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Friend or Foe:  
Chaucer's Depiction of Women in *Troilus and Criseyde*

Vanessa Balis  
DePauw University

Honor Scholar Program

Class of 2020

Primary Thesis Sponsor: Dr. Amity Reading

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### Abstract

Often considered the father of English poetry, Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1340s-1400 CE) produced a number of famous poems during his lifetime, the most famous arguably being *The Canterbury Tales*. But another of his works, *Troilus and Criseyde*, is often considered the best example of both his poetic ability and his creative use of sources.<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, I will be considering whether Chaucer supports or subverts a patriarchal social structure, specifically by looking at his representation of women in *Troilus and Criseyde* in comparison to his source Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*. Instead of resorting to the assumptive rhetoric of women as either meek or villainous, Chaucer's unique narrative and subtle stylistic deviations from his source material reframe the choices of female protagonist Criseyde as the necessary product of the social role that she has been forced into by her family, her lover, and her society. In doing so, Chaucer implies the hypocrisy of medieval society's construction of the female role by revealing the society's direct involvement in the choices she is criticized for. Ultimately, Chaucer seems to be critiquing the society *around* women rather than the women themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> I make this claim because it is both: the longest complete poem that Chaucer wrote and it was written at the height of his career (ca. 1380's).

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## Introduction

On May 4th, 1380, Geoffrey Chaucer, the so-called ‘Father of English Poetry’ (ca. 1340s-1400 CE) was acquitted of the charge of “raptus,” or rape. While records of the original charge and resulting adjudication have not been found, the discovery of an acquittal document proves that Chaucer had previously been brought to trial by Cecily Chaumpaigne with the charge of “raptus.” Chaucer was later released from the charges with impunity and faced no public legal consequences upon his release by Chaumpaigne of “omnimodas acciones tam de raptu meo tam de aliqua alia re vel causa”<sup>2</sup> [all sorts of actions so concerned with my *raptus* as well as any other [related] matter or cause]. Although the definition of raptus as *rape*<sup>3</sup> (as in the modern sense of sexual assault) is supported by a comparison of Chaucer and Chaumpaigne’s legal document to other medieval rape cases,<sup>4</sup> it has also been translated as *abduction*<sup>5</sup> (the somewhat more common definition in Chaucer’s time, referring to the violent seizure of persons or property).<sup>6</sup> However, without legal proof of a guilty verdict or detailed descriptions of the crime, it is impossible to say for certain that Chaucer was proclaimed guilty of the crime of “raptus,” or what raptus could mean.

The recent uncovering of three other legal documents--the release of Chaucer by London citizens Richard Goodchild and John Grove, the release of Goodchild and Grove by Chaumpaigne when she acquitted Chaucer, and the establishment of a ten pound debt to Chaumpaigne<sup>7</sup>--further

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<sup>2</sup> Close Roll 219, 3 Ric. II, m. 9 d, quoted in Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1990), p. 135-138. Accessed Wednesday, April 8th, 2020, <http://www.umsi.edu/~gradyf/chaucer/cecily.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary records the definition of the word “raptu” in the modern sense *rape* as early as 1425. S.v. “rape,” Oxford English Dictionary, Accessed Wednesday, April 8th, 2020. <https://www-oed-com.duproxy.palni.edu/view/Entry/158145?rskey=zIEpH&result=3&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Cannon, “*Raptus* in the Chaumpaigne Release and a Newly Discovered Document Concerning the Life of Geoffrey Chaucer,” in *Speculum* no. 68 (1993), p. 74-94. Accessed April 5, 2020. [http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/varia/life\\_of\\_Ch/chris.htm](http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/varia/life_of_Ch/chris.htm).

<sup>5</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary records the definition of the word “abduction” in the modern sense *kidnapping* as early as 1436. S.v. “abduction,” Oxford English Dictionary, Accessed Wednesday, April 8th, 2020. <https://www-oed-com.duproxy.palni.edu/view/Entry/215?redirectedFrom=abduction#contentWrapper>.

<sup>6</sup> Pearsall, *Life*.

<sup>7</sup> Pearsall, *Life*.

complicates the possible definition of *raptus* as either “rape” or “abduction,” and scholars have recently argued that perhaps Chaucer had been involved in the kidnapping (another form of *raptus*) of Chaumpaigne for the purposes of marrying her to his minor ward, Edmund Staplegate.<sup>8</sup> Despite clearly recording an acquittal, the surviving documents nevertheless suggest some wrongdoing on the part of Chaucer. If Chaumpaigne released Goodchild and Grove alongside Chaucer in the acquittal, whether it be that they participated in a gang rape against Chaumpaigne or they assisted in an abduction of her, it is clear that all of the men were involved in some form of the crime in question. Chaucer’s debt to Chaumpaigne is further proof of his involvement; typically, when a woman accused a man of rape in the medieval period, the cases were written off, and the woman could even be arrested for “lying” about the occurrence of the rape.<sup>9</sup> Even in the rare circumstance that a woman surpassed the bias of a male-favouring courtroom, a woman’s necessity for a man’s resources meant that women were often bribed by men with money to dismiss the rape accusation: this exchange allowed for women to gain the resources they needed while the accused male maintained his untarnished reputation. Therefore, while the payment of Chaumpaigne by Chaucer is not equal to a conviction, it does imply a sense of obligation towards Chaumpaigne that likely came from a guilty conscience.

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<sup>8</sup> According to recently discovered documentation by medieval scholar Sebastian Sobiecki (qtd in Flood), Chaucer was the guardian of minor Edmund Staplegate until 1382, which means Staplegate would have been under the age of 20 at the time of the incident. It was accepted social practice in medieval times for guardians to abduct women within the same social class as a bride for their minor “groom.” Since “Chaumpaigne...would have been socially the peer of [Staplegate],” Chaucer’s choice to abduct Chaumpaigne would have made sense in the context of medieval society. Therefore, it’s plausible that “*raptus*” simply meant “abduction” in this specific legal document. However, Chaumpaigne’s ability to serve as the acting party releasing Chaucer from his crime, as the documentation states, meant that *she* must have been her own legal guardian at the time, and such cases were typically played out as a minor kidnapped on behalf of another minor. Allison Flood, “Document Casts New Light on Chaucer ‘Rape’ Case.” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, 2019). Accessed December 4, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jun/07/document-casts-new-light-on-chaucer-rape-case>.

<sup>9</sup> Mike Streich, “Rape in the Middle Ages,” Short History Website (2017) Accessed April 10, 2020, <https://www.shorthistory.org/middle-ages/rape-in-the-middle-ages/>.

Although there appears to be ample evidence that Chaucer committed either possible form of “raptus” based on the debt payment and two complaint releases, a lack of concrete legal evidence leaves scholars unable to determine the exact definition in Chaucer’s case. But regardless of the exact nature of his crime against Chaumpaigne, the incident itself clearly had an impact on Chaucer’s motivations and inspirations in his subsequent writing. His pieces after the date of the trial—including but not limited to *The Legend of Good Women* (1380s) and *Troilus and Criseyde* (1380-1387) --are different from his earlier pieces in that they advocate for women rather than villainize them. This drastic stylistic change could imply he developed a keen interest in exploring women’s voices in his writing following the acquittal. Chaucer’s representation of women’s stories in these texts usually involves a critique of men’s mistreatment of women. The connection between Chaucer’s experience during the Chaumpaigne trial and the subsequent changes to the nature of his writing is too pronounced to be coincidence. He appears to have been atoning for the crime he committed against the silenced Chaumpaigne. While he could not change his past actions--and his works are fictional, not autobiographical--Chaucer’s sudden attention to the female voice allows him to advocate for better treatment of women in the most effective way he could: in his writing. By writing in support of women, he could reveal the restrictions placed on them by all men to relay a social critique on the power dynamics between men and women in medieval society. Ultimately, Chaucer’s vocalization of the unheard female voice in his later pieces of literature could help set a new precedent for female treatment in the reality of medieval society.

### **A Summary of *Troilus and Criseyde***

Following the rape trial, and at the height of his career, Chaucer wrote *Troilus and Criseyde*. Although not as famous as *The Canterbury Tales*, the poem is often lauded as Chaucer’s best and it represents the peak of his poetic skill and creativity. The poem centers on the affair



between two lovers, the Trojan prince Troilus and the beautiful widow Criseyde, during the Trojan War. After being abandoned by her father, Criseyde is in the care of her paternal uncle Pandarus, best friend of soldier Troilus. Troilus falls in love with Criseyde upon seeing her and enlists Pandarus to convince her to agree to an affair. The rest of the poem follows the development of their love affair to its tragic end, when Criseyde leaves Troy and takes a new lover, the Greek soldier Diomedes. After Criseyde's so-called betrayal, Troilus dies heroically but miserably, valiantly fighting the Greeks. The poem leaves us unsure of the fate of Criseyde and Diomedes. The narrative is traditionally understood as an example of the fickleness of female love and a cautionary tale for male lovers.

While writing his version of the story, the central focus for medieval writers like Chaucer was the relationship between lovers (as told through the genre of courtly love). Courtly love, or *fin amour*, is the way that romantic relationships were performed in medieval literature.<sup>10</sup> The concept of courtly love has its origin in the medieval Italian literature that Chaucer would have encountered during his time traveling in the royal court.<sup>11</sup> Courtly love was defined by several key factors; one of which was only practiced by aristocrats.<sup>12</sup> Aristocrats believed that the lower classes of peasants and serfs did not have the mental capacity to carry on a relationship of courtly love because their spirits were not refined enough for it. Courtly love was also ritualistic - lovers were expected to share tokens of their love, be it material things such as pins, rings, locketts or verbal vows like declarations of love or letters.<sup>13</sup> The choice for Criseyde to give Diomedes the token of

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<sup>10</sup> The defining work on this subject is C.S. Lewis's *Allegory of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013). Lewis extensively develops the main characteristics of courtly love (it's secrecy, transgressiveness, and connection to chivalry) in a series of close readings of representative medieval romances.

<sup>11</sup> Larry D. Benson, "Courtly Love and Chivalry in the Later Middle Ages," Harvard's Geoffrey Chaucer Website, p. 239-254, Accessed April 7th, 2020, <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/courtly-love-and-chivalry-later-middle-ages>.

<sup>12</sup> Amity Reading

<sup>13</sup> Amity Reading

love Troilus gave her is a perfect example of the ritualistic side of courtly love. By giving it to him, Diomede is always reminded of his love even when he is far away, or in this case, at war.

Finally and above all else, courtly love was based in secrecy.<sup>14</sup> Since courtly love relationships<sup>15</sup> were usually transgressive or adulterous, the practitioners of courtly love maintained their dignity by keeping their love private.<sup>16</sup> If a relationship became public, it would be terminated immediately, and society would shame solely the woman, although the man was just as involved. The close scrutiny of women evoked a fear of shame, which is present in the worrisome dialogue of Criseyde and at times of Troilus when he worries about how their relationship or certain choices may pose consequences for Criseyde.

### ***Troilus and Criseyde Before Chaucer***

Although this thesis will be analyzing Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and his unique stylistic adaptations as a case study, the foundational story of the lovers Troilus and Criseyde is not a Chaucerian original. The mythological setting of the narrative (Troy during the Trojan War) can be traced to Homer's *Iliad*,<sup>17</sup> but Chaucer's focus on the romance between the lovers was influenced by Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* (1340 CE), which was itself inspired by Benoit de Sainte Maure's *Roman de Troie* (ca. 1160 CE).<sup>18</sup> As the tale was adapted over the course of centuries, each writer developed a unique way of telling the story to fit their specific intentions. In the *Iliad*, Troilus is briefly mentioned only as one of the several princes of Troy--little other attention is given to him. Centuries later, Benoit takes up both the character and the

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<sup>14</sup> Amity Reading

<sup>15</sup> Amity Reading

<sup>16</sup> Amity Reading

<sup>17</sup> Louise Bishop. "Background of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," University of Oregon (2020). Accessed January 12, 2020, [https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Troilus\\_&\\_Criseyde.pdf](https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Troilus_&_Criseyde.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Benoit's text arguably originated the popular medieval version of the narrative, which focused on Troilus as a lover figure. Ibid.

Trojan War setting and weaves a complex love story, one which participated in the flowering of the European medieval romance tradition during the twelfth century. The introduction of medieval romance literature brought “a sophisticated culture of courtly behaviour between men and women [which] began to change the idealized image of a knight.”<sup>19</sup> One can see the change to tragedy in Benoit’s rendition when he includes lovers Troilus and Criseyde as having to part from one another or having one last night of love before she is traded.<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of the lovers as being unable to continue their relationship under tragic circumstances exemplifies the shift from war-focused literature to the thematic elements of love. As Boccaccio adapted the literature, he retained the romance tradition of Benoit, but added the character Pandarus. Boccaccio’s addition of Pandarus is particularly influential for Chaucer’s tale and message since the character plays a vital role in illustrating Criseyde’s helplessness.

The act of comparing and contrasting Chaucer’s poem with his source text, Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato*,<sup>21</sup> reveals the stylistic deviations that Chaucer has intentionally made so that Chaucer’s version, I argue, reads differently than the rest. Although the poem is about two fictional lovers, a close examination of both Chaucer’s creative use of his source material and details of his own personal life suggest that the poem is anything but ‘fictional.’ Using a blend of cultural studies, historicism, and literary analysis, I will be considering whether Chaucer supports or subverts a patriarchal social structure, specifically by looking at his representation of the character Criseyde and the social structure surrounding her in the poem. Rather than placing the blame for the failed love affair entirely on Criseyde’s false love, Chaucer’s changes to the previous discourse of the

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<sup>19</sup> Laura Ashe. “Love and Chivalry in the Middle Ages,” in *The British Library* (2018). Accessed April 9, 2020, <https://www.bl.uk/medieval-literature/articles/love-and-chivalry-in-the-middle-ages>.

<sup>20</sup> Bishop.

<sup>21</sup> C.S. Lewis, “What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*,” in *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Stephen A. Barney (W.W. Norton & Company: 2006).

poem shifts much of the poem's attention onto the problematic behavior of the men surrounding her--especially her lovers Troilus and Diomedes as well as her guardian Pandarus. Chaucer's version of the tale implies that all of Criseyde's decisions--her accepting of Troilus' love, her reactions to Pandarus' advice, her 'betrayal' with Diomedes--are responses to the social norms of medieval society that dictate her behavior rather than conscious choices motivated by her personal desires. Instead of critiquing the women in medieval society, which might be represented by individual female characters like Criseyde, Chaucer's changes critique the society around Criseyde, the society which has produced them as cultural 'subjects' and dictated their behavior to them through social norms.

### **Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: Cultural Studies and Close Reading**

Although it can be difficult to make cultural claims based on literature (because, in the end, literature is fiction), reading literature for information about cultural values still offers a fruitful window into the norms and expectations of the society that produces it. When it comes to the study of literature of the past, Michel Foucault's beliefs that discourse determines and is determined by the cultural norms and values of the society that produces it underscores the importance of studying *Troilus and Criseyde*.<sup>22</sup> According to Foucault, discourse doesn't just give us a way to talk about things--it determines what we can say. In the case of literature, careful attention to discourse can help us use stories to learn about the past. According to Stuart Hall, "representation connects meaning and language to culture...it is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either real world objects."<sup>23</sup> In this way, representation performs the important role of connecting what we believe ideologically and how we talk about that (consciously and

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<sup>22</sup> The most famous work establishing the idea of Foucauldian discourse is Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith.

<sup>23</sup> Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 3.

unconsciously). To use an example that is relevant for *Troilus and Criseyde*: although the poem can't tell us much about how real women lived in medieval society, the *representation* of women in the text can tell us about medieval society's concept of femininity and female social roles.

