

## The Involvement of Gods & Goddesses Politics in the love of Troilus & Criseyde

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**Abstract:** This paper inspects the elusive divine involvement of politics in Geoffrey Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde, focussing on how the gods and goddesses vigorously trace the destiny of the insignificant lovers. Different from reflexive fantabulous and fabulous mythological records, goddesses such as Venus and Fortune exercise an enormous influence over human-emotion and decision-making, moulding hesitation on the independence of individual determination. By investigating supernatural manipulation and its emotional and political ramifications, the research investigates how Chaucer analyses the role of higher super-powers in shaping human and societal fates. Venus, representing the inconsistency and instability of love passion, and Fortune, demonstrating the unpredictable nature of earthly events, contribute to a tale formed by divine randomness and emotional softness. The consequent tension between predestination and free-will emphasizes Chaucer’s complex realization of love, fate, human and supernatural agency. Eventually, the poem propositions a clear deliberation on the boundaries of human control in a cosmos governed by heavenly impulse, revealing the comprehensive socio-political and supernatural consequences of such religious conceptions.

**Keywords:** Venus, Fortune, Free-will, Involvement, Supernatural.

### Introduction

Geoffrey Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde remains as a foundation of medieval literature, recognised for its delicate representation of love, fate, human and supernatural agency. At its core invention the miserable passion between the Trojan leader Troilus and the widowed Criseyde, set against the background of the Trojan War. Hitherto underneath this throbbing narration, Chaucer generates a rich inspection of heavenly influence, asking questions about the restrictions of human sovereignty in a world subjugated by volatile higher supernatural powers. The gods and goddesses of Troilus and Criseyde are far-flung from decorative figures; they serve as vigorous agents who generate events and personify the tensions between craving, destiny, and prime choice.

Among these divine characters Venus is foremost, the goddess of love, whose encouragement rouses Troilus’s romantic yearning. Her existence renovates love into a practically unescapable supernatural-powers, sparkling the medieval view of love as both a benediction and a threatening obligation (Chaucer I.1–52). Troilus’s original disrespect of love vicissitudes recklessly into acceptance under Venus’s control, indicating not unprompted sensitive progression but divine will of operation. Correspondingly, the figure of Fortune, referenced constantly throughout the poem, symbolizes the fickleness of worldly success and emotional stability. As Chaucer says, “For every wight that hath a hous to founde / He nempned hath in his composicioun / The mutabilitee of Fortune” (I.838–40), foregrounding the characters’ vulnerability to circumstances beyond their control.

Scholars have long recognized the religious and philosophical elements of Chaucer’s divine characters. Lee Patterson asserts that Chaucer adapts classical and Christian ideas of Fortune to underscore the instability of moral agency in a fallen world (Patterson 108), while Jill Mann emphasizes how divine powers in

the poem shape emotional experience rather than simply representing abstract allegories (Mann 132). These viewpoints underline that Chaucer’s use of heavenly forces—especially Venus and Fortune—functions not only as narrative adornment but as critical engagement with the era’s debates about determinism, providence, and moral freedom.

This book analyses how Chaucer deploys these divine creatures to interrogate current political and philosophical fears. Venus and Fortune, among others, serve as devices through which Chaucer investigates the contradictions between individual desire and divine or cosmic restriction. Their involvements are both symbolic and direct, altering characters’ decisions and underlining the tenuous boundary between autonomy and determinism. Over this portion of crystalline lens, Troilus and Criseyde develop not only as a replication on romantic tragedy but also as an evaluation of the socio-political, supernatural and theological frameworks that define—and confine—human and supernatural existence. The governance of the divinity, as portrayed in Chaucer’s text, thereby illustrate the essential back-and-forth between power, fate, and love in the twilight of medieval thoughts.

### Divine Influence in Medieval Literature

Celestial encouragement exhibits a significant role in medieval literature, shimmering the epoch’s amalgamation of philosophy, theology, and narrative art. In the medieval-view, heavenly supremacies were not abstract concepts but genuine beings unswervingly involved in the conception of human experience. Literary works of the period often exaggerates the struggle between divine prudence and human’s free-will, a concept profoundly fastened in Christian theological dissertation. Intellectuals such as Augustine of Hippo contended that while

divine providence directs the universe's grand design, human beings maintain the capacity for moral choice within this framework (Augustine 22). This battle between divine- control and personal-action is vividly discovered across medieval outstanding works, when supernatural forces interfere in human affairs, recurrently controlling characters toward moral reckoning or existential crises. In Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, supernatural spiritual beings such as Venus and Fortune play key story and symbolic roles.

