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Narrative Control in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde

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Narrative Control in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

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Introduction

Midway through Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, the first of his *Canterbury Tales*, a passage stands out as something of an oddity. A duel has been arranged between the story's romantic protagonists, Palamon and Arcite, for the hand of Emelye, the object of their affections. The two men are heading to separate temples to pray for victory. In between their prayers, Emelye gets a passage focusing on her perspective, for the first and last time in the narrative. She goes to the temple of Diana, virgin goddess of the hunt, and asks, in effect, to join her company. "Chaste goddese," she says, "wel wostow that I / Desire to ben a mayden al my lyf, / Ne nevere wol I be no love ne wyf" (*KT*, lines 2304-6); she wants out of the story of romance in which she has been placed.[1] Neither of the gods to whom Palamon and Arcite pray, Venus and Mars, answer them directly. Emelye does receive an answer, with Diana appearing in the temple to tell her that her prayers have been rejected. Diana tells Emelye that she must marry Palamon or Arcite, and that her secondary request – to marry which of them most desires her – is also impossible to ensure. Emelye is denied all power, all agency to affect her situation.

As Emelye leaves the temple, the Knight concludes the passage with the phrase "This is th'effect; there is namore to seye" (*KT* 2366). Within *The Knight's Tale*, there is indeed no more to say. The next time Emelye appears, she is fully committed to the romance of the story, without trace of the opinions she expresses in the temple of Diana.[2] But Chaucer was writing other

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[1] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). All quotations from Chaucer are from this edition.

[2] The shift between Emelye's presence in the temple and her presence in the rest of the text is drastic enough that the Knight feels the need to justify it in a parenthetical before the duel; "For wommen, as to speken in comune, / Thei folwen alle the favour of Fortune" (*KT* 2681-2).

works while drafting *The Knight's Tale*, and the theme of a woman with a troubled relationship to the romantic narrative she is in reappears at length in one of them, his *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Though *The Knight's Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde* can be compared in a great number of ways, there are three which are specifically important for the aims of this project. First, both works feature a woman placed in the narrative role of the love interest while having ambivalent feelings about this placement. Emelye has the scene described above in which she asks for a way out. Criseyde goes back and forth throughout *Troilus and Criseyde* on whether to adopt her place within the narrative as the object of Troilus' affection or to fight it, and constantly redefining her place in society with relation to her ambivalence. Neither woman ends up escaping their role as the love interest – Emelye as described above, Criseyde as will be described later on – but Criseyde gets a lot further in her attempts than Emelye does in hers.

Second, both stories have a narrator who is painfully aware of their literary context. The Knight constantly interrupts his tale to highlight elements of the story that he chooses to leave out; his stated aim is to edit the story for time, but the effect is to balance between the story he wants to tell and that which his audience wants to hear. The unnamed narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* enacts similar self-censuring, but their claimed considerations are less the time constraints of their audience and more their stated need to conform to the details of the story as it has been handed to them by their literary tradition.

Third, the two stories are grounded in the epic tradition of Classical Greece, specifically the part of it concerning the siege of Thebes. *The Knight's Tale* starts with Theseus, an epic Athenian leader and founding figure, leading an army to liberate Thebes from its possession by Creon at the tail end of events in the Theban saga. *Troilus and Criseyde* is set in the midst of the

Trojan War, with characters ancestrally tied to the siege of Thebes and a strong presence from the Theban saga within the literary world of Troy.

This project will not go into detail on how these elements function within *The Knight's Tale*. The comparison is, however, useful for introducing this project's guiding question: How does Chaucer challenge tradition while telling a traditional story?

The question has a fairly straightforward answer when applied to *The Knight's Tale*. In his ambivalence about Emelye's role in the story, the Knight gives her a passage wherein she can freely express her desires. What she expresses is the desire to escape the traditional system she is in, a system which has her ensnared in a love triangle of which she wants no part. It's a striking inclusion on the Knight's part, but it's incredibly limited. Diana tells Emelye she must play her part, and she does. Emelye's moment of freedom is just that – a moment. The Knight's own moment of freedom (at least, with regards to Emelye) is equally limited. He cannot change the role she plays in the story; he is constrained by the expectations of his audience and the tradition from which he sources the story. Giving Emelye a moment of self-actualization is as far as he is willing to go to give her freedom. The Knight accomplishes significant work in the story, but the bulk of it is done elsewhere, in other parts of the text, on other themes.