One thing that discourse creates is a person's social role. According to Foucault, society "constructs" or creates the subject by telling them who they are within society. These labels, based on factors like gender, race, or ethnicity, are accepted as fact and have a significant impact on what a person can achieve in their life. Although hypothetically discourse does not completely guide action, the overwhelming power of discourse can make those with inferior labels feel like they have no choice but to follow the path and expectations of their social role. In other words, the pressure to follow a label's social norms is because the "subject of the discourse cannot be outside of the discourse because it must be suggested [to it and] must submit to its rules and conventions."<sup>24</sup> In the end, the persuasive effect of discourse on an individual culture normalizes societal expectations so that it is more difficult for a subject to act or live the exact way they'd like. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Criseyde's gender becomes her label, and the expectations that come with it are given to her by society as fact since they have been solidified in the society's discourse towards women. Although gender is performative, the label of "woman" sticks with Criseyde, and the discourse's repetitive command for her to follow norms eventually forces her to give into what is expected of her label rather than what she believes.

As one of the few male "feminists" of the medieval period, Chaucer uses the power of language to alter the representation of women in many of his later pieces such as *The Book of the Duchess*. Considering his focus on women is not unique to *Troilus and Criseyde*, it is key to address why I am choosing to examine *this* poem in this thesis as a case study for Chaucer's

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

implied social critiques in favor of women. One reason can be found in the ending of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Before ending his poem, Chaucer warns both men and women to beware of the faults of the opposite sex rather than alleviating men from blame. Chaucer's unique conclusion, as a result, allows him to avoid offense and construct the tale for both male and female audiences, an inclusive effort that was rare in the time of his writing.<sup>25</sup>

Bysechyng euery lady bright of hewe,  
 And euery gentil womman, what she be,  
 That al be that Criseyde was vntrewe,  
 That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me:  
 Ye may hire gilt in other bokes se,  
 And gladlier I wol write, if yow leste,  
 Penelopes trouthe and good Alceste.  
 Ny sey nat this al oonly for thise men,  
 But moost for wommen that bitraised be  
 Thorough false folk; god yeue hem sorwe, amen!  
 That with hire grete wit and subtilte  
 Bytraise yow. (Book V 1772-83)<sup>26</sup>

[I beseech every lady bright of hue / and every gentlewoman, regardless of rank, / that although Criseyde was untrue, / for that guilt don't be angry with me: / you may see her guilt in other books, / and gladlier would I write, if you wished, / of Penelope's truth and

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<sup>25</sup> Nicola F. McDonald "Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women,' Ladies at Court and the Female Reader," in *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 1 (2000), p. 22-42. Accessed January 12, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/25096115](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25096115).

<sup>26</sup> This and all subsequent quotations of the Middle English are taken from the Norton Critical Edition of *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Stephen A. Barney (W. W. Norton & Company: 2006) and cited parenthetically by book and line number. Translations are provided by Amity Reading.

good Alceste. / Nor say I this only for men, / but more for women who have been betrayed  
 / by lying folk; God give those grief, amen, / who with their great wit and subtlety / betray  
 you!].

Chaucer's call, or "beseech" to women of all ranks or colors hints at an apology towards women if his personification of Criseyde was inaccurate and subsequently offensive to the reputation of women. However, even if his depiction of Criseyde is "untrue," Chaucer implies that the placement of guilt on the female protagonist is something that can be found in almost every piece of literature of the time that was written by men; he is not creating this stigma on his own. Therefore, the use of guilt in his story is not necessarily something solely he can be blamed for. His comment also suggests that his poem is different from the "other books" on the subject because of his unique advocacy for women. Furthermore, considering the majority of male characters in the literature of the time act in accordance with the guidelines of courtly love, Chaucer has limited guidance and examples for how to write Criseyde appropriately. As a result, his apology humbly admits that his Criseyde may not be the best depiction of women but speaks volumes towards his unique mission of advocating for women since many women of the time received no such apology from other male authors. The apology and acknowledgement of the guilt trope towards women clearly places *Troilus and Criseyde* in a category that is different than both his other female-driven pieces or other courtly love literature.

While acknowledging that there is a side of the story from a woman's perspective that has yet to be told, as a way of correcting the error that he and his fellow male authors, Chaucer offers the option that he would "gladlier I wole wryten, if yow leste, / Penelopes trouthe and good Alceste" [gladlier would I write, if you wished, / of Penelope's truth and good Alceste] (Book V 1777-8). By referring to Penelope and Alceste, Chaucer references other well-known stories of

women who were placed into a similar situation to Criseyde: villainized without the opportunity to defend themselves. Mentioning the link between Penelope, Alceste, and Criseyde, is Chaucer's hint that he could save Penelope, Alceste, and other female characters from being villainized by telling their sides of the story just like he has done for Criseyde in this poem.

Although Chaucer's acknowledgement speaks to the missing component of the female voice, it must be acknowledged that the line could also have been written for economic reasons. In the medieval period, writers like Chaucer were only able to write by making money from the patronage system, which called for wealthy men or women in aristocratic society to commission writers to write stories for them. Chaucer is clever in his tease to potential female beneficiaries by acknowledging that there is a woman's side to a story such as "Penelope's truth," but he will not reveal the truth without payment. Ultimately, even if the line was the medieval period's way of modern marketing techniques or strategy, the line's appeal to women as independent agents rather than dependent on men speaks to Chaucer's conscious attention towards women.

Chaucer continues to warn women to beware of the patriarchal antics of men in medieval society by commenting that women should "beth war of men, and herkeneth what I seye!" [beware of men, and listen to what I say!] (Book V 1785). The warning to women to take caution when listening to what men are telling them can be taken as blatant acknowledgment of the trickery as a way of getting Criseyde to agree to be in a relationship with both Diomedes and Troilus. Since the use of trickery is far more apparent in Chaucer's rendition, his warning towards women to be careful of what men say to them is a direct reference to the trickery that has been done to Criseyde; as a result, Chaucer warns his female readers to take heed of the power of male deceit and what it could look like in hopes of preventing his female readers from falling prey to male deceit as Criseyde has.



Chaucer maintains a clear support for female interests when encouraging his book to circulate at the end of the poem: “go, litel book, go litel myn tragedie, / ther God thy maker yet, er that he dye” [go, little book, go, my tragedy, / and may God send the poet, before he dies, / the power to make a comedy] (Book V 1786-7). Encouraging his book to “go” to multiple readers vocalizes his hope that the book will circulate and fall into the hands of multiple men and women. While the poem’s offer of agency to women is undeniably a start to expanding the discourse of courtly love to both sexes, the only way in which Chaucer’s message can be enacted is if the poem circulates enough to become popular and force people read the poem; while reading, the audience will receive Chaucer’s social critique of medieval society and hopefully understand the message enough to change the ways in which women are treated in not only the courtly love genre, but medieval society as a whole. Upon realization of the error in society’s ways, Chaucer can only hope to be able to write a happier tale of love where both sexes receive equal treatment. However, as evident by Chaucer’s implied social critiques, he cannot do so when reality does not reflect his hope. So, Chaucer’s encouragement could be for economic reasons; but the fact that he encourages his book that exposes medieval male wrongdoings speaks to an elevated desire by Chaucer for this work to circulate in particular.

Chaucer ends by saying that he “preye I God that noon miswryte thee, / Ne thee mismetre for defaute of tonge. / [and that] thou be understonde I God biseche!” [I pray to God no scribe miscopies you / or mismeters you because of dialect or accent, / so that you may be understood, I beg God!] (Book V 1795-8). Since literature was typically translated or re-written even in the medieval period, Chaucer recognizes that his work may be handled to the discretion of people other than himself and that medieval society tends to ignore the female voice. Although he cannot help his reprinting, Chaucer’s desperate caution to those writing serves as both a command and

plea for those copying it to be as accurate as possible so that the language he has used to represent women fairly is not either lost in translation, or adjusted on the basis of bias towards men. Although the caution appears to be aimed at those copying his writing, Chaucer's apparent desire can also apply to those reading. Chaucer's wish to the Divine compels those reading to look past what they want to understand, which he predicts will deter his message of female empowerment, and see what Chaucer is truly saying in between the lines of his changes to the courtly love rhetoric.

Chaucer uses a retraction in *The Canterbury Tales* to push for higher readership of the poems which go against popular opinion like *Troilus and Criseyde*. When ending *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer writes:

Wherefore I biseke yow mekely, for the mercy  
 Of go, that ye preye for me that crist have  
 Mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes; and  
 Namely of my translacions and enditynges of  
 Worldly vanitees, the whiche I revoke in  
 My retracciouns:  
 as is the book of troilus;  
 the book also of fame; the book of  
 The Ladies; the book of the duchesse;  
 The book of seint valentyne's day of the parlemen  
 of briddes; the tales of counterbury,  
 Thilke that sownen into synne;

the book of the Leoun; and many another book. (1077-1089)<sup>27</sup>

[Wherefore I beseech you meekly, for the mercy / of God, that you pray for me that Christ have / mercy on me and forgive me my sins; / and namely of my translations and compositions of / worldly vanities, the which I revoke in / my retractions: / as is the book of Troilus; / the book also of Fame; the book of the / Ladies; the book of the Duchesse; / the book of Saint Valentines day of the Parliament / of Birds; the tales of Canterbury, / those same that are sown in sin; / the book of the Lion; and many another book].

Although he opens the list with an apology, Chaucer negates the genuineness of his apology by placing a “resume” of his most popular past publications directly afterwards to establish his credibility. The contrast between an apology and the success of the pieces he wrote leads readers to pick up on a sense of sarcasm from Chaucer. Chaucer’s sarcasm reminds readers that they enjoy his work and have chosen to read his pieces time and time again. So, for those of his readers who are hesitant to read a piece like *Troilus and Criseyde* simply because of its inconstancy to social norms by addressing the female voice, Chaucer urges the naysayers to read it regardless of their hesitations; much like the reader has enjoyed his writing in the past, Chaucer suggests that they will most likely enjoy this controversial piece as well.

If his retraction is in fact a push for higher levels of readership, his citing of “the book of troilus” first in the list speaks even more so to the importance of the piece’s message and success to Chaucer. Since he was, as proven by the list, a successful and popular writer, placing the tale of *Troilus and Criseyde* first so that his name is right next to the title could have been his way of guaranteeing that this piece was the one readers chose to read, even over any of the titles farther

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<sup>27</sup> This and the subsequent quotation of Middle English are taken from the Penguin Classics *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Jill Mann (Penguin Classics: 20065), and cited parenthetically by book and line number. Translation is provided by Amity Reading.

down the list. Particularly because *Troilus and Criseyde* was a story that went against societal norms, the strategic placement of this piece and all of his other female centered poems closest to his name implies that Chaucer knew the topic of better treatment towards women was risky; however, the relevance of the works made a risk to his credibility worthwhile if his credibility was the enticement people needed to read *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Although *Troilus and Criseyde* is a stellar example of a medieval courtly love piece, Chaucer chooses the introduction used in epic poetry to begin his poem. While introducing the story, the narrator invokes the muse of “Thesiphone” for inspiration (Book I 6). In the classical epic tradition, the Nine Muses that were typically invoked were all goddesses of the arts, and they governed realms like epic poetry and rhetoric (Calliope) or music and dance (Terpsichore).<sup>28</sup> However, Chaucer’s Tisiphone is one of the Furies, not one of the traditional Nine Muses. The Furies were the Greek goddesses associated with violence and vengeance, and Tisiphone was known as “the voice of unavenged crime.”<sup>29</sup>

Chaucer did not seem inspired by Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato* to mimic the epic tradition. Boccaccio cites neither Tisiphone nor the Nine Muses, but instead cites “[his] lady” as his muse since “[she is] the clear and beautiful light [that] guides him through [his] world of darkness”, and even ends by directly saying “[she] is [his] muse!”<sup>30</sup> Boccaccio’s invocation of a lover as his muse

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<sup>28</sup> The other seven muses were: Thalia - Muse of comedy and idyllic poetry, Melpomene-Muse of tragedy, Cleo - Muse of history, Euterpe - Muse of lyric poetry, Erato - Muse of erotic poetry, Urania - Muse of astronomy, Polyhymnia or Polymnia - Muse of sacred hymns and harmony. “9 Greek Muses,” College of Southern Nevada, Accessed April 3, 2020. <https://www.csun.edu/~hchum001/muses.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> N.S. Gill, “Tisiphone the Greek Goddess,” ThoughtCo (2019), Accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.thoughtco.com/tisiphone-greek-goddess-121229>.

<sup>30</sup> This and all subsequent quotations of Boccaccio are from the facing-page translation of the Italian provided in the Norton Critical Edition of *Troilus and Criseyde* (see above, note 26). Although I will not be addressing the quotations in the original Italian, this English translation of *Il Filostrato* is very literal and is adequate for the purpose of demonstrating Chaucer’s adaptation of the source. However, I acknowledge that matters of translation could potentially affect the version on which I am basing my analysis. When quoting Boccaccio, I will be using page numbers as opposed to line numbers since the NCE does not provide line numbers for *Il Filostrato*. Boccaccio, 8.

was a common tactic of male courtly love writers; the tradition falls in line with medieval society's objectification of women as objects to be admired or used at men's disposal when need be. However, even if Boccaccio's invocation is what prompted Chaucer, Chaucer's is still unique because Boccaccio's muse is an appropriate match to the story of the two lovers because she represents the ideas of love.

After looking at other poems for a possible reason behind the invocation, it is relevant to point out that Chaucer's other tales of love such as *Aneldia and Arcite* and *House of Fame* invoke the muse yet are not epics. Therefore, the use of invocation is not solely Chaucer's ode to epic poetry if the pattern is not consistent in each of his poems. Instead, Chaucer could be utilizing the inspiration of the muses to communicate a message to his readers. Choosing the goddess of revenge instead of a more appropriate choice like Calliope in *Troilus and Criseyde*, allows Chaucer to vocalize a desire for revenge in his poem on behalf of Criseyde. Since the character of Criseyde is given the most ill treatment by being coerced and traded throughout the plot of the poem, Tisiphone is Chaucer's way of "getting revenge" on both Criseyde's behalf as well as the women in medieval society whom she represents.

### **Criseyde's Abandonment**

When Criseyde is introduced, readers are told that her father Calchas has left after betraying his nation and that she is widowed (Book I 84-110). Since<sup>31</sup> men in the medieval period offered protection and resources through their jobs in the public sphere, Criseyde is now left with no male figure who has to take on the responsibility to provide for her.<sup>32</sup> She must take on the role of the

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<sup>31</sup>Although she does technically have her uncle Pandarus as a male who she could depend on at this point, readers will find that his ties are much stronger to Troilus than they are to Criseyde in accordance with medieval social norms. In the end, his actions make it as if she truly has no family.

<sup>32</sup>Women were seen as inferior to men based on Biblical texts in the period so once a woman has been married, her husband has responsibility over her well-being, so the father no longer assumes any expected role in her life.

male provider and force her way into the public sphere to earn the money she needs for resources on her own. However, the limitations tied to her gender label prevent her from leaving the domestic sphere, even though it must be done for her survival. As if the construction of her role did not place her at enough of a disadvantage, Criseyde also must deal with the aftermath of her father's betrayal as if it was her own since the town wanted "al [Calchas's] kyn at-ones / ben worthi for to brennen, fel and bones" [All of Calchas' kin deserved no less / than burning, skin and bones] (Book I 91-2).<sup>33</sup> Unlike a son, who would be able to defend himself, Criseyde's lack of individuality as the daughter assumes her to have the same beliefs as the dominant man - her father - and betray the nation as well.<sup>34</sup>

Chaucer's explanation of her father's past and her husband's death provides readers with the appropriate contextual information to infer that Criseyde has no one and nothing. Although Criseyde's portrayal as a damsel is a stereotype commonly used by the typical male authors of the time period,<sup>35</sup> Chaucer's choice to include exposition separates his use of the trope from the others. In turn, Chaucer's exposition works towards the benefit of Criseyde because it points out that her helplessness is uncontrollable. Especially in comparison to Boccaccio, who does not give attention to Criseyde's isolation other than a mention that she was both widowed and unaware of her father's plans,<sup>36</sup> Chaucer elaborates upon the precarity of her situation: she was "wel neigh out of hir wit for sorwe and fere" [almost out of her wits for sorrow and fear] (Book I 108). Chaucer's allusions to her feelings of sorrow and fear place Criseyde's emotions into the language as a way of proving

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<sup>33</sup> The use of the word "all" could imply that the people of the town would've wanted sons and/or daughters to be burned. However, the specification of burning would only be done to a woman of the time. It is interesting to note the punishment of burning seems to be applied to all genders as opposed to just women in this line, indicating a discrepancy between historical sources and Chaucer's word choice.