Venus, the goddess of love, employs a transformational impression upon Troilus, whose unexpected craving is represented as divinely driven rather than self-generated: "And with that look she [Venus] smote hym to the herte" (Chaucer I.305). Her presence emphasizes the medieval perception that love may perform as a type of heavenly madness or coercion—an uncontrollable forces that both upraises and entraps. In distinction, Fortune illustrates the unpredicted, often vicious aspect of destiny. She impresses the impression as a character whose unpredictable favour causes the rise and falls of humans, autonomy of their virtue or goal. As Troilus notes, "Fortune! Oon hath al, another nought" (Chaucer I.841), indicating his understanding of the arbitrary character of his own delight and pain. The concept of the Wheel of Fortune—a ancient symbol adopted into medieval Christian thought—epitomizes this unpredictability. As Lewis elucidates, Fortune in medieval literature is not only a reflexive symbol of fate but an energetic supremacy that "reverses men's conditions, thus revealing their true spiritual state" (Lewis 120).

This theological interpretation saturates Fortune with moral consequence: setbacks of fortune are not haphazard catastrophes but divine prosecutions meant to interpret hubris, examine faith, or inspire remorse-ness. Beyond Chaucer, heavenly inspiration often works as a moralistic technique in medieval literature. In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, heavenly supernatural agents not only penalize or recompense souls in the life hereafter but also attend as counsellors for spiritual renovation. Dante's journey, driven by figures such as Virgil and Beatrice, is underpinned by a divine direction that personifies the moral-logic of Christian cosmology (Dante, 1–36). Likewise, the presence of God and spiritual beings throughout the poem represents a theological view in which divine justice is omnipresent, and redemption is indistinguishably connected to ethical knowledge. Therefore, the supernatural encouragement in medieval literature evolves on numerous stages—as narrative incentive, moral guidance, and philosophical encounter. Characters' communications with divine or supernatural powers highpoint greater cultural fears about fate, moral responsibility, and human fragility. Whether portrayed through classical goddesses like Venus and Fortune or Christian figures like God and angels, the divine in medieval manuscripts assist to investigate the restrictions of human control and the everlasting mystery of wisdom.

## The God Venus's Role as a Nurturer and Protector in *Troilus and Criseyde*

As the story developments in *Troilus and Criseyde*, the goddess Venus endures to employ an extensive inspiration—not merely by opening love but by nourishing and protection of its growth. Her supernatural involvements go from rabble-raising Troilus's primary enthusiasm to supporting and controlling him through his emotive voyages on erectile love. In Book II, at a period of weakness, Venus appears to Troilus in a dream, bringing both

reassurance and encouragement. "Venus... hir son hath sent / To helpe hym on his wey" (*Troilus and Criseyde* II.50–52). This vision appears when Troilus is beset by emotional confusion over Criseyde, and it provides as both a spiritual solace and symbolic validation of Venus's supernatural endorsement of his pursuit.

Chaucer offers this story not merely as a narrative embellishment but as an image of divine support for romantic love. Venus is far from a remote mythological character; she is intimately related to the real problems and emotional environment of her devotee. As Jill Mann argues, Venus in Chaucer's poem signifies "not just the power to arouse love but the capacity to sustain and protect it, even in adversity" (Mann 139). Her impact remains throughout Troilus's courtship, as she quietly strengthens him with optimism and emotional resilience. This persistent supernatural assistance contradicts the typical literary conception of Venus as a mere promoter of lust. Instead, Chaucer offers her as a moral and emotional anchor, bringing Troilus not only passion but advice and endurance. Her soothing presence, especially in periods of disagreement or doubt, suggests a more spiritually sophisticated function. When Troilus hesitates or falters in his romance, Venus remains a silent yet effective mentor, revealing how divine love in the medieval imagination might perform a protecting and formative function (Robertson 145).

In contrast to Fortune's unsettling brutality, Venus signifies consistency and emotional security. Her acts raise love to a divine mission, not just a passing emotion. As Lee Patterson maintains, Chaucer's presentation of Venus constitutes a crucial rethinking of ancient myth: "She is no longer the goddess of frivolity but of commitment, responsible for the spiritual dimensions of love" (Patterson 120). Thus, Venus is not only a stimulant for desire—she is a supernatural custodian of emotional integrity. Chaucer's complex portrayal echoes medieval notions about divine intercession, claiming that gods might accompany human souls through their emotional and moral tribulations. This theologically educated image portrays Venus not in opposition to Christian religion, but as part of a divine system that navigates human love through the stormy elements of chance and sorrow.

