotionally volatile within the context of Book III, demonstrating the imbalanced emotional patterns within their love fail to reflect the harmonious patterns of nature's cycles. John M. Hill elaborates on this tumult by analyzing the events surrounding the lovers' intimate encounter:

In the immediate moments of the night, Troilus has been buffeted, going from sorrow to sweetness, from fear to rescue and gladness (III, 1240-45). More securely, however, where once Troilus had burned repeatedly with an ever-greater desire after whatever earlier progress Pandarus had brokered, now he burns no longer. Before morning, they have more than counterpoised past woe with present joy (III, 1406-7). They have recovered bliss and come into an ease with

each other that neither has known before, the great worthiness of love. But morning and painful departure intervene. Troilus returns to his palace weebegone and restless. Sleep eludes him as he burns again with an ever-greater desire. Such burning may contain moral warning, which, if so, Troilus does not heed.²⁶

No balance and organic satisfaction exists as it would in nature's cycles. Chaucer's ironic illustration through the *aubades* that the love between Troilus and Criseyde is not compatible with the laws of nature points to the lovers' romantic contact as being ultimately bad as it is not compatible with the greater good that is cosmic love.

Chaucer's use of the *aubades* likewise points to the love between Troilus and Criseyde as being ultimately bad, because details within the passages demonstrate lack of reason present within both characters during their romance. Gerald Morgan asserts that "[...] love is seen in relation to the exercise of reason".²⁷ Morgan further elaborates on St. Thomas Aquinas's approach to this by stating that love is governed by reason either properly or defectively, "and therefore in a secondary manner may be described as either good or bad [...]." ²⁸ Likewise, love and reason are in harmony as "The criterion of the intellect is that which is in accord with man's ultimate good or supernatural end, that is, union with the divine will [...]." ²⁹ Even Dante, one of Chaucer's philosophical influences, asserts this in Canto XVII of *Purgatorio*:

Or with more ardour than behoves, or less,
Pursue the good; the thing created then
Works 'gainst its Maker. Hence thou must infer
That love is germin of each virtue in ye,
And of each act no less, that merits pain.³⁰

If reason should act in accordance with the greater force of cosmic love, opposing cosmic love in some form—such as Troilus and Criseyde's complaints against nature's cycles—would oppose reason. After all, according to Chaucerian scholar D.W. Robertson, Jr.:

Reason [...] is a manifestation of the divine will, a function of the chain of love which holds creation together. To love the uncertain and transitory rewards of the world is to subject oneself to their fluctuations. To

love God is to acquire freedom and peace of mind.³¹

Thus, the *aubades* are projections of the irrationality surrounding their romantic contact, as it is irrational to seek a disruption of nature for the sake of indulging mortal romantic encounters. Their invocation for nature to disrupt itself is instead an ironic invocation for their own downfall, “to wander from the way to the true good in search of false and unreasonable worldly satisfactions.”³² Irony is furthered as Troilus and Criseyde’s irrationality in opposing nature’s cycles detracts from the credibility of Troilus’s philosophical insights in *Canticus Troili*, for no action within Book III demonstrates that his insights are lessons learned or virtues achieved through soul-mending. Rather, his philosophical insights function as contradictory to his attitudes towards nature expressed in a vulnerable instance of his romance through the *aubades* further manifesting the inconsistencies developing around the romance and pointing to irrationality rather than harmony. The lovers’ lack of reason does not exemplify them as elevating each other in virtue rather, it reminds the reader that these lovers are sinners to have pity (but also judgment) upon, as neglect for reason results in sin:

The reason should be subject to God; and “sensuality,” or the desire for worldly satisfactions, should be subject to the reason. When the “sensuality” triumphs so that the reason loses sight of what Boethius calls the “verray good,” the proper order of things is disturbed so that sin results [...]³³

The lovers’ irrationality, illustrated in their invoking nature to disrupt its cycles so they may indulge their desires, reminds the reader that the lovers are sinners from which Chaucer wishes to provide moral instruction. The irrationality illuminated through the *aubades* in turn illustrates Troilus and Criseyde’s love as ultimately bad as it operates in opposition to both nature and reason.