<sup>34</sup> Amity Reading.

<sup>35</sup> "Women in Medieval Literature and Society." British Literature Wiki. Accessed March 27, 2020. <https://sites.udel.edu/britlitwiki/women-in-medieval-literature-and-society/>.

<sup>36</sup> Boccaccio, 14.

the detrimental effect that male absence had on women's well-being. In doing so, Chaucer reveals how the society's emphasis on female domesticity leaves women like Criseyde vulnerable to the point of emotional exasperation. The establishment of exposition from the beginning of the poem also helps Chaucer to prevent Criseyde's villainization of her from the start; since Criseyde is constantly facing the pressures of society to search for a man, she cannot be blamed when she chooses the lover who is able to provide her with what medieval society tells her she needs at the end of the poem.

Although Chaucer is bound by the plot of the story of Troilus and Criseyde (he is, after all, treating material that was inherited from twelfth-century French tradition), from the start he is making significant changes to the framing of the narrative that re-center Criseyde and give much more depth to her character. Unlike the villainous unfaithful lover that many other female protagonists were subjected to because of their female label, Chaucer's Criseyde is written as a woman who is clearly trapped by a force beyond her control, a social system that limits her agency, both socially and sexually. Chaucer's highlights of her helplessness and the choices that she will have to make as a result more clearly stem from the marginalization in the structures of power and the fear they have created rather than personal choice. Although Criseyde may engage in romantic relationships at the expense of her well-being later on, Chaucer establishes a point of view with greater explanatory characterization in her introduction which carries on throughout the rest of the poem.

### **Criseyde and Prince Hector**

After Chaucer's narrator talks about the precarity of Criseyde's social situation, Criseyde goes to Prince Hector and on "knees she fil biforn Ector adown / with pitous vois and tendrely wepynge / his mercy bad, hirselves excusynge" [she knelt down before Prince Hector / with a

pitiful voice and tenderly weeping / excused herself and asked for mercy] (Book I 110-2) to tell the prince her fears. Although Criseyde personally has done nothing wrong, her status in medieval society leaves her vulnerable to a point where she must lower herself physically below a man and beg for forgiveness if she wants to survive. Chaucer and Boccaccio both include the physical lowering of Criseyde to Hector when begging for forgiveness; her physical submission to Hector in the language places her as his subject and highlights the precarity of her situation and subsequently the women at the time who have been either widowed or estranged like her.

After she has begged for forgiveness, Hector eases her worries: “dwelleth with us, whil yow good list, in Troie” [dwell with us, as long as you like, in Troy] (Book I. 119) with the same benefits as if Calchas were there. Although she is a woman, Prince Hector listens and attends to her feelings as if she has a voice that matters. His offer for Criseyde to stay, despite her inferior sex, speaks to the goodness of Hector in comparison to the typical male character of the genre. Particularly, his inclusion of the phrase “as long as you like” is a conscious effort by Hector to give Criseyde the power to make the decision herself. Despite his silent subjection of her through his reading of her body as “so faire a creature,” [so fair a creature] (Book I 115), he does not allow her beauty or sex to affect him externally or logically.

Unlike the other men that are lusting after her, Hector tries to “gladde hire anon” [tried to cheer her up immediately] (Book I 116) or “comfort her greatly”<sup>37</sup> as she weeps. He is not her husband or lover, yet he has offered her the protection that women would only expect from the aforementioned roles. The fact that he is the only one in both Chaucer and Boccaccio’s poem who expresses care for her not only paints him as an outlier and comments on the behaviors of men in medieval society. While it’s good that Hector is offering Criseyde what she needs, she can only

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<sup>37</sup> Boccaccio, 14.



find it in one man. The rarity of his behaviors, even when it is his personality that women need, can be taken as a critique on the male members of medieval society who believe that his way is abnormal rather than the other way around.

### **The Superficiality of Criseyde's Beauty by the Narrator**

After providing some expositional insight on her abandonment, Chaucer shifts his focus on her external beauty. Although Chaucer was arguably more favorable towards Criseyde in his intel on her father, he still talks about her physical attributes before her personality. Boccaccio's poem also seems to place her looks before all else, describing her as "so beautiful and angelic that she did not seem a mortal."<sup>38</sup> In both cases, a woman's beauty serves as the accepted and primary tool of attraction. Despite his substantial changes to rhetoric, this was one of the ways in which Chaucer balanced critiquing society but still followed key traditions of courtly love. By invoking too much change from the start, Chaucer could have risked isolating his readers before they could even recognize the critiques he craftily hid between the lines.

According to Chaucer's narrator, Criseyde is "nas non so fair, forpassynge every wight, / so aungelik was hir natif beaute, / that lik a thing inmortal semed she" [there was none so fair, surpassing every being, / so angelic was her natural beauty / that like a thing immortal she seemed] (Book I 101-3). The description of her beauty places her in a category that is beyond worldly representation. Adjectives such as "angel-like" and "immortal" are typically used to describe omniscient and benevolent beings like God and his angels. Even her name, Criseyde, can be linked to the modern Greek word "Christo", which means Christ. There is irony in naming the most helpless character after almighty powers considering God and Christ have the ultimate power, yet she is given none. Since this poem is an adaptation, Chaucer could have easily changed her name.

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<sup>38</sup> Boccaccio, 1.

However, his choice to keep it the same, albeit intentional or not, the irony in her name highlights the dichotomy of her beauty being a tool and a hindrance.

Her beauty's label as "all good" categorizes her through the language as being unable to handle the public sphere and the evils within it. If she is as her name tells her "all good," she is constructed and thereby told by the society that has given her the name that she cannot fend for herself at the risk of altering her pureness. In the end, the descriptions of both Chaucer and Boccaccio marginalize Criseyde so that she cannot help herself with her beauty - the one thing that men have left women to have - instead, it leaves women powerless and unequipped for the public.

### **The Fear of Discovery**

When Criseyde and Troilus are in the same space for the first time, their opposing entrances are described side by side. Since Troilus is both royalty and a man, his entrance is far more elaborate in Chaucer's as he makes a masculine display and "lad hem up and down" [led [his troop of young knights] up and down] (Book I 184).<sup>39</sup> Boccaccio's depiction of Troilus' entrance seems far less extravagant in comparison as he "strolled about" with no mention of other men alongside him.<sup>40</sup> In comparison to Chaucer, the solo entrance of Troilus in combination with the leisure implied in the word "stroll"<sup>41</sup> projects less of a hyper-masculine performance in Boccaccio. Chaucer's decision to emphasize Troilus's entrance as grander characterizes Troilus as a dominant alpha male who represents the pinnacle of masculinity from the very beginning of the poem. Criseyde, on the other hand, has a drastically different entrance as she "and yet she stood ful lowe

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<sup>39</sup> As a man, let alone as a prince, Troilus is expected to assert his dominance over others by parading his masculinity. In accordance with courtly love, Troilus' grand entrance reinforces his importance and nobility, key factors for the male protagonist in the genre.

<sup>40</sup> Boccaccio, 18.

<sup>41</sup> S.v. "stroll," Oxford English Dictionary. Accessed April 3, 2020.  
<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/191767#eid20244275>.

and stille allone, / Byhynden other folk, in litel brede, / And neigh the dore, ay undre shames drede” [and yet she stood there very humbly and alone, / behind the others in a little space / and beside the door, almost under dread of shame] (Book I 178-180). Her fear of disgrace, or her “ay under shames drede” even in her “humble” stance reflects the severity of the social restrictions on women both physically and emotionally. She is doing nothing but standing, yet instinctually worries as if her presence alone is wrong. The decision to physically remove herself from the public eye implies that her presence in the public sphere is something she is personally uncomfortable with.

Boccaccio’s Criseyde doesn’t seem to face similar fears and though she, too, stands “very close to the door,” she is “proud.”<sup>42</sup> Chaucer’s from Boccaccio’s characterization evokes stronger senses of demureness on behalf of Criseyde; particularly when compared to Troilus’ entrance. The foil between one and the other is Chaucer’s way of highlighting the dichotomy inflicted by the societal norms of the time for not only the male and female characters in the courtly love literature, but also for the men and women whom they represent.

### **Troilus’ First Glance at Criseyde**

Both Boccaccio and Chaucer do not involve Criseyde in Troilus’ primary attraction to her as he “wax therwith astoned” [immediately grew astonished] (Book I 274) or that her general stance made her “pleasing to Troilo.”<sup>43</sup> Considering her stance is one of shame and meekness, Troilus’s attraction to her by her “stance” speaks to the acceptance, and even attraction, of female weakness to men in medieval society. The idea that her meekness pleases Troilus vocalizes the perpetuation of female submission when women are under the male gaze. However, as Criseyde gazes in the direction of Troilus, Chaucer has Criseyde meet Troilus’s gaze and ask: “What, may

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<sup>42</sup> Boccaccio, 18.

<sup>43</sup> Boccaccio, 24.

I not stonden here?” [What, may I not stand here?] (Book I 292). The look she gives Troilus and message that is communicated as a result allows her to be a semi-active participant in their courtship. She may be “just” a woman, but Criseyde vocalizes and enforces through her glance, whether it is passive or not, that she has just as much of a right to be here as Troilus does. However, as the relationship progresses, Chaucer’s reveal of the limitations placed on women during a courtly relationship only leaves women with glances such as this; aside from a glance, Criseyde is unable to do anything else to begin a relationship with Troilus herself.

Chaucer continues to emphasize her inferiority as the narrator of the poem describes the inner monologue of Troilus when he first lays eyes on Criseyde. After seeing her for the first time, Chaucer compares her attributes to what the ideal woman should be when he describes her “lymes so well answeyng / weren to wommanhod” [her limbs were so well answering to womanhood] (Book I 282-3). If her body answers to the call of womanhood, it can be assumed that her figure exemplifies the ideal female body at the time. In describing her, Chaucer states there was never a person “lasse mannyssh” [less mannish] (Book I 284), which subsequently categorizes her as the opposite of a man, which places emphasis on her traits that the culture has deemed appropriate for women to showcase like physical beauty. In lieu of speaking for herself, she is forced into being an object for the male gaze to read and assess.

As Chaucer’s description continues, the perception of her as having “honour, estat, and wommanly noblesse” [honor, status, and womanly nobleness] (Book I 287) based on her body language presents her as a readable text which men like Troilus can look at on their own time. The process of subjecting women to their physical stature is not uncommon in courtly love, but Chaucer’s direct references to her body as womanly or unmanly has allowed him to narrate the gaze that has not been narrated in prior courtly love pieces, but is precisely the type of subjection

which restricts women from having a voice from the beginning of the courtly love relationship. His change to the narrative is one of the preliminary flips of the narrative which showcase the power of the male gaze on the female psyche, not the other way around.

Chaucer's narration of the male gaze can also be found in his use of phallic language. Looking at Boccaccio's depiction of the same scene, readers will find no evidence of sexual overtones--his love is described in idealized romantic language: "Nor did [Troilus]. . . perceive that Love with his darts dwelt inside the rays of [Criseyde's] beautiful eyes, . . . nor did he notice the arrow which ran to his heart until it stung him thoroughly."<sup>44</sup> The allusions to Cupid's "arrow" or love at first sight were typical tropes of the courtly love rhetoric. In Chaucer, however, as Troilus looks at Criseyde, he appears to experience sexual arousal in the line "ther gan to quyen / so greet desir and swich affection" [there began to grow / so great desire and such affection] (Book I 295-6), followed by a euphemism for the softening of the male genitalia in the lines "he was tho glad his hornes in to shrinken" [he was then glad to let his horns retract] (Book I 300) once he has finished looking her "up and down" (Book I 299). As Criseyde stands in the temple, she is sexually objectified from afar without any sort of consent or knowledge of Troilus' interest. However, society's acceptance of the male gaze has made it so that Chaucer's Criseyde does not necessarily have to give consent to Troilus; he can do it anyway. While Boccaccio alleviates Troilus from the blame of objectification, Chaucer's vocalization of the male gaze in his description of Troilus's inner monologue highlights the problematic objectification of women that was typically unsaid so that his male readers can reflect on what kind of effect their mindset has on the women they are gazing at.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

### Troilus's Mention of Criseyde's Cheer

Despite the suggestion in both versions that Criseyde 'inflicts' Troilus' love with her beauty, Chaucer's Troilus also considers her demeanor in the vocalization of his preliminary attraction. Typically in courtly love, or *fin amour*, it is the glance alone that begins the process of love as the lady captures the lover's heart through his eyes. However, Troilus in Chaucer's version comments on "her chere" [her cheer] (Book I 289) while Boccaccio makes no such mention, naming only physical attributes in paragraphs 27-29. Since cheer is not a physical attribute, Chaucer's inclusion looks beyond the physical attributes and takes possible personality into consideration to show readers the importance of characteristics that expand beyond the artificiality of love at first sight in the courtly love genre.

The verbal admittance of Troilus as being love-struck is also unique to Chaucer. Once Troilus has seen Criseyde, he begins to second guess himself by saying that:

"Lo, he that leet him-selven so konninge,  
 And scorned hem that loves peynes dryen,  
 Was ful unwar that love hadde his dwellinge  
 With-inne the subtile stremes of hir yen;  
 That sodeynly him thoughte he felte dyen."

[Lo, he who thought himself so cunning / and scorned all those who endured love's  
 pains, / was very unaware that love had his dwelling / within the subtle streams of her eyes;  
 / such that now suddenly it felt to him as if he were dying] (Book I 302-6).

Chaucer's depiction of him as cheerful until he is able to be alone avoids revealing the true emotional impact to the public so that Chaucer adheres to the courtly love rhetoric. His choice to do so unfortunately seems to perpetuate the stigma against women as the sole emotional gender if

the male character only expresses emotion once he is alone. However, Troilus's public display of emotion in the following section redeems Chaucer's choice.

### **Criseyde's First Glance versus Troilus's**

Much like her admirer, Criseyde becomes entranced and falls in love with him at first sight. However, what's unique for Criseyde is that she takes on the practice of gazing and immediately falling in love that is typically reserved for the male lover. It could be because Criseyde has no husband or father to keep her from having the opportunity to gaze,<sup>45</sup> but the gaze is not specific to Chaucer's version. What is specific to Chaucer, however, is the possibility of children; Chaucer explicitly keeps audiences on their toes as to whether or not she has children in the beginning (Book I 131-132), while Boccaccio says she does not. While slight, Chaucer's hint that Criseyde may have a child without referencing it again throughout the poem flips gender roles so that the female now has the ability to worry solely about herself instead of placing her male lover and possible child first.