## The Symbolism of Venus

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Venus acts not just as a character but as a potent emblem of love's divine and contradictory nature. Chaucer's description of Venus corresponds with the medieval notion of the goddess as a powerful and occasionally capricious entity who oversees not only passionate longing but also the emotional troubles that accompany it. Over her emblematic existence, Chaucer reconnoitres the mystical and psychological sides of being darling, screening it as both a heavenly errand and a reason of human nuisance. The goddess's symbolic significance becomes obvious early in the narrative, when Troilus, initially contemptuous of lovers, is suddenly seized with ardent longing upon meeting Criseyde. This metamorphosis, attributed to Venus's influence, shows love as a divine and overpowering power: "Love, that of erthe and see hath governaunce, / Love, that his hestes hath in hevene hye" (*Troilus and Criseyde* I.15–16). Venus, as the embodiment of love, rules not only human feeling but the cosmic order itself. Her authority is shown as transcending human understanding, recalling the medieval concept that love was a force that emanated in the divine realm and disrupted rational control (Chaucer 370). Venus also symbolizes the idealized form of loving love. Her involvements drive Troilus and Criseyde toward a love defined by authenticity, emotional intensity, and loyalty.

In this way, she represented the courtly love tradition, which valued devotion and service to a beloved as morally and spiritually ennobling (Lewis 123). However, Chaucer compounds this symbolism by portraying Venus not only as a loving figure but also as a cause of instability. Her influence typically leads to heightened emotional sensitivity and mental struggle, reflecting the dual character of love in medieval thought—at once sublime and torturing. This complexity exposes Venus's conflicted metaphorical significance. While she increases human feeling and facilitates intimate connection, her presence also brings uncertainty and sorrow. As Jill Mann argues, "Love under Venus's dominion in Chaucer is never purely beneficent; it is a force that arouses, consumes, and destabilizes" (Mann 137). The goddess's role thus echoes the broader medieval idea of love as a trial of the soul, a divinely sanctioned yet deadly voyage. Ultimately, Venus serves as a symbol of both divine inspiration and emotional disorder, symbolising the contrasts of love itself. Through her symbolic presence, Chaucer urges readers to contemplate on love not simply as a human sensation but as a cosmic principle—one that unites and wounds, uplifts and destabilizes. Venus's involvements in Troilus and Criseyde demonstrates that love, the goddess herself, is a mediator of both attractiveness and catastrophe.

## Venus's Connections with Fortune

The back-and-forth in-between Venus and Fortune is vital to considerate the difficult dynamic power of godly encouragement and human feebleness in Troilus and Criseyde. Despite the fact Venus indicates the ideal of divine love—stimulated, lucratively passionate, and emotionally heartening—Fortune illustrates the illogical and irrational, rapidly compromising and changeable character of destiny. Their juxtaposed situations underline one of the poem's most throbbing themes: that even the haughtiest forms of love are prone to peripheral intermission and experiential infirmity. Venus, as the goddess of love, initiates and advances the adoringly romantic amorously lovely rapport in-between Troilus and Criseyde, controlling them on the way to a flawless emotive and mystical bodily union. Her godly presence seems assurance of the steadiness and accomplishment, confirming the picture of love as a heavenly gift directed by transcendental directions: "Love, that of erthe and see hath governaunce, / Love, that his hestes hath in hevene hye" (Troilus and Criseyde I.15–16).

This sagacity of cosmic mutual harmony, furthermore, is finally interrupted by the presence of Fortune, whose random will destabilizes the prudently constructed romantic model. Fortune's inspiration develops predominantly apparent in the future books of the poem. When Criseyde is traded as part of a political transaction, her departure heralds the beginning of a disastrous reversal in Troilus's fortune. His sorrow and emotional collapse illustrate the limits of Venus's influence and the overpowering power of Fortune to upend even divinely sanctioned relationships: "O Fortune, executrice of wierdes, / O influences of this hevene above!" (Troilus IV.1–2). This lament depicts how Troilus, once a beloved topic of Venus, is now thrown down by Fortune's wheel—an image profoundly established in medieval literature to signify the volatility of human happiness (Lewis 152). The contrast between Venus and Fortune underscores a crucial philosophical contradiction in the poem: love's idealization versus life's unpredictability. While Venus provides emotional and spiritual support, her influence proves insufficient to preserve Troilus's love from the external realities of politics, battle, and betrayal. As Robertson explains, Chaucer's Fortune is not only a force of chaos

but a theological emblem of divine testing, indicating the fleeting and trial-ridden character of worldly relationships (Robertson 191). This divine competition indicates Chaucer's connection with Boethian philosophy, particularly the idea that genuine constancy lay not in outward circumstances but in the soul's alignment with divine intent. Yet Troilus, still emotionally committed in earthly love, becomes a sad person stuck between Venus's ideal and Fortune's brutality. His ruin imitates the dangerous situation of human beings who pursue perfection through love and all amorous are restricted to the temporariness of the short span of world. In accordance with the relations in-between Venus and Fortune in Troilus and Criseyde imitate Chaucer's serious empathy on celestial politics. Desire and love, anyhow delightfully enthused, cannot drainage the superior power of luck. The subsequent tension between existential impermanence and emotional idealism engenders a gloomy visualization of love's weakness in a universe conquered by differing supernatural powers.