The question is harder to answer when asked of *Troilus and Criseyde*. This project will attempt to do the work of answering it.

Chapter 1: Criseyde

Criseyde is a complicated figure in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. On the surface, her part in the plot is simple – she is pursued by Troilus, she accepts his affections, and she betrays his love when circumstances force them apart. But her inner life and her interactions with other characters in the text are multifaceted, capable of withstanding scrutiny through a number of different lenses.

The idea of dilemmas is an especially helpful lens through which to view Criseyde. A dilemma, as used in the context of classical rhetoric, is a situation in which two options are presented, both of them with negative consequences attached.[3] Neither choice is inherently better than the other; the choice of one leads to one set of dangers, while the other leads to another. It's a particularly subtle form of rhetorical trickery, where the only effective response is not to engage. The relevance of the dilemma as a framing device for Criseyde's journey is supported by her own description of her situation as such. Midway through Book III, she is arguing with her uncle Pandarus about how she ought to respond to the crisis of the moment – Pandarus is trying to have her go to Troilus and convince him of her faithfulness, a course of action she views as undesirably risky. She tells him, while weighing her options, "But whether that ye dwelle or for hym go, / I am, til God me bettre mynde sende, / At dulcarnoun, right at my wittes end" (III.929-31). Whether Pandarus stays with her or goes to Troilus, however the situation resolves, Criseyde is at 'dulcarnoun,' a word derived from the Arabic 'dul-qarnayn,'

[3] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "dilemma – logic," Britannica, Encyclopaedia Britannica, November 21, 2018, https://www.britannica.com/topic/dilemma-logic

two-horned'.[4] The classical description of a dilemma describes the argument as horned, often two-horned; each horn is a terrible option, and choosing between them is only choosing whether to be gored from the right or from the left.[5]

The consequences of the dilemmas within *Troilus and Criseyde* present themselves, often, as threats to Criseyde's "honour" and her "estat." Neither of these concepts, crucial to the progression of her thought, are explicitly defined within the text. The *Middle English Dictionary* includes multiple definitions of both words. For "honour", the range of meanings covers such ground as the action of "honoring" ("the action of honoring or paying respect to someone"), the reputation one has for of being "honorable" ("fame, good repute"), and one's "honored" status ("position or rank, station in life").[6] "Estat" takes the last category, that of status, and expands it, being defined generally as "state or condition", and having secondary definitions including "welfare, wellbeing, prosperity," "state or period of life," and "a person's position in society."[7] A general, unifying theme of both descriptions is "state," or "station," with honour adding the idea of that state being one which is somehow noble or praiseworthy, and estat suggesting something more material with definitions like "prosperity." These definitions do not explain everything about the concepts they define. They explain merely that a certain state is regarded in a certain way by society; they do not detail what that state may be, or how it might be

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[4] "dulcarnon, n.," OED Online, Oxford University Press, December 2019, accessed November 28, 2020, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/58303

[5] Lucia Calboli Montefusco, "Rhetorical Use of Dilemmatic Arguments," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric,* 28(4), 368. Accessed November 29, 2020. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rh.2010.28.4.363

[6] "honour, n.," Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan, November 2019, accessed November 28, 2020, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED21149/track?counter=1&search_id=4721332

[7] "estāt, n.," Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan, November 2019, accessed November 28, 2020, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED14519/track?counter=1&search_id=4721332

regarded.[8] Both serve, however, as useful starting points, which Criseyde uses to understand and define her social position, and as a guiding principle in her deliberations about how to resolve her dilemmas.

This chapter will contend that Criseyde's arc throughout *Troilus and Criseyde* can be understood in terms of dilemma, honour and estat. The actions of other characters in the narrative, the decisions made by Troilus, Pandarus, Calkas and the like, place Criseyde in a series of situations which threaten her social position, placing pressure upon her honour, her estat, or both. The resolution to each situation comes in the form of a dilemma, where Criseyde is given a range of unfavorable options and asked to choose between them. Criseyde makes as good a response as she can to each dilemma, attempting to choose the options which cause the least harm to her honour and her estat. But the nature of a dilemma allows for no good options, and with each choice, Criseyde sacrifices elements of her social standing.