As she gazes, both Boccaccio and Chaucer describe Criseyde as being mesmerized by him from afar; she "leet so softe it in hir herte sinke, / That to hir-self she seyde, 'Who yaf me drinke?'" [let [Troilus' looks] so gently sink into her heart / that to herself she said, 'Who gave me a drink?'] (Book II 650-1) for Chaucer, and "suddenly was she taken that she desired him above every other good"<sup>46</sup> in Boccaccio.<sup>47</sup> While Boccaccio's version of the story has the narrator tell readers how Criseyde, Chaucer gives Criseyde the agency to tell readers how she felt herself. Giving Criseyde

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<sup>45</sup> Georges Duby, "Excerpts from Georges Duby, 'The Courtly Model,' in *A History of Women: Silences of the Middle Ages*, Accessed March 28, 2020, [http://employees.oneonta.edu/farberas/arth/arth214\\_folder/courtly\\_love\\_.html](http://employees.oneonta.edu/farberas/arth/arth214_folder/courtly_love_.html).

<sup>46</sup> Boccaccio, 112.

<sup>47</sup> In both versions, Criseyde has had this epiphany once she has been coaxed of Troilus' beauty by Pandarus, meaning her subconscious anxiety could be a factor in making her think this way. However, this analysis runs the risk of being a modern-day observation as opposed to something Chaucer would be thinking while he wrote.

the ability to speak for herself allows her to have control over her own perception rather than be told how to react by someone else. Criseyde's subjectivity also allows her to have the same agency that her male lovers, Troilus and Diomedes, are given when they fall in love at first glance. The placement of Criseyde into a trope previously exclusive to males allows Chaucer to subvert the gender assumptions of courtly love. As Criseyde continues to observe Troilus's ride past her house, Boccaccio has Troilus look directly at Criseyde while Chaucer's Troilus zips past her, leaving almost as quickly as he came without any direct interaction with her. Boccaccio's version also says that Criseida "discreetly who, no less discreet, showed herself to him at prearranged times beautiful and gay."<sup>48</sup> The direct interaction in Boccaccio's version allows the two to have a tête-à-tête of courtly love from their first glances, while Chaucer's Criseyde gives no indication that she has even seen Troilus, let alone expressed interest as she "Gan in hir heed to pulle, and that as faste, / Whyl he and al the peple for-by paste" [pulled in her head, and fast, / while he and all his people passed by] (Book II 657-8). Criseyde's lack of direct interaction with Troilus gives Criseyde the power to be a decision maker for far longer by offering her the time to "And, lord! So she gan in hir thought argue" [And, lord! So she began to argue in her thoughts] (Book II 694).

### **The Love Sickness of Troilus and His Placement of Blame**

After admitting his love of Criseyde, Troilus describes "The fyre of loue," which "...held hym as his thral lowe in destresse / And brende hym so in soundry wise ay newe" [the fire of love [which] held him as a servant in distress, / and burned him so hot and often] (Book I 436-440). Both Chaucer and Boccaccio use fire to symbolize love "kindled each and every part of him."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Boccaccio, 112.

<sup>49</sup> Boccaccio, 32.



The symbolic use of fire describes the intensity that the passion of his love brings.<sup>50</sup> However, another symbol that fire -specifically in epic literature- could represent the burning of fire “from anger or pride.”<sup>51</sup> Considering Chaucer follows epic tradition at the beginning, the use of fire as a symbol for love is not only an adapted metaphor, but another ode to epic tradition. When Troilus or his “companye... draw ner” [When Troilus or his company...draw near] (Book I 450) to the fire of love, they lose control to the women who hold their affections and get burnt. The burn may be from the pain of their love as is done in other courtly love pieces. However, it could also stem from internal feelings of anger and pride directed at women since the woman, in this case Criseyde, has more control over the male psyche. Since the goddess Tisiphone, who Chaucer chose earlier, is also the goddess that is written in epics as using fire herself,<sup>52</sup> the pattern of epic tradition and using Tisiphone could be Chaucer’s drawing of a connection between unavenged crime and women as the cause of this fire through their love.

In addition to the feverish “fire” that love has brought him, Troilus also begins to exhibit other flu-like symptoms such as nausea, paleness, and a fever. As he falls deeper into his illness, he claims: “And he to be hir man, whyl he may dure; / Lo, here his lyf, and from the deeth his cure!” [And he to be her man, while he lives; / lo, she is his life, and from death his cure!] (Book I 468-9). Diction like how his “lyf is lost” villainized Criseyde even though she doesn’t have an active role in making Troilus fall in love with her, let alone intentionally cause his love-sickness. Although at the surface level, the decision to love Troilus back is up to Criseyde, his language of blaming makes her unable to say no to the relationship because she will have caused Troilus’s

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<sup>50</sup> A. Martha Prayoga, “A Dictionary of Literary Symbols.” Academia.edu. Accessed February 14, 2020, [https://www.academia.edu/7791057/A\\_Dictionary\\_of\\_Literary\\_Symbols](https://www.academia.edu/7791057/A_Dictionary_of_Literary_Symbols).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> “Erinyes,” Erinyes - The Furies, Greek Goddesses of Vengeance & Retribution, Theoi Greek Mythology, Accessed March 5, 2020, <https://www.theoi.com/Khthonios/Erinyes.html>

death if she chooses to not love him back. As the sickness gets worse, Troilus continues to place blame on Criseyde's lack of empathy as the reason for his ailment. As he lies in bed, Troilus claims: ““But al so cold in love, towards thee, / Thy lady is, as frost in winter mone, / And thou fordoon, as snow in fyr is sone”” [But so totally cold in love towards you / your lady is, as frost in winter morning, / while you are destroyed, as snow in fire melts immediately] (Book I 523-5). Although the language is technically blaming Criseyde, Chaucer's dramatization of Troilus's agony actually proves that Criseyde is not as villainous as he paints her to be. While suffering, Troilus is assuming that Criseyde is consciously ignoring him and keeping her emotions as cold as icy “frost.” However, Criseyde's reasoning for not considering him as a lover is because she doesn't know he loves her. It is not because she is “as cold as frost” as Troilus is claiming her to be.

However, the placement of such drastic blame from the beginning of Troilus's love sickness is relevant beyond the scope of female blame. As the male suitor, Troilus has the ability to go and court Criseyde to win over her love as he desires. However, he has chosen instead to stay in bed and grieve about how not being with Criseyde will cause him pain. His passivity of staying in bed rather than chasing after her allows Chaucer to highlight the unjust sense of superiority given to men in medieval society.<sup>53</sup> Without rising from his bed, Troilus is able to enact his sense of male empowerment to not only blame Criseyde, but also recruit someone else to get her for him as a result of his grief. The idea that Troilus is able to end up receiving exactly what he wants while passively grieving in his bedchamber exemplifies the power given to men in comparison to women. From his position in bed, Troilus is able to use his heterosexual feelings of love to turn

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<sup>53</sup> Holly A. Crocker and Tison Pugh. “Masochism, Masculinity, and the Pleasure of Troilus,” in *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec, (Boydell & Brewer, D.S. Brewer, 2008).

Criseyde into an object which he desires and further utilize his passivity to avoid any direct involvement in gaining her love.

Ultimately, the blame and villainization via language onto a woman as opposed to himself in this circumstance was common in the courtly love rhetoric, but Chaucer uses stronger language such as consequences of death to emphasize the ease with which Criseyde is blamed without any opportunity to defend herself. Both Boccaccio and Chaucer place blame on Criseyde in their rhetoric, saying things like “[Criseida] alone [is] the woman who can help me”<sup>54</sup> versus Chaucer saying that Troilus will “Lo, here his lyf, and from the deeth his cure!” [lo, she is his life, and from death his cure] (Book I 469). Although the threats construct Criseyde as a villainous perpetrator, Boccaccio’s narrator tries to salvage Criseyde’s reputation by reminding readers that her reputation outside of Troilus’s threats of death is untarnished: “[how he] heard only what spoke of the high virtue of his lady.”<sup>55</sup> Although Troilus is saying that she has caused and is now the only cure for his death, Boccaccio’s mention of her virtue proves to readers that her supposed involvement in Troilus’s ailment does not exemplify her overall moral compass. Boccaccio continues to defend Criseyde by asking “whether Criseida did not perceive all this because of the way he had concealed his state or whether she pretended not to notice it.”<sup>56</sup> [What does this refer to? Meaning, that Criseyde (in Boccaccio) didn’t know that Troilus was the prince of Troy?]. Boccaccio’s defense of Criseyde in this section is one of the few times that Boccaccio is easier on Criseyde than Chaucer since Chaucer’s Troilus explicitly cites Criseyde as intentionally causing his grief. However, Chaucer’s villainization of Criseyde serves a purpose. Chaucer’s harsh language is an exaggerated reflection of the courtly love trope of female blame that was common in other courtly love pieces

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<sup>54</sup> Boccaccio, 32.

<sup>55</sup> Boccaccio, 32.

<sup>56</sup> Boccaccio, 34.

of the time. Since the placement of female blame was normal, many readers accepted the trope without considering its impact on women. But, Chaucer's dramatization of the idea allows him to expose the hypocrisy within the male point of view of courtly love. Ultimately, Chaucer's choice to have Troilus directly blame Criseyde points out a detrimental characteristic within the courtly love rhetoric: by placing women in an impossible situation through blame, like Troilus's implication that he will die if Criseyde does not "love" him, men are restricting women from acting on their liberty. Instead, women are left with no choice but to be subject to men's expectations. While female characters like Criseyde were typically villainized in the genre for making the decisions they have, Chaucer's vocalization of Criseyde's inner struggle reveals the reason behind their decisions is because of societal expectations. Chaucer is reminding his readers that they cannot blame Criseyde for her decisions on which lover she picks or how she acts in the relationship--instead, the society must reassess the expectations that they have for women so that women can stop being villainized for making decisions they have been forced to make.

As Troilus continues to fester in his love sickness for Criseyde, Boccaccio includes a concern about whether Criseyde has another lover: "Troilo . . . first believes that Criseide has another lover; afterwards he reasons with himself concerning her and complains to Love."<sup>57</sup> Although Troilus's character has been given no reason to believe that she is with another man, one of his first instincts when he has just fallen in love with her is to assume that she has "cheated." His assumption could be a result of his inexperience with courtly love relationships-- since Troilus is "an inexperienced idealist, capable of getting so lost in his own thoughts as to become paralyzed,"<sup>58</sup> Troilus allows his anxiety to overtake his ability to think through his fears before

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<sup>57</sup> Boccaccio, 34.

<sup>58</sup> E. Talbot Donaldson, "Lovers' Problems: Troilus and Criseyde and Troilus and Cressida," in *The Swan at the Well: Shakespeare Reading Chaucer* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985), p. 95. Accessed January 12, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1xp3tvn.9](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1xp3tvn.9).

worrying, no matter how ridiculous they may be. Alluding that Criseyde has another lover assumes the worst of Criseyde by making her seem to be using multiple men and blames her for being the villain in the relationship before it has even begun. Doing so could also take the blame for the illness off of Troilus and pin it to Criseyde as her responsibility. However, Chaucer makes no such reference in his poem. Chaucer's choice to omit the fear prevents Criseyde from being labeled as a prostitute. Instead, she remains a grieving widow. The idea that Chaucer's Troilus thinks higher of Criseyde than supposing her to be "sleeping around" not only alleviates the blame so that she, and the women she represents, are above the unfaithful lover trope that other male authors of courtly love perpetuated in the past.

### **The Consequences of Troilus's Love for Criseyde**

Chaucer's striking adaptive choices surrounding the "blame" for Criseyde's behavior suggest that she and the women that she represents are in a bind from the start. As a result of the social restrictions imposed by courtly love, women were typically unaware that they were being lusted after and so were not given the option to either deny the lover or accept their proposal. Though they rarely had an active role in the dynamics of the love affair, women were nonetheless blamed for the outcomes when affairs failed, and their beauty was almost always cited as the spark that ignites the flame of love. In Criseyde's case, in both Boccaccio and Chaucer she has no idea that Troilus is sick at all, let alone that he is sick over *her*, and yet Troilus and the rest of the male-dominated society surrounding her suggest that the whole thing is somehow her "fault." Even though she hypothetically has the agency to decide whether she will accept his love (she is, after all, Troilus' "cure" as well as his sickness), the supposed agency of holding a man's life in her hands is instead used as a tool to manipulate her into sexual submission. And Chaucer's version

of the narrative is conspicuously quiet on the point of whether she might actually love Troilus *back*. The only real consideration is whether she will accept *his* love.

### **The Assistance of Pandarus**

When Chaucer's Pandarus finds Troilus distraught, he immediately goes to help him and coax the reason for his pain out of Troilus. Chaucer's inclusion of their interactions speak to the power of male friendship in the medieval period since Troilus is supported in his choices. To emphasize Pandarus's support, Chaucer's Pandarus uses language of support to try to coax Troilus into telling Pandarus about the cause of his grief: "'Now freend,' quod he, 'if ever love or trouthe / Hath been, or is, bi-twixen thee and me, / Ne do thou never swiche a crueltee'" ["Now friend," said he, "if ever love or truth / has been or is between you and me, / never perform such heartless cruelty] (Book I 584-6) or that "'I wole parten with thee al thy peyne," [I will share with you all your pain] (Book I 589). In the medieval period, males would typically share close bonds of friendship, especially in comparison to women.<sup>59</sup> Especially since they were in the same court, it is likely that Pandarus and Troilus shared friendly love or trust in one another. Boccaccio's Pandarus also offers to share the pain, but his reiteration of the word "friend" throughout the dialogue almost diminishes the strength of the friendship by acting like any friend would do what he's doing.

Ultimately, Troilus's decision to tell Pandarus could be because of his relation to Criseyde, but it could also be because Troilus needs a messenger that he can trust, and Pandarus is the only man that has expressed concern about Troilus' well-being. More importantly, the decision to choose Pandarus, or even choose a messenger at all, points out an incongruence between Troilus and Criseyde's system of support; while Troilus has a vast choice of friends to help him deal with

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<sup>59</sup> Amity Reading

his love and he has the ability to choose the best one, Criseyde has no one who could do the same for her. In comparison to Pandarus, who is watching out for his friend, Criseyde is left without someone to hold her accountable for her actions and eventually help her to make the best choice for herself; in fact, the person who should be doing that, her uncle Pandarus, isn't even on her side. Chaucer's elaboration on the support that Pandarus gives Chaucer is the contrast Chaucer needed to emphasize Criseyde's loneliness. Without even a family member on her side, there is no way that Criseyde would be able to gain the same support as Troilus and subsequently get out of the social predicament that she has been placed in as a result of society's allowances for female and male friendships and support systems.

### **The Coercion of Criseyde**

Before reading the coercion of Criseyde by Pandarus, readers already know that her options as a widowed woman of how to proceed with Troilus are limited. As Pandarus begins his coercion of her, he is also most likely aware of her predicament, yet is clearly more concerned about Troilus's best interests when Pandarus attempts to put her in a better mood by asking her to "'Do wey your book, rys up, and lat us daunce'" ['put away your book, rise up, and let us dance'] (Book II 111), to which she replies: "'A! God forbede!' quod she. 'Be ye mad? / Is that a widewes lyf, so god you save?'" ['Ah, God forbid!' said she. 'Are you mad? / Is that a widow's life, so God you save?'] (Book II 113-4). Based on her widow's attire, Criseyde is still in mourning; Pandarus's offer to dance implies a conscious choice to ignore social protocol about widowship. However, the bigger issue is that more than anyone, a family member of Criseyde's, like Pandarus, would have been expected to be sympathetic to a fellow family member's loss, social etiquette or not. Instead, Chaucer's Pandarus's disregard for Criseyde's sadness highlights the allegiance of even Criseyde's

family members to someone other than Criseyde. At this point, Chaucer is asking his readers to consider the isolation of Criseyde: is there anyone that can be expected to help her?