## Theological and Philosophical Implications

In this view, divine inspiration does not remove human choice but rather influences the environment under which individuals act. Venus's mentoring of Troilus and Criseyde shows this dual structure: she generates love, but the lovers themselves must choose how to respond to that love. Her impact thus mirrors the idea that supernatural powers may bend human hearts without destroying moral autonomy (Augustine 90). Chaucer's picture of Venus coincides as well with Boethian philosophy, particularly with *The Consolation of Philosophy*, a text well-known to Chaucer and influential in Troilus and Criseyde. Boethius contends that ultimate happiness rests not in earthly love or Fortune's gifts, but in aligning the soul with the divine order (Boethius III.9). Troilus's eventual disillusionment, followed by his death and rise to the eighth sphere—where he sees "the erratic starres" beneath him (Troilus V.1807)—suggests a Boethian denouement. Despite Venus's nurturing function, the poem eventually challenges devotion to temporal love, elevating divine wisdom above sensual desire (Pearsall 214). At the same time, Venus's symbolic significance echoes medieval understandings of love as a spiritually formative force.

In contrast to Fortune's arbitrary disruptions, Venus depicts a heavenly principle of order and desire, pointing toward the possibility for love to elevate rather than debase. As Jill Mann notes, "Chaucer's Venus is morally serious: her influence marks not just emotional intensity but a test of character" (Mann 140). In this perspective, Venus is not simply a goddess of passion but a vehicle for ethical reform. Her interactions with Fortune further accentuate the theological contradiction of a universe governed by both divine design and unforeseeable contingency. While Venus represents harmony and emotional fulfilment, Fortune intervenes to remind the characters—and the audience—of the frailty of earthly attachments. The conflicting positions of these two celestial figures reflect a medieval cosmology in which spiritual truth must finally transcend emotional desire. In Troilus and Criseyde, then, Venus is more than a classical deity—she is a theological construct, representing the contradictions of divine love, free will, and moral evolution. Chaucer uses her to examine the intricacies of human experience in a universe guided by both divine purpose and temporal volatility. Over Venus's communications with Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer shapes a classy meditation on the nature of

love as both divinely choreographed and deeply human, both a gift and an examination.

## Divine Politics and Human Agency

Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is an elusive and often bewildering exploration of the relationship between divine politics and human agency. In the poem, spiritual beings such as Venus and Fortune are not abstract symbols but genuine participants whose involvements touch the route of human lives. These involvements reflect greater medieval theological and philosophical issues, particularly those involving fate, free-will, and moral culpability. Through his characters' fights with divine forces, Chaucer questions the scope of individuals might keep fit autonomy in a world governed by contradictory spiritual powers. The concept of deific politics projects most clearly over the back-and-forth between Venus and Fortune. Venus replicates the heavenly ideal of love—its power to inspire, uplift, and spiritually renovate. Her gentle caring role in *Troilus's* emotional journey indicates that supernatural involvement can assist human accomplishment (Chaucer I.295–300). Even divine favour does not assure any pleasure. As the relationship evolves, Fortune's capricious whim quickly overturns Venus's influence, underlining the volatility of any bliss rooted in temporal conditions. When Criseyde is traded for a Trojan prisoner, leading to her eventual betrayal of *Troilus*, Chaucer dramatizes the fragility of human hopes under the unpredictable dominion of divine powers: "O Fortune, executrice of wierdes, / O influences of this hevene above!" (*Troilus and Criseyde* IV.1–2).