The very first moments of Criseyde's presence within *Troilus and Criseyde* present her in a dilemma, where her honour and her estat are both at risk. Her father Calkas, a "lord of gret auctorite" (I.65) within the city, has defected to join the besieging Greeks. His absence leaves Criseyde isolated, especially so because she has already lost her husband; "For both a widewe was she and allone / Of any frend to whom she dorste hir mone" (I.97-98). Later parts of the poem complicate this picture, presenting her as an active participant within the noble subset of Trojan society. The implications of 'durst hir mone' remain unchallenged by said complication; although she retains connections within the city apart from her husband and her father, they

[8] Some of the subdefinitions for both terms appear especially relevant to Criseyde. Honour has the subdefinition "feminine repute, reputation for purity"; estat has "state (of virginity, matrimony, womanhood)."

were the primary figures to whom she could complain. Her only close relation left in the city is her uncle Pandarus, who proves himself a less than reliable source of security; in response to his advice that loving Troilus will bring her security, she protests "Allas, what sholden straunge to me doon, / Whan he that for my beste frend I wende / Ret me to love, and sholde it me defende?" (II.411-3). With her husband dead, Calkas gone and Pandarus unreliable, Criseyde is left without a stable recourse to turn to when her safety is challenged.

Along with leaving her in this place of insecurity, Calkas' treason directly prompts a crisis which challenges her safety. Directly before Criseyde's introduction in the poem, the narrative presents the views of the Trojan people on Calkas' treason. They are furious with him, and "casten to be wroken / On hym that falsly hadde his feith so broken, / And seyden he and al his kyn at ones / Ben worthi for to brenen, fel and bones" (I.88-91). With Calkas in the Greek camp by the time his treason is discovered, out of reach of the people's revenge, Criseyde is the only target upon which they may be "wroken"; their desired method of revenge, burning his kin "fel and bones," threatens Criseyde in the most extreme fashion. Calkas's treason has led to a direct threat on Criseyde's life; his absence, and the death of her husband, has left her without immediate recourse in dealing with said threat. Within the first hundred lines of the narrative, Criseyde is placed in a position of crisis and of isolation, a dilemma to which she must respond.

From this position, Criseyde makes the choice to go to Hector, the son of Troy's king Priam, and to seek recourse from him. The kind of security he can offer is inherently different from the kind offered by her father or her husband. Criseyde and Hector are not directly related, leaving him unable to offer the security of family ties provided by Calkas or by Pandarus, but he appears in this narrative as the de facto leader of Troy: Priam holds ultimate

power, but never appears directly, and Hector is shown to wield decision making authority both in council and on the battlefield. Criseyde goes to Hector for political recourse, seeking assurance from the city's ruling figure that she is still welcome, and her approach is crafted with that in mind. She comes to him "in widowe's habit" (I.109), a choice which both acknowledges her lack of familial ties and makes her place in the political sphere of the city clear. Though her late husband is not described in detail in *Troilus and Criseyde*, the state of Troy makes it reasonable to assume that he died defending the city from Greek invasion; whether or not this is the case, at the least, there is no evidence to suggest he was a traitor. Criseyde's adoption of widow's habit in this moment casts her as the wife of a fallen soldier and a respected citizen, rather than as the daughter of a proven traitor. The content of her plea to Hector also shows she's aware of the politics of the situation. She asks Hector not for protection, though she is in danger, or for personal favor to replace the bonds of kin she has lost. She asks, instead, for mercy; "His mercy bad, hirselven excusynge" (I.112). In that one phrase, Criseyde implicitly acknowledges both that her father's actions are crimes worthy of punishment which must be forgiven and that she is implicated in his crimes by the kinship between them. For punishment not to fall upon her head, she must be explicitly "excused" from his criminality.

Hector's response attempts to excuse her and to give her mercy both. He begins his response with the words "Lat youre fadres treson gon / Forth with meschaunce" (I.118), saying that her having a treacherous father is a matter of bad luck which contains no implications about her character; she may be "excusyed" from her father's treason, as it was only "meschaunce" which tied her to it in the first place. He tells her "And al th'onour that men may don you have, / As ferforth as youre fader dwelled here, / Ye shul have" (I.120-2), specifically

ensuring that her honour within the city will remain intact. She will be still be seen as a praiseworthy Trojan citizen, regardless of the disgrace her father has incurred in his flight from Troy. After their conversation, Criseyde is shown capitalizing upon her newly ensured honour to preserve her estat: "And whil she was dwellynge in that cite, / Kept hir estat, and both of yonge and olde / Ful wel biloved, and wel men of hir tolde" (I.129-31). Hector's assurances to Criseyde carry an important caveat, however, one which comes at the end of his brief speech; "As fer as I may ought enquere or here" (I.123), he says, his assurances will be true. Notably he does not say that these things will occur "as far as is within my power." That implication is left unstated. He says, instead, that "as far as he will hear," these things will be done. The implication is that there will be areas of the community where, unheard, people will disagree with his decision, and refuse to do Criseyde the honour he promises her.