Although the arrangement being proposed by Pandarus is not the best for Criseyde, both Boccaccio and Chaucer write Pandarus's dialogue as continuing to pressure Criseyde to be with Troilus. However, the two authors do so differently. In Boccaccio's version, Pandarus enters into Criseyde's home and enjoys "laughter and sweet words"<sup>60</sup> before bringing up the topic of Troilus, whereas Pandarus in Chaucer has entered the interaction without considering social etiquette or Criseyde's comfort. Although in both versions Pandarus does not reveal his proposition until later on in their conversation, Boccaccio's Criseyde does not express tones of exasperation, only asking who this man is twice<sup>61</sup> before Pandarus tells her it is Troilus. However, Chaucer's Pandarus leads her to the point of clear exasperation: "'A! Wel bithought! For love of god,' quod she, / 'Shal I not witen what ye mene of this?'" ["Ah, well put, for love of God," said she, / "[But] am I never to know what you mean by this?"] (Book II 225-6). Instead of being honest with Criseyde, Pandarus toys with her emotions to eventually drive her to a point where she is desperate to know what he is referring to. In doing so, Pandarus forces Criseyde to be dependent on him, in this instance for information. Whereas Boccaccio makes the interaction between Criseyde and Pandarus in this scene a conversation,<sup>62</sup> Chaucer's Pandarus takes complete control over the agreement by making false claims based on his judgement. One example is when Criseyde asks whether the news he will give her is that the war with the Greeks has ended, to which Pandarus replies: "'It is a thing wel bet than swiche fyve'" ["It is a thing much better than five such [events]"] (Book II 126). The discrepancy between the benefits Criseyde and Troilus receive reveals the ridiculous nature of

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<sup>60</sup> Boccaccio, 76.

<sup>61</sup> Boccaccio, 78 & 80.

<sup>62</sup> Boccaccio, 76-80. 83-5.



Pandarus's statement: Troilus will receive a benefit of sex, while Criseyde is left with nothing other than a risk of humiliation. In other words, Criseyde will be at the sexual beck and call of a man who is providing nothing for her. However, Pandarus paints the opportunity as similar to winning the Trojan War. Even though Pandarus is feeding false information to Criseyde, Chaucer's inclusion of lines like these show the use of blatant manipulation used on Criseyde for the benefit of a man. Although Criseyde is Pandarus's niece, Troilus's desire for her changes the way in which Pandarus sees Criseyde; she is no longer his niece-- she has become a commodity he must obtain for Troilus.

His comparison between the war and the relationship also introduces a pattern that will carry through many of his coercive interactions with Criseyde: to catch the victim, Criseyde, off guard to make the coercion of her easier.<sup>63</sup> Since Pandarus sets up the relationship to be an amazing opportunity for Criseyde, her reaction when she learns the news is not what she had imagined. As a result, she's unprepared to appropriately respond to Pandarus's tactics to defend herself or consider whether the relationship is truly the best decision for her. Despite her discomfort, the inherent power dynamics between Criseyde and Pandarus place him in the role of the male persuader and Criseyde as the hesitant female, much like what the social expectations for women in the medieval period were.

Regardless of her misfortune as a result of her uncle's persistence, Chaucer's Criseyde still pledges allegiance to her uncle: "Now, uncle myn, I nil yow nought displese, / Nor axen more, that may do yow disese" ["Now, my uncle, I will not displease you, / nor ask again, since that might ail you"] (Book II 146-7). Although Criseyde is being used as a pawn, she feels that she must blame her distaste for his idea on herself versus vocalizing what type of a relationship she

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<sup>63</sup> Carol L. Shilket, "The Manipulations of Chaucer's Pandarus and Shakespeare's Iago" in *Chaucerian Shakespeare: adaptation and transformation: a collection of essays* (1983), p. 121.

knows she needs out of fear of disappointing her uncle. The inclusion of a quote where she blames herself for a fault being done to her speaks to the restrictive nature of the patriarchy that forces women like Criseyde to accept all the blame as their own, even when it is by no fault of themselves.

Once Criseyde officially learns about the proposal, Pandarus switches from creating false hope to manipulating her judgement by offering ultimatums that place all of the pressure and responsibility onto her: ““That, bot ye helpe, it wol his bane be. / Lo, here is al, what sholde I more seye? / Doth what yow list, to make him live or deye”” [“That, unless you help, it will be his end. / Lo, here is all, what more should I say? / Do what you please to make him live or die”] (Book II 320-2). Pandarus even goes so far as to say her beauty and cheer (Book II 332-336) are the reason that these ultimatums or even being given to her, even though she has had no direct involvement in Troilus’s love sickness and subsequently Troilus’s death. In other words, Pandarus, on behalf of Troilus, is saying that if Criseyde does not agree to have sex with Troilus, Troilus will die. At first, the idea of bartering Criseyde off for Troilus seems like another exaggeration by Chaucer to help illustrate the helplessness of women in the society. However, bartering was a typical way in which women were paired with men. So, Pandarus’s selling off of his own niece for sex was most likely an ode to the social expectations of medieval society that Chaucer mimics to keep in line with medieval social structure. But, bartering was typically done when agreeing upon marriages or when there was a trading of commodities like land or animals. By bartering off Criseyde in the same way that commodities are being auctioned off, Chaucer is implying how her helplessness has resulted in her commodification. However, aside from the bartering, the threats of death are far more concerning since they place her in the decision maker role when she is not granted the social agency by society to do so. Criseyde made no active effort to flaunt her beauty, particularly to Troilus - however, Pandarus blames it on her anyways.

Both Chaucer and Boccaccio end up placing the blame on Criseyde, but Chaucer goes a step further in his placement of blame on Criseyde by saying that her denial of Troilus will make Pandarus die as well. This threat by Pandarus is another tactic of manipulation in Chaucer that exacerbates her helplessness because he is able to “read” Criseyde<sup>64</sup> and therefore cater his manipulation directly to Criseyde’s misfortune. Because her father is gone, Pandarus knows that he is her only family left; if Pandarus were to kill himself, Criseyde would be even more alone than she already is. Therefore, including himself in the suicide threat, Pandarus’s knowledge of the risk that his death would place on Criseyde makes the threat an even bigger prey on Criseyde’s helplessness.

Even more alarming is the similarity between Pandarus’s threats of death and the blaming language Troilus uses earlier in the poem. The continuous pattern of blaming language both creates and points out a pattern of blame by all men, despite Criseyde’s lack of agency in her label. Particularly since women, not men, had to consider the power of disgrace, once she agrees to be in a relationship with Troilus, she would avoid his death, but runs the risk of ruining her own reputation in the society if their relationship were to become public. Considering social disgrace was as awful of an option as physical death for women, Pandarus and Troilus a lot of her without any sort of visible regard for her risks. By the end of this group of scenes, Chaucer has effectively illustrated the trap of Criseyde and the women she represents as a result of her role in society: Criseyde cannot agree to Troilus because of the possible shame from society if their relationship was discovered, but will lose her only remaining family member if she disagrees. What is it then that society expects her to do? Chaucer’s elaborations on the manipulations of Pandarus and his previous elaboration on Criseyde’s bind, when combined, exacerbates the detrimental effects of

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<sup>64</sup> Shilkett, 121

male entitlement in the Middle Ages, where the power of the patriarchy prevailed above female sanity.

### **The Consequences of The Agreement**

After Pandarus leaves, Chaucer discusses Criseyde's anguish. Since she is most likely aware that the choice is not really a choice for her to make, Chaucer says: "And she bigan to breste a-wepe anon, / And seyde, 'Allas, for wo! Why nere I deed?'" [And immediately she burst into tears / and said, "Alas, for woe! Why am I not dead?"] (Book II 408-9). Unlike in Boccaccio, Criseyde expresses clear exasperation through weeping and wishing that she were dead rather than be alive and have to deal with the choice she will be forced to make. Criseyde's sadness and deliberation of an option as grave as death over the relationship reveals the inability for Criseyde to make a choice where she comes out victorious in any sense of the word.

In the end, she agrees to participate in the illicit relationship. However, her choice to do so is not necessarily her choice or a reflection of her personal desires. As if her lack of agency as a woman did not pose enough of a restriction, her status as a widow and below Troilus' social class means that she is unable to pursue a normal courtship with him; the only type of relationship that could occur within the context of medieval societal norms would be a transgressive one. However, a secret relationship does not solve Criseyde's predicament: being devoid of a male for protection and resources. In order to fill the void, Criseyde could have tried to ask for Troilus's help or protection with the issue before agreeing or denied Troilus to find a relationship that could grant her the resources she lacks. But, Criseyde's inability to utilize her chastity, the trait society expected women to have in order to be desirable romantic partners, as a bargaining chip limits her options for a relationship. Without the value of her chastity, Criseyde is unable to find a partner who would provide a better offer than Troilus or persuade Troilus to give her the resources she

needs. However, in the case that she did have a courtly love affair with Troilus to attempt to fulfill the void that she currently faces, being devoid of a male protector, it would be perceived as a disgrace by medieval social standards and she would be given all the blame and consequences while Troilus faced neither. So, while her social circumstance alleviates the pressures placed on Troilus to fill in the role of a provider, Criseyde has more restrictions placed on her. In the end, Chaucer's language aptly illustrates Criseyde's entrapment into submission by medieval society's norms as apparent through the tropes of courtly love. Although Criseyde has a choice to deny Troilus in theory, society limits her options by telling her that she needs to be in a relationship to receive the protection she needs, but simultaneously prevents her from finding that romantic relationship on the basis of her widowship. Chaucer's reveal of the contrasting social expectations for Criseyde and the women she represents implies that women cannot be blamed for their choice in relationships; it is the society that is forcing women to make these choices that should be blamed. In fact, the idea that women are expected to take on the responsibility of choice, considering men have more social agency than women, speaks to the illogical infiltration of society's patriarchal values into the guidelines for medieval courting.

On the other hand, Criseyde could have used her beauty as a way to gain agency in the relationship but agrees to be with Troilus instead of using the value that her beauty could offer a better provider than Troilus. Some may say that agreeing to Troilus places the ultimate blame on her-she could have bargained harder with the beauty that she had. However, Chaucer's choice to include Pandarus's threats of suicide or disownment reminds readers that she wouldn't have anyone on her side if she were to deny Troilus what he wanted. In fact, Criseyde would be worse off since she would be killing both her uncle and possible lover if she were to follow what was

best for her and said no. It would seem that her role as both a niece and a woman work against her in her process of deciding whether to agree to be Troilus's lover.

It is interesting to note that Chaucer's Criseyde asks how Troilus's brother Prince Hector is doing (Book II 153). Her inquiry about him specifically could imply interest beyond a casual conversation with her uncle. Considering he offered her the protection she needs earlier in the poem, Chaucer could be pointing out that she isn't trying to avoid a relationship; she would simply be more interested in pursuing the man that could offer her more, even though he is not in love with her. Her question, as a result, proves that she is attempting to find a beneficial relationship, but is restricted from doing so as a result of the patriarchal discourse from her uncle and Troilus. Chaucer's writing of Criseyde sheds a new light on the idea of female silence. Her character implores readers to question whether women's silence at the time was not because they wanted to be silent; instead, it is because the labels being given to women as subjects discouraged them from speaking up and rewarded their silence. Although Criseyde's role as a widow is not unique to Chaucer, the language he uses to describe her anguish and the descriptive adjectives within the coercion paint an attitude of dominance that is not as prevalent in the rhetoric of Boccaccio.

### **Troilus and Criseyde's First Meeting**

When describing Troilus and Criseyde's first meeting, Chaucer writes Criseyde as having her own part in the agreement, even offering her own rules for their relationship. Boccaccio does not give her the same sense of liberty; instead, he places Troilus as the sole decision maker who decides what "might be pleasing to Criseyde"<sup>65</sup> while Criseyde is an inactive participant. By making a place for Criseyde in the discourse, Chaucer is allowing her to have a voice in the process. Since the process involves her, including her voice is dual in its purpose: not only is it a way to fill

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<sup>65</sup> Boccaccio, 148.

the gap in the conversation that had been empty in previous literature, but also points out the gap in the first place.

Before Criseyde has officially agreed to the relationship (Book III 159), it is important to note that Chaucer, but *not* Boccaccio, has her say that she has two things to say to Troilus: “First, yow to thonke, and of your lordshipe eke / Continuance I wolde yow biseke” [“First, to thank you, and of your lordship also / I would ask for your continued protection and financial support”] (Book III 77). For one, Criseyde uses the formal plural “you,” and not “thou” in the statement as if she was speaking to Troilus and somebody else. Considering both men are or could be in a role which could provide her with resources, Chaucer’s Criseyde could be opening up the request for resources to Pandarus as well. By asking both men before the agreement of the relationship, Criseyde gives Pandarus the opportunity to support her with the resources she needs in the case that Troilus is unable. The formality of the statement also allows her to treat this conversation about her resources and the maintenance of her honor as a serious matter--this is not something that she would like Troilus to take lightly. Since she realistically does not have much control over the relationship, Chaucer has Criseyde utilize the power that she does have at this time to plead her case.

Her request for protection and upkeep (“continuance”) before the relationship begins also highlights once more the female preoccupation with gaining male protection and the importance of it in the life of medieval women as well as alleviates her from the accusation that she did not try to help herself in their relationship. Chaucer’s knowledge of the literature of courtly love in combination with his experiences as a man in the time period likely prompts him to have his narrator say that Criseyde is “wise” when noticing the hesitation of Troilus to offer that type of support. Although he is using her for his own sexual pleasure, Chaucer’s vocalization of Troilus’

hesitation exemplifies the different expectations in the courtly love relationship structure between men and women. Chaucer has Criseyde push the boundaries of these expectations by establishing a pattern of her request for protection, which indicates that she has a strong sense of what she needs out of the relationship and will make the appropriate efforts to get what she needs regardless of how society constructs women typically.

Troilus eventually musters up the strength to respond and reassures her that he is hers to command in all things, even death: “I to han, right as yow list, comforte, / Under your yerde, egal to myn offence, / As deeth, if that I breke your defence” [“I have comfort, as you wish, / [that I may suffer] under your rule, equal to my offense, / even death, if I ever abandon you”] (Book III 136-8). In this, he appears to be giving up part of his agency as a way of appeasing her desires. However, Chaucer does not have him mention whether or not he can or cannot give her the protection she needs and requests. By avoiding giving a yes or no answer to Criseyde’s requests, Troilus does not make any verbal commitment to Criseyde. Troilus’s evasions allow Chaucer to illustrate the problem women faced at the time: sentiments of love are nice, but actions of protection speak louder than words. He can tell her he loves her all that he wants, but his declarations of love are not what Criseyde needs especially when she is devoid of anyone else that she could ask to protect her.

As if Troilus has not caused enough of a detrimental impact on Criseyde’s life, Chaucer even slips into Troilus’s language the blame that Pandarus used before when convincing Criseyde to be with Troilus, following up his statements of love with threats of death. When offering himself to her, Troilus claims: “That shal I wreke upon myn owne lyf / Right sone, I trowe, and doon your herte an ese, / If with my deeth your herte I may apese” [“I will kill myself / immediately, I swear, and do your heart ease, / if with my death I may appease your heart”] (Book III 108-110). Even



when trying to gain her trust, Troilus is still turning to methods of coercion as a way of guiltling her to love him. Instead of offering her what she needs, which would more likely get her to love him without fear, Troilus turns to methods he knows will work in his favor at the risk of her discomfort. The coercive structure of his declarations was not abnormal in courtly love but using death in his threats is not. In fact, the use of death counteracts Troilus's sentiments of love; Troilus continues to guilt her when he should be focusing on giving her the love she needs to be confident in her decision to be his lover. While Criseyde's acceptance of coercion implies that the use of coercion was an effective method to get women to agree to courtly love, Chaucer's dramatic choice to include death helps readers realize that their methods were not necessarily right.