This poetic invocation of Fortune as the "executrice of wierdes" (executor of destinies) foregrounds Chaucer's engagement with Boethian philosophy, especially the idea that Fortune governs the mutable realm of earthly experience, while true stability lies in aligning the will with divine Providence (Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* II.1). *Troilus*, stuck between his devotion to Venus and his suffering under fortune, portrays the confused medieval subject—torn between emotional yearning and spiritual surrender, between individual will and divine manipulation. Despite the tremendous influence of external factors, Chaucer does not depict his characters as passive victims. Human agency is crucial to the moral structure of the poetry. *Troilus* decides to pursue Criseyde, he chooses to trust her, and he chooses how to respond to her treachery. These decisions indicate moral autonomy, even under the restrictions of divine influence. As Augustine argues, divine foresight and providence do not eliminate free will: "God foreknows our free will choices, but we still make them freely" (*City of God* V.9). Chaucer quietly confirms this idea by showing how heavenly forces set the stage, but individuals are responsible for the moral integrity of their deeds. *Troilus's* fault rests not in loving, but in connecting his ultimate hope to something mutable—Criseyde's constancy and worldly love—rather than transcendent truth. His sorrow is thus not merely a question of divine cruelty, but of mistaken devotion. As Lee Patterson argues, "*Troilus's* suffering becomes meaningful only insofar as it reveals the limitations of temporal desire and the necessity of spiritual insight" (Patterson 167). In this light, Chaucer's divine politics serve not to obliterate human will but to confront and reinterpret its relevance. The poem becomes a reflection on the limits of control, the significance of moral intention, and the soul's position amid a divinely structured yet chaotic world. Venus and Fortune may affect results, but the ethical duty of reaction belongs with the person. Through this tension, *Troilus and Criseyde* shows the

depth of medieval thought, as theology, love, and philosophy converge to confront enduring questions about what it means to be human in a world governed by heavenly, yet often inexplicable, forces.

## The Role of Divine Influence

In the poem *Troilus and Criseyde*, Venus, the goddess of love, plays a vital role in beginning and nurturing the relationship between *Troilus* and Criseyde. Her efforts are portrayed as at once sympathetic and manipulative, reflecting the view that love, albeit divinely inspired, is rarely easy or ethically unambiguous. *Troilus's* metamorphosis from contemptuous warrior to ardent lover is directly linked to Venus's influence: "Love, that of erthe and see hath governaunce, / Love, that his hestes hath in hevене hye" (*Troilus and Criseyde* I.15–16). This argues that love is not only emotional or psychological but cosmic in scale, governed by celestial forces beyond human understanding. Venus's influence encourages the idealization of love as transformational and spiritually charged, while it also introduces emotional vulnerability, dependency, and the potential for disillusionment (Mann 138).

In contrast, Fortune represents the inconstancy and unpredictability of fate, a power that functions without regard to human effort or moral merit. As the narrative unfolds, her role becomes increasingly dominant—especially in Book IV, when Criseyde is swapped for a Trojan prisoner and ultimately abandons *Troilus*. This turn of events reveals the unpredictable nature of Fortune's power and highlights the limitations of divine compassion. *Troilus's* lament, "O Fortune, executrice of wierdes" (IV.1), directly connects his suffering to Fortune's whim, recalling the medieval image of the wheel of fortune, which symbolizes the cyclical and unstable aspect of human existence (Lewis 130). Together, Venus and Fortune represent warring divine principles—one idealistic and passionate, the other disruptive and indifferent. Their interactions with the characters disclose a world in which human happiness is contingent and fragile, sensitive to forces that operate above and beyond individual will. Yet Chaucer does not totally absolve his characters of agency. *Troilus*, for instance, continues to choose love, trust, and grieving despite the heavenly pressures surrounding him. As D. W. Robertson argues, Chaucer shows heavenly intervention not as compulsion but as moral testing, laying the responsibility of virtue and insight on the person (Robertson 189). In this theologically infused picture, divine figures intervene not to dictate outcomes, but to modify the arena of human choice, making virtue more difficult but more important. The presence of heavenly intervention in *Troilus and Criseyde* thus represents a profound contradiction at the heart of medieval Christian cosmology: the simultaneous administration of providence and the preservation of human freedom.

## Tension between Divine Will and Human Agency

The tension between heavenly will and human agency lies at the heart of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Through the interactions of Venus and Fortune, Chaucer portrays a cosmos in which supernatural forces simultaneously inspire and hinder human impulses, presenting complicated concerns about free will, moral accountability, and the nature of fate. This dualism reflects broader medieval intellectual concerns, especially those informed by Augustinian theology and Boethian determinism, about the



limitations of autonomy within a divinely regulated cosmos. Venus represents an idealized, organised form of heavenly love. Her influence on Troilus is clear from the moment he sees Criseyde and is captivated by a passion that overwhelms his reason and past indifference: “Love at the first sight him so a frayde / That with his look the spirit from his herte / Stirte and he waxe abasshed and eek dismayde” (Troilus and Criseyde I.295–297). Though Troilus considers himself to be acting out of personal emotion, Chaucer’s invocation of Venus at the outset of the poem suggests that his passion is divinely choreographed, placing his will in service of a higher, cosmic love (Chaucer I.1–7).