Chaucer’s use of the *aubades* likewise depicts the love between Troilus and Criseyde as ultimately bad as it expresses their love as not only incompatible with cosmic love’s governance, but *irreverent* to it as well. In medieval literature, a convention of courtly love is that it recalls religion. This is prevalent in Guillaume de Lorris’s *Romance of the Rose* when the dreamer employs pious language to address the God of Love who instructs him in courtship;

it is also prevalent in Dante's works, particularly in *Paridiso*, as his love for Beatrice reflects religious devotion and elevates him in virtue.³⁴ Even throughout Troilus and Criseyde's courtship, Troilus and Pandarus exchange pious words with each other, and Pandarus even remarks, "I thence, sith that love, of his goodnesse,/ Hath thee converted out of wikkednesse."³⁵ Contrasting this language, in the *aubades*, Troilus and Criseyde react irrationally and blasphemously to cosmic love by cursing nature's cycles, demonstrating "the departure from reason involved in a sin is a corruption of the Image of God."³⁶ Chaucer's impious word choice in the *aubades* manifests how Troilus and Criseyde's love causes them to be irreverent to nature and thus in opposition to cosmic love itself. Criseyde curses the Night, saying, "Ther God, maker of kynde,/The, for thyn haste and thyn unkynde vice,/ So false ay to oure hemysperie bynde/ That nevere more under the ground thow wynde!"³⁷ Troilus joins in this cursing in his complaint against Day, saying:

O cruel day, accusour of the joie
That nyght and love han stole and faste iwryen,
Acorsed be thi coming into Troye,
For every bore hath oon of thi bryghte yen!
Envyous day, what list the so to spien?
What hastow lost? Why sekestow this place?
Ther God thi light so quenche, for his grace!"³⁸

Later, he foolishly chides the sun, concluding, "I bidde God, so yeve yow bothe sorwe!" and later calls the day "traitour," adding "Ne shal I nevere don hire sacrificise."³⁹ Chaucer's use of irony in the *aubades* manifests as the impious language is inconsistent with the esteemed theme of love functioning as recalling religion and virtue; this irony illustrates that Troilus and Criseyde's love is not enlightening, but ultimately bad, driving them to heretical behavior rather than virtue.

Troilus and Criseyde's discontent with nature for forcing them to part ways is certainly endearing in a sentimental sense, but this *pathos* does not dismiss the sinister nature surrounding the implications of the criticism and curses they address to nature's cycles within the *aubades*. Chaucer's use of irony within Book III's *aubades* is an invitation for the reader to make a moral evaluation regarding Troilus and Criseyde's love as ultimately bad as it opposes esteemed conventions of courtly romance. The *pathos* within the

aubades invites the reader to make this judgment with mercy balanced with reason. Due to this, the reader should recognize that when courtship becomes adulterated by elements unnatural in genuine love (such as scandal, third-party pandering, etc.), the love becomes too inorganic to foster virtue and bear good fruit.

NOTES

1. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), III, 1422-28.
2. Ibid., III, 1423, 1426-1427.
3. Ibid., III, 1457-59.
4. Ibid., III, 1459.
5. Ibid., III, 1459.
6. Ibid., I, 402.
7. Gerald Morgan, "Natural and Rational Love in Medieval Literature," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 7 (1977): 43-52.
8. Ibid.
9. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: Concupiscence (Prima Secundae Partis, Q. 30)*, *New Advent*, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2.htm>.
10. John M. Hill, "The Countervailing Aesthetic of Joy in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The Chaucer Review* 39, no. 3 (2005): 280-97. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25094292>.
11. Ibid.
12. D.W. Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," *English Literary History* 19.1 (1952): 1-37.
13. Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," 1-37.
14. Ibid.
15. Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III, 1459.

16. Morgan, "Natural and Rational Love in Medieval Literature," 43-52.
17. Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," 1-37.
18. Ibid.
19. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. David Slavitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), Book II, Meter VIII.
20. Morgan, "Natural and Rational Love in Medieval Literature," 43-52.
21. Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III, 1744-49.
22. Hill, "The Countervailing Aesthetic of Joy in "Troilus and Criseyde," 280-97.
23. Morgan, "Natural and Rational Love in Medieval Literature," 43-52.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Hill, "The Countervailing Aesthetic of Joy in "Troilus and Criseyde," 280-97.
27. Morgan, "Natural and Rational Love in Medieval Literature," 43-52.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Dante Alighieri, *The Harvard Classics*, ed. Charles W. Eliot. comp. Charles W. Eliot, Vol. 20 (New York: P.F Collier Company, 1909), *Google Books*, e-book, 217.

31. Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," 1-37.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Frances Horgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Dante, *The Harvard Classics*, 217.
35. Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, I, 998-99.
36. Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," 1-37.
37. Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III, 1437-1441.
38. Ibid., III, 1450-1456.
39. Ibid., III, 1464-1470, 1698-1708.