Troilus's choice to guilt her eliminates the possibility that Pandarus' coercion was not a reflection of what Troilus wanted to be done when offering a relationship to Criseyde. The fact that both men use coercion speaks to both their moral character as well as a reflection on how men seduce women in courtly relationships. However, Chaucer continues to empower Criseyde in her rhetoric when the relationship begins as she "With that she gan hir eyen on him caste / Ful esily, and ful debonairly, / Avysing hir, and hyed not to faste" [With that, she did cast her eyes on him / very readily and graciously, considering and moving not too fast] (Book III 155-7) when she sees him for their first relationship meeting. Her standing position allows Chaucer to physically place herself above Troilus so that he is in the position of the subject rather than herself. The pause she takes is also more emblematic of the typical male role since it gives her the time to think rather than accept what is being told to her as truth.

At this point, Criseyde probably noticed that Troilus does not offer her the protection she asked for, but also knows based on the societal expectations of the time that she really does not have the option to say no. Therefore, her caveat of "'Myn honour sauf, I wol wel trewely,'" ["My

honor being safe, I will well truly [accept him]”] (Book III 159) to reiterate her defense of her honor and warning to abide by his promises in Chaucer vocalizes Criseyde’s effort to break from her role as the submissive female subject. Particularly when she mentions her honor, Chaucer makes it clear that she is aware of what is important to her and makes sure that what she needs is not damaged as a result of Troilus’ whims.

### **The Night that Troilus and Criseyde Spend Together**

Unlike Boccaccio, Chaucer writes Criseyde as being tricked into seeing Troilus their first night together by her Uncle Pandarus. Chaucer’s decision to do so begs the question of why Pandarus had to turn to trickery. Clearly, if just asking wasn’t enough, this choice wasn’t good for Criseyde; but since it’d be good for Troilus, it’s okay to use tricks. For example, when Criseyde asks whether Troilus would be at the house, Pandarus lies and says that he has left town (Book III 570) even though Troilus is at the house waiting for her. Boccaccio’s version does not include trickery by Pandarus since Criseyde is said to be “alone and [fearfully] waiting for him.”<sup>66</sup> Without the explicit detail that Chaucer has included, Criseyde’s fear cannot be assumed to have come from Pandarus. The lie from Pandarus in Chaucer’s version is significant not only because it is a lie, but because the lie comes from a family member.

The more interesting part of this section is not even the tones of trickery, but how Criseyde responds to it. Criseyde acknowledges that her uncle might not be totally truthful (Book III 578) but agrees to go anyway. Her submissiveness to her uncle in spite of her gut feeling that something is wrong exemplifies the power that men, particularly one she is related to, have on Criseyde’s sense of self. At this point, Chaucer makes it clear that the societal rules placed on her have begun to affect the previous confidence she had in herself when negotiating the terms of her and Troilus’s

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<sup>66</sup> Boccaccio, 166.

relationship. Even if she may not feel right about something, after being told time and time again by the men in her life that she cannot help herself, she begins to take her own feelings as second-hand knowledge and leaves her trust to her uncle. Even if being with Troilus was the best option for her in accordance with the time period so her uncle's efforts were simply a way to place her in the best social situation for her well-being, her uncle shouldn't have to threaten her towards the best option with death.

Chaucer's coercive language continues when Pandarus convinces her to stay the night. Pandarus knows it's going to rain after dinner but treats the risk of travel as assurance for the success of his plan. When she realizes that she has to stay, Criseyde even acknowledges that spending the night was not her first choice as she concedes it would be better to "“graunte it gladly with a freendes chere, / And have a thank, as grucche and thanne abyde”" ['grant it gladly with a friend's cheer / and receive thanks than to grouch and yet remain'] (Book III 642-3). His entrapment of her enforces the consistent use of trickery towards Criseyde that has not been done to Troilus at any point. Chaucer's choice naturally questions why the woman is always the one who is being tricked? Her efforts of trying to make the best with what she can after the apparent manipulation further proves her helplessness. Chaucer also paints Troilus as less certain than Pandarus about the whole situation, hinting towards a redemption on behalf of Troilus for realizing the wrongdoings in their mischievous plan. Instead, it is Pandarus who pushes Troilus by asking Troilus whether he is "“Art thou agast so that she wol thee byte?”" ["Are you so afraid that she will bite you?"] (737) and to go after her. Ultimately, whether it be Troilus or Pandarus, Criseyde is being played with by men solely for the sake of their own personal pleasure.

Chaucer's Pandarus even uses her own words against her by pulling them out of context as the reasoning for her to sleep with Troilus in his lines, warning her: "“That, but it were on hym

along, ye nolde / Hym nevere falsen, while ye lyven sholde” [‘unless he wrongs you first, / never be false to him, while you live’] (Book III 783-4). Although her choice to sleep with Troilus should be dependent on whether she’d like to do so, Pandarus does not consider her feelings as a reason why she would say no. Instead, he centers the language around Troilus and his supposed victimization and how Troilus has “‘come in swich peyne and distresse” [arrived in such pain and distress] (Book III 792) as a result of her own doing. Pandarus once more places her as the perpetrator in the language when she is actually the victim. In this instance, Pandarus seems more and more to be the male character who exemplifies Chaucer’s social critique of the power of the patriarchy even more than Troilus.

As a result of Pandarus’s verbal placement of blame, Pandarus’s language leaves Criseyde with no option other than that she must sleep with Troilus to resolve the distress that she has supposedly caused Troilus, although in reality Troilus’s distress was entirely his own fault. On her first attempt to amend Troilus’s distress, she tries to give him the gift of a ring to honor her promise to him. This is shot down by Pandarus because he tells her, “‘swich a ring trowe I that ye have noon” [such a ring I swear you do not own] (Book III 893). By saying this, Pandarus implies that there is no physical object or verbal promise that she could give as a representation of the promise of her honor. Since she is a woman, her word or token, in this case her ring, are not considered as valid as a man’s offer of those things. Since women are inferior, her options will not be taken as a serious pledge of loyalty to Troilus. In the end, Pandarus’s dismissal traps with no option other than what he wants her to do. In exasperation, Criseyde states, “‘fayn wolde I doon the beste, / If that I hadde grace to do so” [‘I would gladly do what’s best / if only I had the grace to do so’] (Book III 927-8), by which she seems to mean she has neither the knowledge nor the power to choose the ‘correct’ course and can instead only respond to the few options she is given.

As Criseyde eventually realizes that she has no choice but to be with Troilus, it is also in Book III that Pandarus realizes the error in his ways. In both Chaucer and Boccaccio, when Pandarus asks Troilus to treat his niece fairly within their relationship before they spend their first night together, Pandarus acknowledges his role as a “go-between”<sup>67</sup> or “swich a meene” [pimp] (Book III 256) who has made his “Al say I nought, thou wost wel what I mene. / For thee have I my nece, of vyces clene, / So fully maad thy gentillesse triste, / That al shal been right as thy-selve liste” [Although I say nothing, you know well what I mean. / I have for you my niece, free of all vices, / so fully made to trust your nobility / that all shall be as you desire] (Book III 256-9). Since Pandarus was the person who initiated the relationship between Criseyde and Troilus, he realizes that he has now placed control over Criseyde “will” into Troilus’s hands. If Troilus was to mistreat her or tarnish her reputation as an innocent and kind person, then Pandarus will have been the “traitor to her peace” (Book III 273). Pandarus’s ability to tarnish her reputation in a single action as well as his handing over of her to Troilus as if she was his property allows Chaucer to speak to the power men held over women’s reputations. Pandarus’s warning to Troilus tells readers that he, and the men he represents, is aware of the risk that his behavior has brought his niece. However, he has continued to manipulate Criseyde on the basis of male friendship. As told by Troilus in the following lines (Book III 360-427), the power of male bonds is able to override any detrimental consequences to women, including “pimping” out their own nieces.<sup>68</sup> Chaucer’s choice to include Pandarus’s admission of his role points out the detrimental impact that medieval society’s value of men in both friendship and love can have on women. Despite the harm that comes to women

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<sup>67</sup> Boccaccio, 156.

<sup>68</sup> John Hill. “Aristocratic Friendship in Troilus and Criseyde: Pandarus, Courtly Love, and Ciceronian Brotherhood in Troy” in *New Readings of Chaucer’s Poetry* (2003), p. 167.

because of male privilege, Pandarus and Troilus's continuation of coercion to Criseyde allows Chaucer to imply that what is condoned by medieval society is unjust.

Once Pandarus has convinced her to see Troilus and Troilus reveals himself, Criseyde is so shocked that "she kouthe nought a word aright out brynge" [could not bring herself to speak any words] (Book III 958). Her reaction not only mimics the reaction that Troilus had earlier in the poem, but also vocalizes a physical reaction of her entrapment by Pandarus and Troilus. Criseyde's inability to speak in combination with the added feeling of "doubt" are clear signs of panic but are not as important as Troilus's desire for sex when Chaucer's Pandarus tells her to "whisper there" (Book III 977) as Troilus approaches so that she does not ruin Pandarus's plan. In the end, her agreement to have sex with Troilus does not seem to be of her own accord since she remarks: "Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte dere, / Ben yolde, y-wis, I were now not here!" ["Nor had I before now, my sweetheart dear, / been yielded up, I never would be here"] (Book III 1210-1). By saying that she "never would be here" if it were not for Pandarus's trick, Criseyde is clarifying that it was not her personal choice to come see Troilus and subsequently consummate their relationship--the choice was presented to her without her say so. Now, however, since she has already been brought to Troilus's bed, she has no choice but to do so. Unfortunately, the language does not include a clear vow of consent, or contextual clues that direct readers on how to interpret to her retort; rhetoric like "before now" and "been yielded" lends itself to two interpretations. One could be that she had already fallen in love with him before she was presented with the option to sleep with him, so having sex with him would only reiterate the love she has. The other option could be that she had already lost her sense of chastity to her previous husband, so if she had already lost her virginity, there was no harm in sleeping with Troilus now. Regardless of which interpretation is taken, phrasing such as "been yielded" is cause for concern since the

definition assumes that “there had been some fight to finish which Criseyde had lost.”<sup>69</sup> Either option forces Criseyde to relinquish both emotional and physical control over her own body as a result of the articulated male desire. The inclusion of guilty language places Chaucer’s Criseyde as an undeniable victim so that the part of the narrative that was previously ignored can be looked at and questioned by male readers and medieval society as a whole.

### **The Trade of Criseyde**

By the time that Criseyde is sent to the Greeks, she appears to have lost any and all right of choice. Although she is romantically involved with Troilus, the secrecy of their relationship renders his help useless when deciding whether she could stay in Troy or be sent to the Greeks as a trade. As the matter is debated in the parliament (Book IV 211), neither Chaucer nor Boccaccio’s stanzas reveal any hint towards consultation with Criseyde. Instead, Criseyde is forced to follow a decision that affects her without any say in the discussion. Her trade makes sense since her father is on the other side is the one asking for her, but it is ultimately the lack of her own voice in the language which paints her as a male commodity.

The decision places Troilus between a rock and a hard place - by the standards of the time, he should be in agreement with his fellow members of Parliament that the trade of a valuable soldier for a woman, let alone the daughter of a traitor to the state, was more than agreeable. If he openly disagreed, Troilus risked revealing his relationship with Criseyde which would lead her to be shamed by the town. Whereas Troilus remained silent as the decision was made, Boccaccio claims that Troilus fainted when hearing the news.<sup>70</sup> Why did Chaucer keep Troilus’s emotions secret while Boccaccio’s version faints? Withholding his anger and sadness in Chaucer means that

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<sup>69</sup> Gretchen Mieszkowski, “Chaucer’s Much Loved Criseyde.” in *The Chaucer Review* 26, no. 2 (1991), p. 114-115, Accessed April 15, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/25094189](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25094189).

<sup>70</sup> Boccaccio, 232.

Troilus places Criseyde's reputation above his own anguish so that Criseyde's name is kept clear. His personal sacrifice on behalf of her honor not only pays respect to Criseyde, but also proves that he loves her. On the other hand, not fainting in Chaucer also saves Troilus from suffering the loss of power that supposedly comes with fainting.<sup>71</sup> Without being able to confirm nor deny the possibility behind his intentions, Chaucer could be playing to the sides of both Criseyde and Troilus.

Unlike Troilus, Chaucer points out that Hector is one of the few who has adamantly voted against the trade of Criseyde (Book IV 214). Hector clearly realizes that the trade is wrong, as evident by his continuous fight for Criseyde against the majority rule. The contrast between Hector and Troilus' reactions as shown by Chaucer certainly points out an unfortunate irony - as her life is being brought into chaos, the man that has been supposed to love her remains quiet as his brother makes the effort to fight for her. It is true that if Troilus were to fight, he could risk bringing shame to Criseyde. However, Troilus could've joined his brother in defending her without suspicion since Hector started to defend her first. Troilus could have even voted no without joining Hector's debate out of brotherly support. Ultimately, Hector's choice to take a stand despite potential embarrassment or shame shows Troilus's inequality to Hector's goodness<sup>72</sup> and better compatibility with what Criseyde would need from a partner.

From the beginning, Chaucer has written Hector as the ideal man, "a paragon of goodness and wisdom, consistent with the dictates of early chivalric texts."<sup>73</sup> By rising above the belief that women were simply male property, Hector seems to be the only male character who takes notice

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<sup>71</sup> Angela Moots "Perceptions of Syncope in Medieval French Literature of the High Middle Ages: the Function and Cultural History of Fainting," (KUScholarWorks, 2015), <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/19065>.

<sup>72</sup> Marcia Smith Marzec, "What Makes a Man?: Troilus, Hector, and the Masculinities of Courtly Love." In *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, Boydell & Brewer (2008), p. 61, Accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81ttr>.

<sup>73</sup> Marzec, 60



of Criseyde as a fellow human being. When her life was threatened by almost everyone else, it was Hector, and not Troilus who took notice of her unfortunate position and offered her personal protection. Even once Troilus and Criseyde have become lovers, there is no line where Troilus offers her the protection that Hector has. In fact, the benefits of having Troilus as a lover pale in comparison to his brother Hector's proposal who isn't even receiving the personal benefit of sexual gratification from Criseyde that Troilus has. The incongruence between Troilus and Hector's behavior in Chaucer once more serves as a foil to illustrate the difference between a good and a bad partner. As the rest of the men in her life abandon her, coerce her, or take advantage of her, Hector places her well-being above his own. It's significant that Hector's vote for her to stay ends up being denied, while the assumed vote of her lover sends her away; it points out a striking inequality inherent in the patriarchal system. If a woman like Criseyde is given more protection by the man who is not her lover, what does this say about the benefits of courtly love for women? Even after it has been decided that she will leave, Chaucer includes a line where Troilus continues to place the "cost" to himself above her as he worries that "So sore him sat the chaunginge of Criseyde" [So deeply the exchange of Criseyde affected him] (Book IV 231). In a moment where Criseyde is the character that faces the ultimate trauma of leaving her home, Troilus still places his joys as the utmost priority rather than thinking about how she will cope.

### **The Introduction to Diomedes**

It would only seem appropriate that Criseyde is picked up from Troy by her next lover, the Greek soldier Diomedes. As she mounts her horse, Criseyde's sorrow is clear as "Ful sorwfully she sighte, and seyde 'Allas!' / But forth she moot, for ought that may bityde" [very sorrowfully she sighed, and said "Alas!" / but forth she must go, whatever might happen] (Book V 58). Chaucer's description is a striking contrast to Boccaccio's poem where Criseyde is said to have "turned herself

disdainfully to Diomedes...[and left] without saying anything except farewell to her servants...[leading] the king and his barons clearly [recognizing] the lady's scorn."<sup>74</sup> Boccaccio's description paints Criseyde as emotionless, or even cold, without consideration for the fact that she is leaving the man she has said she loves. Chaucer seems to take her sorrow into account by including an inner monologue that states she is devastated but cannot do anything about it, so she must do the best she can to be strong. The strength it takes Chaucer's Criseyde to leave despite emotional torment characterizes her as strong without the assistance of a lover or any man. Particularly in comparison to Troilus, who is sad and can only hold himself together with the assistance of someone else, Criseyde has been more self-sufficient than Troilus from start to end despite her tribulations. Even after she has just been ripped from her life as she knows it, she restrains from taking it out on the one who had taken her away, even thanking Diomedes (Book V 183-4) for his kindness. Once more, Chaucer's writing emphasizes the emotional strength of Criseyde as she perseveres past personal heartbreak to live with the unfortunate circumstance that she has been placed in. In turn, Chaucer flips the assumption through Criseyde's gestures of strength and compassion in her exit by taking control over how she wants the men in the new city to view her.