Venus’s influence is thus formative yet subtle, moulding emotions while keeping the illusion of choice. By contrast, Fortune functions without moral compass, expressing the medieval notion of fate as unstable, unpredictable, and indifferent. Her influence is most vividly felt in Book IV, when Criseyde is exchanged for a Trojan prisoner. The decision is political, but its emotional consequence is tremendous, plunging Troilus into despair. His agony is worsened by the understanding that no amount of human virtue or effort can overcome the capricious reversals Fortune enacts: “O Fortune, executrice of wierdes, / O influences of this hevene above!” (IV.1–2). Troilus’s despair becomes representative of the philosophical paradox in Chaucer’s poem: how can individuals exercise moral agency if supernatural forces govern the outcomes? Chaucer does not reconcile this conflict but rather uses it to illustrate the complexity of human experience in a divinely structured yet chaotic world. While Venus is frequently represented as kind and guiding, Fortune represents divine will’s mysterious aspect. Together, they enact the two poles of medieval religious anxiety: the optimism that divine love rules the creation with purpose, and the worry that life is ultimately dominated by forces that reject individual virtue or intention (Lewis 128; Augustine 94). Yet Chaucer also argues that human beings are not wholly passive. Troilus takes choices—he chooses to love, to trust Criseyde, and to lament her passing. His decisions, however influenced by divine beings, are morally meaningful.

## Moral and Ethical Implications

Troilus’s pain consequently becomes a cause for intellectual inquiry. While Venus operates as a moral support—representing the uplifting, idealistic part of love—Fortune serves as a disruptive force, questioning the stability of virtue. As Robertson argues, Chaucer’s characters are not just pawns of heavenly manipulation; their moral worth depends in their response to misfortune, not in their capacity to avoid it (Robertson 207). Troilus’s persistence, despite his misfortunes, validates his ethical stature, even as his end remains tragic. Criseyde’s moral position, however, is significantly murkier. Her decision to remain in the Greek camp, though perhaps motivated by external forces and fear, is still an act of abandonment. Chaucer confuses the reader’s judgment by foregrounding her internal conflict: “She wex a moren red, and eke pal pale, / That neither ys she to saye durste ne wryte” (V.1057–58). Criseyde is not villainized but shown as a figure trapped between duty, survival, and emotional truth. Her choice highlights a medieval moral tension: the conflict between personal loyalty and social restraint, especially for women in patriarchal institutions. As Jill Mann maintains, Chaucer allows Criseyde to remain morally equivocal, particularly to illustrate the limits of basic ethical categories (Mann 150). This ambiguity emphasises the central philosophical conflict of the poem: can individuals be held totally accountable for choices made under supernatural or

situational pressure? Chaucer seems to argue that while divine powers complicate decision-making, they do not abolish ethical responsibility. Rather, morality consists in the integrity of intention and perseverance, even when outcomes are beyond human control. Ultimately, Troilus and Criseyde offers a meditation on morality in a damaged world. Venus and Fortune do not remove the weight of decision but frame it with suffering. The poem provides a vision of moral conflict, where clarity is elusive and justice delayed, yet where ethical significance originates in how characters manage love, betrayal, and suffering under heavenly watch.

## Theological Reflections

The theological dimensions of Troilus and Criseyde are crucial to understanding the interplay between heavenly politics and human agency in the poem. Chaucer’s involvement with theological discourse—particularly the Augustinian and Thomistic traditions—enables a deep study on the nature of providence, free will, and divine justice. Through the figures of Venus and Fortune, Chaucer dramatizes medieval fears over how a divinely ordered cosmos could allow true human freedom and moral responsibility. Augustine’s idea of divine providence maintains that God’s will directs all events in history, yet human beings are morally responsible for their decisions since they act freely within this providential system. As Augustine argues in *The City of God*, “the will is truly free when it serves God’s plan willingly, though that plan governs all things” (Augustine 23).

In Troilus and Criseyde, this perspective is echoed in the way Troilus’s love appears divinely ordered through Venus, yet his responses—pursuing Criseyde, trusting her, mourning her—are presented as morally autonomous acts, not coerced behaviours. Divine influence does not overrule the character’s moral freedom, but rather sets the theological and emotional context for human decision-making. Thomas Aquinas, building on Augustine, tackles the difficulty of divine omniscience and human freedom by stating that God, being outside of time, perceives all events—past, present, and future—simultaneously.

