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Myth and the Present: Chaucer's *Troilus* as a Mirror for Ricardian England

Whether history repeats itself or not has always been a key concern for theoreticians of history in the widest sense of the word. It stretches from the ancient belief in recurring circles of being, posited by the Physicists, to Marx's relatively recent theory of a farcical repetition of the past. Read against this horizon, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* becomes a subtle negotiation of both the view of recurring historical circles and the medieval notion of a teleological historical development, as found in Augustine, Boethius and many other. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, history is presented as neither teleological (as in Boethius and Augustine) nor circular (as in pagan thought), but rather as a complex merger of these two opposing concepts.

We should not underestimate the importance of the Troy myth in medieval England, which would in itself already give Chaucer's poem a political dimension. His critique of historiography serves to set up his fictional Trojan polis as a mirror for his contemporary society, simultaneously stressing its closeness and detachment. Although Chaucer characteristically does not present his audience with an easily discernible solution to the problems he treats in his poem, he nonetheless uses his fictional Trojans to highlight possible shortcomings in his own contemporaries.