Although she has held herself together, Diomedes senses the love between Troilus and Criseyde as he picks her up from the gates. Once he has made the discovery, he comes to the realization that he should not be talking about love with Criseyde right now because she is thinking about another man (Book V 101-4). In this instance, Diomedes's observant nature has informed him that she has a past romantic history with Troilus that is still ever-present in her thoughts. As a result, Diomedes must be patient and only bring up the idea of love when she would be receptive

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<sup>74</sup> Boccaccio, 314.

to considering the prospect of moving on to a new love. Unlike Troilus, who courts her while she is still mourning, Diomedes is observant and considerate in his process of wooing her. Therefore, Diomedes resorts to making her comfort his top priority by saying he will do anything to “hir herte an ese” [ease her heart] (Book V 110-6). Unlike Troilus, Diomedes has clearly considered the feelings of Criseyde when planning his own actions and responds by catering to her needs with every effort he could. However, his considerations may just be because he is better at hiding his intentions than Troilus was. As the stanzas go on, Diomedes reveals his feelings of love for her in the back of his mind; his gestures of kindness are ultimately a way for him to “. . . finde a mene, / That she not wite as yet shal what I mene” [find a means, so that she will not yet know what I intend] (Book V 104-5). So, as comforting as his actions might be, the aforementioned caveat indicates that Diomedes’s gestures are not out of genuine kindness. They are simply a kinder form of the manipulation that Troilus and Pandarus used to convince Criseyde to agree to her previous lover. In that sense, the trickery of establishing a facade of care and friendship by Diomedes is even worse. At least Troilus slightly separates himself from the blame and guilt by having Pandarus handle it. Diomedes uses disguised coercive tactics himself to get what he wants in the future. Both men have the same mindset but used different tactics. Either way, the language of both men restricts Criseyde from participating in the pre-relationship phase herself.

As Diomedes continues to converse with her, Chaucer slips in a phrase ““Y-wis, we Grekes con have Ioye / To honouren yow, as wel as folk of Troye”” [“Indeed, we Greeks will find great joy / in honoring you as well as folks in Troy”] (Book V 118-9). This coercive phrase is unique in its invocation of her city-state and cultural beliefs within the Chaucerian tactic of wit throughout *Troilus and Criseyde* to invoke a double meaning in the word “honor.” Much like Troilus in Troy would have “honored” Criseyde in their relationship, Diomedes could be hinting that a man like

himself in Greece is able to do just the same. Diomedes is smart enough to avoid any sort of opinion that he is better than her previous lover, which could cause scorn or hate on her end, but instead reminds her that his cultural background will not and has not stopped him from offering her the care that she needs. Despite the feigned respect, he is ultimately hinting towards a plan of coercion from the beginning of his discourse, as was common in the restrictive nature of courtly love towards the female counterparts.

As Diomedes declares his love to Criseyde on the ride over to the Greek camp, Diomedes reveals that he is Criseyde's "owene aboven every creature" [own above every creature] (Book V 154) or "ye me for your servaunt wolde calle" ["you would call me your servant"] (Book V 173). Although Diomedes appears to be granting agency to Criseyde as the owner or servant over him as a way of subverting the patriarchal structure of courtly love, his rhetoric is similar to the traditional romance language used by other male romance writers. So, much like what Troilus did earlier when he placed his life in Criseyde's hands, Diomedes's offer of himself to Criseyde is not truly granting her agency--instead, it is placing the responsibility of decision-making in her hands, even though she does not realistically have the option to say no to Diomedes as a result of her social status.

It is key to point out that Chaucer's adaptation reads much differently than his predecessor; Boccaccio jumps from Diomedes recognizing the love between Troilus and Criseyde to her meeting her father in Greece. Chaucer chooses to elaborate on the conversation between Diomedes and Criseyde. In doing so, Chaucer is able to point out the use of male trickery by Diomedes as well as Troilus. Ultimately, although Diomedes leads his efforts with a performance of care, both him and Troilus use coercive tactics on Criseyde as if she were a commodity they desire rather than a fellow human being with the right to free will. As a result, Criseyde appears to be "passed" from one

patriarchal to another rather than making lifestyle choices on her own accord. It could also be that, while Diomedes's intentions, as Chaucer has pointed out, are clearly not genuine, the idea of caring for the woman you are wooing allows Chaucer to include rhetoric that would ideally be appropriate to use in the beginning stages of a courtly love relationship which do not trap or blame the woman. However, Chaucer's problematic language mixed in with Diomedes "better" courtly love discourse points out that Diomedes is still not perfect; the contract between Diomedes's language of care and his intentions allows Chaucer to enhance his critique with a stipulation that both medieval society's discourse and the mentality that has come with it support the patriarchy of medieval society at the consequence of female subjection. One might ask which lover truly is better--the one who is a good enough liar to hide his intentions or the one who puts all of his cards out on the table? Considering both are not ideal and place women as a submissive subject, Chaucer subconsciously highlights the fault of the patriarchal system for making women choose between two unappeasable options even when one looks like the better option.

### **The Anguish of Criseyde**

As Criseyde situates herself in the Greek camp outside the walls of Troy, she complains "My fader nil for no-thing do me grace / To goon ayein, for nought I can him queme" ["My father will not for anything grant me / permission to leave, for nothing will please him"] (Book V 694-5) even though "My Troilus shal in his herte deme / That I am fals, and so it may wel seme" [My Troilus will in his heart judge / that I am false, and so it very well seems] (Book V 697-8). The use of multiple negatives in the line indicates that this line is meant to be taken as a very emotional line--as a result, the negatives highlight the intensity of Criseyde's exasperation at her current predicament. Despite her vocal desire to return to Troy for the sake of Troilus, her father's desire takes priority over her liberty. In light of her father's denial, she continues on to list off an

alternative option like sneaking away at night. The sneak out option would allow Criseyde the agency she needs to follow her own desires, but the necessity to turn to secrecy allows Chaucer to once more point out an inequality between the sexes: Criseyde's father gives her an order and she must follow it, but when Criseyde wants to do something it must be done in secret. Unfortunately, Criseyde instinctively knows what the fault in her plan will be because another male would destroy that plan as well. Her lack of options conveys the unfortunate nature of her society that it is not even lovers or family, but all men in medieval society who have more agency over her livelihood than herself.

Although she denied Troilus's option to run away and be together in another foreign city, both Chaucer and Boccaccio have her acknowledge her mistake. While contemplating her misfortune, Chaucer has Criseyde question: "Lord, wheyther thou yet thenke upon Criseyde?" [Lord, do you still think about Criseyde?] (Book V 735) while Boccaccio has her "weeping that never the like was made."<sup>75</sup> Her regret is more powerful in Chaucer than in Boccaccio because Criseyde's choices are so unappealing that she feels that even the world's supposed protector, God, is not watching over her or keeping her best interests at heart. Although her widowed status in Troy was more likely to bring her disgrace, at least in Troy she was more independent without her husband or father to dictate her life to her. Now, her role as a daughter forces her to take the will of her father as her own. Chaucer cleverly segues the end of her monologue with a stanza where Criseyde points out that "For who-so wole of every word take hede, / Or rewen him by every wightes wit, / Ne shal he never thryven" ["for whoso will of every word take heed, / or rule himself by other people's wit, / he shall never prosper or succeed] (Book V 757-9). Criseyde acknowledges the fallacy behind her own actions: since she is always "ruling herself by others

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<sup>75</sup> Boccaccio, 260.

rather than following her own desires, she will never get the things she needs, whether it be protection or her liberty. Although rebelling against what she's told to do as a woman is risky, Criseyde knows she must express a sense of agency to avoid the inevitable failure that comes with not following her own advice. Chaucer's verbal reiteration of the risks for Criseyde further exhibits the helpless state that Criseyde is in. Inevitably, Chaucer shows that it is the fault of the patriarchal society that forces her to break her lover's heart and sit with the consequence from the sidelines rather than her own choice. Chaucer's elaborations overall reveal a pattern in the behavior that is done to Criseyde - constant restriction by the men surrounding her. First her uncle, then Troilus, and now her father continually change her life for the worse, with the support of societal social norms for women, without giving her any ability to prevent it.

### **Diomedes Professes his Love**

As Criseyde begins to settle into her new home, Diomedes in Chaucer continues to make efforts to win Criseyde's love through trickery rather than catering to what Criseyde needs. Diomedes begins to refer to terms of fishing as a form of "sleight" [skill] (Book V 773) or trickery to try to catch her with "hook and lyne" [hook and line] (Book V 778). His goal to catch Criseyde like a fish not only dehumanizes her, but also categorizes her as powerless to his charm. Chaucer's writing identifies the use of trickery in every part of the relationship, not just at the beginning or end. While getting to know her, Chaucer's Diomedes tries to alleviate her sadness about her Trojan lover with a medieval reality check; he says Troy will be decimated by the Greeks quickly - in that case, why would she want to be on the losing side? The threat that Troy will fall despite his knowledge that she has just left a lover there or that Troy is her homeland implies Diomedes's disregard for Criseyde's feelings. Although his language does not include such drastic blame like

Pandarus's threats of death, the sole focus of Diomedes is the same as Troilus: to secure his "catch" rather than consider the impact that his language would have on Criseyde.

However, Diomedes reveals the superficiality behind his performance of care tactic when he implies that Criseyde ruins her beauty when she momentarily cries: "clepe ayein the beautee of your face" [call again the beauty of your face] (Book V 914). In doing so, Diomedes seems to invalidate her worries as unworthy of her time. She has the right to be upset about her troubles, but Diomedes's language subtly reminds her of the importance of physical beauty for women in order to verbally guilt her into hiding her feelings for his sake. Diomedes's encouragement to hide her emotions, even though himself and Troilus are able to be open and honest about their own feelings, allows Chaucer to present a difference in expectations between the men and women who they represent. While it is okay for men to feel their feelings, women in medieval society cannot do so at the risk of ruining their beauty. As a result, society validates the male tendency to take women's feelings as secondary consideration to men's primary personal goals.

Much like what Criseyde does with Troilus, she proposes several rules for Diomedes's return<sup>76</sup> in both Chaucer and Boccaccio which helps her establish a possible upward trend of female agency in her relationship with Diomedes. In their dialogue, Criseyde's verbiage mimics how the men of the period talked to their female counterparts. Both authors have her use her voice and wit to defend herself from Diomedes's insult towards the inadequacy of men in Troy by retorting that Diomedes will find that the men within Troy are just as "worthy" of praise as the men in Diomedes's Greek camp (Book V 969). Her retort as not being wholly in agreement with his point of view and vocalizing it helps to set a precedent for the rest of their relationship. Her witty reply could be a ploy of courtly love, where posing the opinion of Diomedes as wrong allows

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<sup>76</sup> Chaucer, V. 995-1009, and Boccaccio, 364.



Criseyde to participate in the conversations with flirtation, but either option gives Criseyde the opportunity to speak in the form of banter: before, Troilus and Pandarus approached her with the option of a relationship in a way where banter was not even an option.

Chaucer's version goes back to creating a stronger sense of agency for Criseyde in a way that Boccaccio does not when she is telling Diomedes that she is allowing him to come back and speak to her the next day (Book V 995-1001). By saying that she will ““speken with yow fayn / So that ye touchen naught of this matere”” [speak with [Diomedes] gladly / so long as you do not discuss this matter] (Book V 995-6), Criseyde is setting up the rules and the agenda for how they will proceed with the following interactions of their relationship. Her choosing of how the relationship will work is a gender role reversal by Chaucer which allows her to take on the agency typically given to men. It is interesting to consider why Criseyde waited to use her own voice when she could've done so with Troilus. Given that Criseyde speaks more herself from the beginning of her relationship with Diomedes, it could be that Criseyde is growing stronger because she is speaking for herself more rather than being silenced or ruled by the men around her. Although the possibility cannot necessarily be proven, what is clear is that her transition into a stronger character through Chaucer's changes present the way that women should be allowed to act rather than what society tells them and helps readers to understand the staggering repercussions of medieval society's social expectations for women. Ultimately, Criseyde accepts Diomedes as a lover without any written indication by Chaucer of grief like crying or wishes of death. There's no doubt that she's been wrongfully coerced by Diomedes, but her confident decision to see him once more reflects an effort by Criseyde that helps prove Chaucer's point: women like Criseyde are not jumping from man to man because they are villains, women simply want to be with men who offer her the protection they need.

### Criseyde's Choice Between her Two Loves

At the end of the poem, Criseyde is forced to choose between one of her two lovers. After hearing what Diomedes had to say, Criseyde considers what Diomedes can give her, such as “his greet estat” (Book V 1025), as well as her current social predicament: “that she was alone and hadde nede / Of freendes help” [that she was alone and had need / of friends’ help] (Book V 1026-7). Chaucer’s reflection on her loneliness and need of male assistance previously has made readers aware that she needs a man that can protect her more than she needs a man that she loves. The similarity in social classes between Criseyde and Diomedes allows them to have a public relationship so that Diomedes has the ability to fulfill her needs more so than Troilus could. In the end, her choice of Diomedes gives her what society has told women they need from their male lovers. Since society’s construction of women as submissive to men has placed her in a situation where she is alone and needs help, Chaucer points out that it is the restrictions placed on women which forces her to abandon Troilus.

Despite the concordance between Criseyde’s choice of Diomedes and societal expectations, Criseyde’s choice reflects poorly on her character as possibly being the villainous and conniving woman medieval society assumed her to be when she goes from one man to another in such a short period of time. Choosing Diomedes right after she has left Troilus makes scholars question whether Criseyde even had feelings for Troilus, or if it was just a ruse to try to get his love. If she really loved Troilus as much as she led readers to believe, how could she have left him for Diomedes so quickly? She could not have chosen Diomedes solely for protection, since Troilus offered her love and protection when he volunteered to elope with her instead of allowing her to go to the Greeks (Book V 1506). Although it would be social suicide for him to elope,<sup>77</sup> Troilus’s offer to give up

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<sup>77</sup> John Maguire, “The Clandestine Marriage of Troilus and Criseyde.” *The Chaucer Review* 8, no. 4 (1974), p. 262-78. Accessed April 3, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/25093277](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25093277).

his social status and riches defies social norms and proves his love for her as beyond a surface-level courtly love affair and proves his true love for Criseyde.<sup>78</sup> Chaucer's version even has Troilus specify that despite their leave, Criseyde will not have to worry about a lack of protection because they are "Of tresour, may we bothe with us lede / Y-nough to live in honour and plesaunce, / Til in-to tyme that we shal ben dede" [of treasure, we may both take enough with us / to live in honor and pleasure / until we die] (Book V 1514-6). Chaucer's addition makes it clear that Troilus is aware of Criseyde's need for protection so is willing and able to offer Criseyde the support she would need. However, now Criseyde's choice to leave has made Chaucer's audience confused: if she's being offered what she needs by the man she loves, why does she leave? To that, it could be said that pursuing elopement not only brings with it the trouble of leaving civilization with a risk that she will be shamed, but also is not necessarily a strong suggestion by Troilus.<sup>79</sup> Although Troilus could have asked to kidnap her and marry her that way, he suggests leaving Troy as a way of avoiding dealing with the social problems that would come with their marriage if they stayed in Troy. Although eloping away from Troy would rid him of the complications, Criseyde still risks leaving a society where she would have a father or uncle that would support her if the plan derailed.