Therefore, His omniscience does not undermine free will but covers all conceivable human choices (Aquinas 76). Chaucer’s story reflects this concept by allowing for divine orchestration (via Venus and Fortune) while still depicting the characters as morally culpable. For example, Criseyde’s treachery is not attributed entirely to Fortune’s disturbance but is contextualized as a conscious, ethically difficult action, impacted by situation but not decided by it. The poem also engages closely with the problem of divine justice. Troilus’s unwavering loyalty and suffering pose painful questions about the fairness of divine intervention. Why should a figure that represents steadfastness and integrity be exposed to such emotional and spiritual devastation? The poem’s tragic resolution—culminating in Troilus’s death and his soul’s passage to the spheres—suggests that justice may exist on a spiritual plane, even when it is hidden in earthly outcomes. As Chaucer writes in the epilogue: “And whan that he was slayn in this manere, / His lighte goost ful blissfully it wente / Up to the holownesse of the eighthe spere” (Troilus and Criseyde V.1807–1809).

This cosmic assumption towards Boethian solace—the belief that earthly suffering is understood only within a divine system that transcends temporal knowledge (Boethius II.1). Thus, Troilus and Criseyde does not just illustrate religious idea but interrogates it

through story form. Chaucer's poem becomes a literary place where problems of divine justice, providence, and moral agency are not answered definitively, but examined with depth and reverence. The theological implications of the novel push readers to explore how human freedom functions within divine systems and whether virtue can endure amid the seeming arbitrariness of divine will.

## Divine Will as a Guiding Force

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, divine will appears as a forceful, guiding force—particularly through the figure of Venus, the goddess of love. Her task is not only to inspire affection but to actively organise emotional states, connections, and outcomes. Venus acts as both a loving and manipulating presence, representing the medieval understanding of divine love as both transcendent and morally contradictory. Troilus's change from a detached warrior to a loving lover is a direct consequence of Venus's will. Initially suspicious of love entanglements, he is unexpectedly overwhelmed upon seeing Criseyde, as Chaucer narrates: "So sodeynly, that wonder was to see, / He wax therwith astoned in his herte" (*Troilus and Criseyde* I.272–73). This quick transformation indicates divine love's power to overcome intellectual resistance, agreeing with the medieval concept that emotions may be divinely instilled. Chaucer clearly links this event to Venus's influence, describing her as a celestial force that originates and sustains human passion (*Chaucer* I.1–7; 15). Venus's position is further developed in Book II, as she appears to Troilus in a dream, bringing solace during a moment of relational ambiguity. This scenario depicts her as a guardian deity, not simply beginning love but also guiding and fostering it: "And Venus laugheth upon every wight" (*Troilus and Criseyde* II.50). Such situations represent the medieval idea of divine will as a sustaining power, not only a trigger for human action, but a continuing influence that changes human decisions in conformity with cosmic or moral order (Augustine 23).

## The Tension between Free Will and Divine Determinism

While Venus's acts indicate divine will as a guiding force, Chaucer also presents a continual tension between heavenly determinism and human free will, confusing the moral landscape of the poem. The love Troilus experiences may be divinely inspired, but his choices—pursuing Criseyde, trusting her, being loyal—reflect individual agency within a framework of heavenly power. This paradox correlates strongly with Thomistic theology, as Thomas Aquinas argues that God's foreknowledge does not cancel free choice; rather, God perceives all outcomes simultaneously without coercing them: "The knowledge of God... is not the cause of things, but encompasses all time in a single vision" (Aquinas 76).

Consequently, Chaucer's characters function with moral freedom, even as they move within a world controlled by divine forces. Fortune, in particular, contributes to this intricacy. Her interference in Criseyde's fate—most notably her swap for a Trojan prisoner—introduces an element of randomness and disruption. Troilus is crushed not by any moral fault of his own, but by Fortune's reversal, wailing, "O Fortune, executrice of wierdes, / O influences of this hevene above!" (*Troilus and Criseyde* IV.1–2). This invocation of Fortune symbolises a change from divine guidance to divine indifference, suggesting a universe where even love, though divinely decreed, is prone to instability. Criseyde's acts, meanwhile, reveal the limits of moral agency under supernatural or

situational constraint. Her departure from Troilus, however driven by political need and terror, remains a conscious decision, placing her in a morally difficult position. As critics like Jill Mann suggest, Chaucer employs Criseyde to highlight the ethical complexity of judgements made under stress, asking medieval readers to analyse moral responsibility in light of divine and external restriction (Mann 146). The poem's conclusion—Troilus's death and spiritual ascension—raises significant issues about divine justice. His suffering seems unjust when measured by human standards, however the final vision of his spirit soaring to the eighth sphere promises a sublime reward beyond worldly comprehension: "And forth he wente shortly for to telle, / Ther as he saw upon a tour, on hye, / In spirit, Venus" (*Troilus and Criseyde* V.1806–08). Here, Chaucer gives a Boethian resolve, saying that while worldly justice may appear arbitrary, divine justice acts on a higher, unseen plane (Boethius III.9).