Scholars also point to her second conversation with Diomedes as evidence for the claim when she says to Diomedes that she had a husband and "the whos myn herte al was, til that he deyde" [who had my entire heart until he died] (Book V 976), and speaks of another love but says that both have died. She does not do so in Boccaccio, instead saying "didn't care for any other, Greek or Trojan."<sup>80</sup> Unlike the past pattern between the two authors, Boccaccio's version paints her as less of a villain than Chaucer. But, her lie about Troilus being dead in Chaucer is not

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<sup>78</sup> Angelina Pappas, "A comparison of Chaucer's and Shakespeare's treatment of the Troilus and Cressida Story," Boston University (1950), Accessed April 3, 2020, <https://hdl.handle.net/2144/4946>.

<sup>79</sup> Donaldson, 96.

<sup>80</sup> Boccaccio, 362.

necessarily the reason to doubt her love. By saying to Diomedes that Troilus is dead, it could be Criseyde's way of making herself forget about her past lover since she knows she must help her to move onto a new lover who can provide her with what she needs without running away. Chaucer's choice is also an example of Criseyde's desperation and necessity for a new lover: if a suitor like Diomedes would offer her the resources and protection women needed without the risk of elopement, alluding to a present love from her previous town would prevent her from receiving what she needed from a better romantic match.

The sense of willpower she has been given by Chaucer is far greater than that given to Troilus and the male lovers similar to him in the genre of courtly love. Leaving Diomedes as an option when Troilus is waiting for her could've been a betrayal to Troilus. But Chaucer has made it clear in Troilus's dialogue throughout the poem that Troilus has been focusing on solely himself and how Criseyde can attend to his needs. When Criseyde is blamed, Chaucer's previous exposition on Troilus's selfishness reveals a hypocrisy of the blame on Criseyde considering her motivations for her choices are the same as Troilus: to make choices that are the best for her personal well-being. As a result, her conscious choice to eliminate Troilus is one of strength. As a result, it can be argued that the choice she is villainized for only happened because she is a "victim of aggression...and seduction of the surrounding men."<sup>81</sup> If Criseyde was not constantly being pursued and coerced into a relationship by another man right when she is forced out of her previous residence, Chaucer implies that she has no choice but to force herself to move on if men do not give her the chance to grieve her loss of love.

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<sup>81</sup> Lawrence Capelovitch. The True Characters of Criseyde and of Diomedes in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: A Restoration of the Reputations of Two Misunderstood Characters Unjustly Maligned in Literary Criticism, Master's Thesis, Concordia University (20110, Accessed April 9, 2020, [https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/973657/1/Capelovitch\\_MA\\_S2012.pdf](https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/973657/1/Capelovitch_MA_S2012.pdf)).

After having decided that Diomedes is the best lover for her, Criseyde gives Diomedes a brooch. Once she has done so, Boccaccio's writing places her in the villainous role when he says that she "did not keep her promise to Troilus."<sup>82</sup> Boccaccio's emphasis on her not keeping the promise to Troilus places her as the conscious perpetrator while simultaneously placing the promise she made to Troilus above her own well-being. Chaucer's more mild approach keeps her from being villainized when she is said to have "made him were a pencil of his sleeve" [made him a pennant of her sleeve] (Book V 1043) and following it up with a stanza of self-blame where she says "Than she, when that she falsed Troilus, / She seyde, 'Allas! For now is clene a-go / My name of trouthe in love, for ever-mo! / For I have falsed oon, the gentileste / That ever was, and oon the worthieste!" [then, when she had falsed Troilus, she said, "Alas! Now my name of truth in love is entirely gone, forevermore! / For I have falsed one of the gentlest / that ever was, and one of the worthiest!"] (Book V 1053-7). The self-blame that she has vocalizes the grief she feels as a result of her rejection of Troilus - as a result, Chaucer's inclusion begs the question, if she did not love Troilus, would she have felt grief after betraying him? The narrator in Chaucer even goes on to say that he "Ne me ne list this sely womman chide" [Nor do I care this hapless woman to chide] (Book V 1093) her for her actions even though it may look like she is deserving of it. Since Chaucer knows how the mindset of the society works, he has prepared his poem to be able to defend Criseyde's actions instead of allowing the judgements to take over his message. Although her betrayal of Troilus might've hurt, Chaucer clarifies that he is not the only one being hurt in the situation to evoke a level of sympathy that does not match Boccaccio. Chaucer flips it so that readers and scholars think about the story from Criseyde's point of view before passing judgement.

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<sup>82</sup> Boccaccio, 366.

Before passing judgement on her, Chaucer also forces readers to consider the far worse repercussions that would fall on her in comparison to the benefits of staying with Troilus. She may love Troilus, but he cannot offer her what he needs without going against societal expectations. Considering reputation at the time meant everything to a woman, damaging her clean reputation would have most likely been a worse threat than losing her true love, even if he offered to provide her with her needs of protection in another place. Criseyde in Chaucer directly acknowledges this reality right after she admits she has betrayed Troilus when she says: “‘Allas, of me, un-to the worldes ende, / Shal neither been y-writen nor y-songe / No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende” [alas, of me, until the world’s end, / there will never be written or sung / a kindly word, for these books will abuse me] (Book V 1058-1060). The immediate consideration of how her thoughts immediately go first and foremost to how her reputation will be affected reflects the value that society has placed on reputation, so much so that their rules have hindered relationships of true love. Her continued words of affection about Troilus even when she has said that she is remaining true to Diomedes displays the tension and conflict between the obligations to social duty and the power of her emotions.

When comparing Criseyde’s efforts to Troilus’s efforts, one can’t say he didn’t make any, but they also cannot really say that he did all he could. As mentioned earlier, Troilus remained silent during the vote to exchange Criseyde for Antenor in both Chaucer and Boccaccio, meaning he did not make an effort at a time where he could’ve prevented her leave and choice of Diomedes from happening in the first place. Later, when Criseyde tries to make an effort in the only way she is allowed by sending him a letter in which Criseyde writes: “I hertelees, I syke, I in distresse” [I the heartless, the sick and in distress] (Book V 1594) and hopes to replace their love with friendship so they are not left with nothing by saying “I pray you as I may / Of your good word and of your

friendship ay” [I beg you as I may of your good word and your friendship always] (Book V 1624-5). However, Chaucer has Troilus assume the worst in her instead of reading her efforts as Criseyde sharing her pain and only offering the sole olive branch she has to give to alleviate his pain. According to his dialogue, Troilus sensed that she had changed and that she “nas not so kinde as that hir oughte be” [she was not as kind as she ought to be] (Book V 1643). Even when he realizes that this letter is not the Criseyde he knows since “this lettre thoughte al straunge” [this letter seemed very strange] (Book V 1632), Troilus allows the society’s normalization of women as the villain to overtake his judgement and inspire him to incriminate her, even after a relationship with her. Unfortunately, Troilus ultimately chooses not to offer her a chance to act on her behalf by preventing her from “speaking” when he does not respond to her letter. At that point, the ultimate burden of responsibility on Troilus for not answering her: his pain and her villainization in the eyes of some readers is on him. Maybe if Troilus had answered her letter, she could’ve had the chance to explain her helplessness and the reason why she decided to stay to give Troilus the closure he needs. But, his choice to not respond back solidified her inability to do anything to remedy the situation, whether she wanted to or not.

Troilus’s unfair villainizing of Criseyde is also in his dialogue: “And eek a broche (and that was litel nede) / That Troilus was, she yaf this Diomedes” [and also a brooch (and that was unnecessary) / that had been Troilus’ she gave to Diomedes] (Book V 1040-1). Criseyde is the person in the relationship who has been giving things up, but Troilus’s language makes it seem like he is the person making the sacrifices as a way to validate his feelings of anger. After all that Criseyde has done, and her clear distress in the letter, the subconscious male entitlement of Troilus prevails. Even the narrator, although their gender is never revealed, seems to agree with Troilus by claiming that her gifting of Troilus’s broach to Diomedes crossed a line between being in charge

of her actions and causing intentional insult to Troilus. By using language such as “unloven yow” [to unlove you] (Book V 1698), Chaucer shows readers how quickly Troilus can turn from loving and doting on Criseyde to emotionless and steel-like.<sup>83</sup> Despite Criseyde’s best efforts, Chaucer showcases the overpowering nature of male entitlement as a result of a constant villainization of women. The use of such a cold adjective when describing Troilus’s rejection of Criseyde’s pleas allows Chaucer to critique the wrongful assumptions of women in Criseyde’s position in medieval society; this situation proves to readers that many times, women are not the only reason for the destruction of romantic relationships. At the very least, women could be making the efforts to avoid their villainization, but medieval society simply chooses to silence them.

There is something to be said about Criseyde’s choice to “dump” Troilus with a letter rather than doing it in person. For the majority of the poem, Criseyde is presented as the subject of Troilus as evident by Chaucer’s stylistic narrations of Criseyde through the mind of Troilus. In doing so, Chaucer has made it seem as though Criseyde was an object that Troilus could visually assess piece by piece like a piece of prose because she was the inferior sex by societal standards. However, writing a letter allows Criseyde to remove her physical body from the break up so that she is given the privilege of vocalizing her thoughts and feelings as she wants them to be taken; now Chaucer has given her control over how she is being presented/viewed by Troilus and the men of the medieval community.

Chaucer even takes Criseyde’s agency one step further by including her letter in his adaptation of the poem, whereas the letter exchanges in Book 5 are not included in Boccaccio’s rendition of the tale at all. Beginning with his first letter to Criseyde, Boccaccio addresses the letter: “Troilo writes to Criseyde of what it is that sustains his life and prays her that she would

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<sup>83</sup> R. Allen Shoaf. “‘The Monstruosity in Love’: Sexual Division in Chaucer and Shakespeare” in *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde* (Boydell & Brewer 2008), p. 186.



return as she promised.”<sup>84</sup> Chaucer actually includes the letter in his passages labeled “Litera Troili” (Book V 1316) as well as in line 1589 under the title “Litera Criseydis” (Book V 1589). Instead of being assigned her role as the villain by simply saying she wrote a letter, Chaucer’s inclusion of the letter discussing her sorrow and desire for friendship gives her as much of a voice as Troilus was given when Chaucer included his letter earlier. Criseyde’s opportunity to defend herself also helps to disprove medieval society’s tendency to victimize men since the letter clearly vocalizes her reasons for doing what she has done instead of letting judgments cloud readers’ judgments.

Chaucer’s language prevents Criseyde from being given complete blame after receiving her letter whereas Boccaccio places Criseyde as the villain who heartlessly broke Troilus’ heart. Although she has just poured her sentiments of love for Troilus, Boccaccio’s automatic assumption for his Troilus is being “suspicious of what was the truth”<sup>85</sup> and concluding that “a new love was the cause of such lies.”<sup>86</sup> The Troilus in Boccaccio’s version labels her as a cheater who is cruelly trading Troilus for the better option. However, Chaucer’s Troilus does not blame her necessarily for the ending of the relationship. He acknowledges that he is sad that their relationship is ending and that it will be a “kalendes of chaunge” [change in the weather] (Book V 1634), but he does not include any language where she is being blamed for the break-up; instead, he acknowledges that if he loves her as much as he previously claimed to do so, he would let her go even if it causes him pain (Book V 1638). Chaucer’s Troilus is sad that she is no longer with him, but he grants her the opportunity to pursue the best option for herself without any hard feelings from him.

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<sup>84</sup> Boccaccio, 388.

<sup>85</sup> Boccaccio, 413.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

By the end, although Chaucer kept the major plotline the same, the majority of the changes that Chaucer implemented were to the discourse of Criseyde and/or men when describing the restrictive nature of male treatment towards her. In doing so, Chaucer seems to exacerbate the restrictions of Criseyde's livelihood in his version, making stylistic choices like adding internal monologues of Criseyde's that are not found in other versions, changing the descriptions of Criseyde and/or Troilus when the two interact, and putting more effort into describing expositional detail about a characters motivations or their emotions at major developments in the story's plot line but still maintained his integrity to the original literature. Based on the social critique that have shown themselves within these changes, Chaucer's social critiques within the poem do not solely reveal female maltreatment at the hands of the men who court them. His changes extend the "blame" to the society that has normalized female helplessness and male superiority as acceptable forms of interaction. In doing so, Chaucer implies a necessary change to those perpetuating the stigma against women as a result of patriarchal beliefs.

Chaucer's aforementioned focus on all of society in his critique rather than a select group of men could have stemmed from his personal life, particularly his crime of "raptus." Although Chaucer committed the crime of "raptus" in 1380, the release of Goodchild and Grove as well in Chaumpaigne's acquittal shows the involvement of multiple men in the crime and suggests a belief by Chaucer's "helpers" that women were a commodity for men to take as they please. Furthermore, the pardon of Chaucer to continue on with life as if the crime had never happened implies an acceptance of crimes like what Chaucer had done to Chaumpaigne as commonplace. The acceptance and perpetuation of the crime against Chaumpaigne speaks to a fault in the medieval period that goes beyond the actions of a single man. Much like Criseyde's maltreatment has been

done to her by multiple men (Pandarus, Diomedes, and Troilus), Chaumpaigne's mistreatment is the fault of a continual practice of female mistreatment by men who follow the deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs of medieval society (in her case, Chaucer, Goodchild, and Grove).

As a result of Chaucer's guilt and the realization that the burden of responsibility lies on all participants of female mistreatment, Chaucer's "personal penance" of a critique on medieval society was aimed at the standards which normalized crimes such as the one he committed. While the work itself is fiction, not autobiographical, his message is an effort to advocate for women in the most effective way Chaucer could, in his writing. Much like it "takes a village" to perpetuate the period's misconstrued ideology towards women, Chaucer's literature was his way to help set a new precedent for female treatment. If taken as Chaucer intended, the message of his changes to the courtly love structure could translate to a reality if enough of his readers were to understand his message and act on it.

Chaucer's social critique on the treatment of women in medieval society in *Troilus and Criseyde* may not seem as far-fetched when looking at literature other than his own. Other pieces such as *The Knight of the Cart* (ca. 1176),<sup>87</sup> among many others, exhibit similar patterns of women being left or being forced to make harsh decisions because of societal expectations while their male counterparts live a life without similar burdens. In fact, his literary prose arrested the attention of many future prominent male authors like Shakespeare, who wrote his own version, *Troilus and Cressida*, in 1602. However, his changes were not plain to the average reader; the brilliance of the poem is that Chaucer alluded to his critique on society in subtle ways that were strategically spread out throughout the poem. As opposed to being strongly pro-women, Chaucer maintained his

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<sup>87</sup> Chr tien De Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, trans. Burton Raffel (Yale UP: 1997), Accessed April 17, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq9x7](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq9x7).

credibility as a poet to circulate his poems and the subliminal messages they had as popular pieces of literature to his audience.

Ultimately, the imitation of Chaucer proves his status as a groundbreaking author. Chaucer's ability to change his subject position as a white European man and depict the ignored female perspective via his stylistic choices, albeit imperfect in certain places, while still maintaining the integrity of the society that he is living in was unlike the majority of male authors of the period. As a result, Chaucer's purpose expanded beyond an attempt to make a change to the medieval social hierarchy; his works have become fossil records of medieval culture. Chaucer's discussion of women's restrictions in love fulfills the gap left by his fellow male authors and provides a space for the ignored female voice to be heard. Regardless of his personal reasons for writing in support of women, Chaucer's risk to provide social insights that went against social constructs speaks to the enormity of the injustices within the medieval social system and the necessity to eradicate the damage done by the social stigmas of a patriarchal society.

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