## Theological and Philosophical Context

The investigation of divine will and human behaviour in *Troilus and Criseyde* is heavily affected by medieval theological and philosophical discourse, particularly the ideas of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas. Chaucer embeds this philosophical heritage inside the framework of his narrative, stimulating meditation on divine providence, free will, and moral agency. Augustine maintains that divine providence regulates the universe while providing for human free will within that order: "God has foreknowledge of all events, but man is still free to choose" (Augustine 23). This contradiction is important to the poetry. Venus and Fortune, albeit celestial actors, do not totally erase the autonomy of Troilus and Criseyde. Their experiences are shaped—but not fully determined—by these supernatural influences. Aquinas, similarly, underlined that God's omniscience does not contradict human freedom, as divine foresight covers all potentialities without enforcing them (Aquinas 76). This notion reflects the way Chaucer permits Troilus to make emotionally motivated yet ethically relevant choices, even under Venus's direction or Fortune's disturbance.

## Troilus's Struggle of Love

Troilus's attempt to win Criseyde's favour symbolises not just romantic yearning but also the burden of fate, divine influence, and chivalric duty. His initial aversion to love is overturned by divine will—Venus compels him to fall unexpectedly and permanently in love: "So sodeynly, that wonder was to see, / He wax therwith astoned in his herte" (*Troilus and Criseyde* I.272–73). This heavenly urge renders Troilus both a lover and a victim of cosmic design, revealing how passion may be divine yet destabilizing. His efforts are further affected by social rules; as a noble Trojan prince, his love must fit with the ideals of courtly love and honour (*Chaucer* 131). Social expectations weigh significantly. Troilus must balance his public responsibility with his private yearning, making his pursuit of Criseyde a test of virtue, patience, and manly integrity. This cultural strain grows as the tale proceeds (*Chaucer* 145, 152).

## The Role of Honour and Social Expectations

Despite the backing of Venus and his own moral perseverance, Troilus's journey ends in tragedy and grief. Criseyde's treachery, compelled by political necessity and Fortune's manipulation,

symbolises the limits of love in a hostile world: “O Fortune, executrice of wierdes” (Troilus and Criseyde IV.1). Even divine love cannot prevail against the destabilizing force of Fortune, whose wheel converts lovers into losers (Chaucer 178, 185). Troilus’s suffering and final death reflect the classical tragic arc and support Chaucer’s Boethian sense of cosmic injustice, where divine fate is impenetrable to human comprehension.

## The Tragic Resolution

Set in war-torn Troy, the poem merges the inner politics of love with the public ramifications of war and diplomacy. Divine will does not work in a vacuum—it infiltrates political decisions and diplomatic engagements. Troilus, as a Trojan prince, must combine his own longing with public duty (Chaucer 12, 22). Venus’s involvement in his heart distracts from, yet also remarks on, his role in state affairs. His emotional fragility demonstrates how even the finest political figures are subject to divine caprice.

## Venus and the Politics of Love

Venus, as the goddess of love, serves both metaphorically and politically. Her participation is more than heavenly whim; it signifies a challenge to established social and political conventions. By sparking Troilus’s passion, she uproots courtly norms and unsettles the expectations of noble conduct (Chaucer 35, 47). Her influence is disruptive and revolutionary, highlighting the collision between personal passion and political responsibility. Troilus becomes emotionally compromised—his feelings, however honest, conflict with his duties and undermine his public image.

## The Intersection of Personal and Political Ambitions

Criseyde’s acts, too, exist at the nexus of personal dread and political survival. Her betrayal of Troilus is not a simple question of fickleness but a reflection of social weakness and pragmatic necessity during battle (Chaucer 108, 112). She is exploited by both Fortune and male-dominated political processes, implying that heavenly politics functions within—and frequently exacerbates—human systems of authority.

## Conclusion

Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde give a highly layered portrait of divine influence, human action, and political struggle. Venus and Fortune do not only symbolize love and fate—they are active political forces, impacting both personal relationships and state affairs. Through their interactions with the characters, Chaucer analyses the frailty of human agency and explores the philosophical dilemmas of freedom and foreordination, love and betrayal, and private desire and public duty. The tragic resolution illustrates the limited usefulness of heavenly support in a world

governed by societal expectations and Fortuna’s unpredictability. By weaving theological and political criticism into his narrative, Chaucer transforms a classical love story into a philosophical meditation on divine politics and the human predicament.

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