Hector's caveat ensures that Criseyde still needs to be careful about the maintenance of her honour and estat, regardless of the assurances he provides. When her position is thrown into uncertainty by Pandarus, who tells her of Troilus' love for her, she is shown doing the work of such maintenance. After an initial outburst against the fate which has placed her in this position, she summarizes the situation thus:

> For myn estat lith in a jupartie,
> And ek myn emes lif is in balaunce;
> But natheles, with Goodes governaunce,
> I shal so doon, myn honour shal I kepe,
> And ek his lif
> -II.465-9

This passage clearly lays out the dilemma in which Criseyde is placed by Troilus' love. Pandarus has told her that Troilus is likely to die if she does not acknowledge his affections, and

that if Troilus were to die he (Pandarus) would soon after follow. These are, within the text of *Troilus and Criseyde*, two of the most crucial figures around her. Pandarus is her only close relation left within Troy after her father's treasonous flight; Troilus is one of the figures foremost in preventing the city's fall, as well as a son of the king. Their deaths would make her estat much less secure (aside from being highly undesirable in themselves). At the same time, accepting Troilus' affections would pose its own threat to Criseyde's estat. When considering whether to reciprocate Troilus' love, she describes her current estat as being that of an unmarried woman, and she describes that state favorably. "I am my owene womman," she says, "an after myn estat ... Shal noon housbonde seyn to me 'Chek mat!' " (II.750-4). She does not mention that this state of affairs has come about because she has been widowed; this has consequences which will be mentioned later. Her immediate concern is that this unmarried state is threatened by the possibility of her granting her love to Troilus: "Allas! Syn I am free / Sholde I now love, and put in jupartie / My sikernesse, and thrallen libertee?" (II.771-3).

Criseyde's current estat, that of an unmarried or widowed woman, is under threat whether she assents to Troilus' advances or rejects them. If she accepts them, the freedom and joy she has found from her singleness is lost, and she is constrained in the fetters of love. If she rejects them, Troilus' death brings Troy one step closer to destruction, an event which would be the final undoing of her current estat, while her uncle's resultant death takes away her closest kin in the city, a vital source of security for her estat.

Criseyde faces a similar dilemma in terms of her honour. Within the passages surrounding her summary of the situation, she makes a key distinction thrice in quick succession, saying that she will attempt both to keep her honour and to give Troilus satisfaction

for his love. The repeated contrast between these concepts suggests tension inherent between them; just as the existence of Troilus' advances jeopardizes Criseyde's estat, there's a difficulty in agreeing to his love while seeking to preserve her honour. Where this tension lies remains momentarily unclear. She seems to suggest that there is no tension during a later monologue, and that it might even bring her honour to accept Troilus. Considering the hypotheticals, she says, "Now sette a caas: the hardest is, ywys, / Men myghten demen that he loveth me. / What dishonour were it unto me, this?" (II.729-31), and claims that Troilus' worth is such that she could accept his love with honour. From these considerations, it would seem that concerns about her honour are unfounded.

Criseyde's status as a widow following her Book I conversation with Hector is an unstated consideration which provides a solid foundation for her concerns. In public, in earlier passages, Criseyde takes care to maintain the signifiers of widowhood. She wears mourning black when going to the temple, and she refuses to dance with Pandarus when he asks her, claiming it would not be appropriate for her as a widow. Even in that passage, however, she doesn't quite fit the picture of widowhood that she presents: she claims the appropriate place for a woman in her position is in a cave, reading the lives of saints, while she herself is sitting in a garden reading with her friends about the siege of Thebes, and when she and Pandarus are alone, she makes no mention of widowhood. This would all be well and good were Criseyde a widow without obligations or constraints. As writes John Maguire, in the essay "The Clandestine Marriage of Troilus and Criseyde," "Widows were not expected to marry again and in fact often did enter nunneries in the Middle Ages, but they were not obliged to and could

remarry if they so choose."[9] The cost of her agreement with Hector, an agreement made to resolve her dilemma in Book I, makes this option of remarriage impossible. Hector guarantees her honour and estat within the city conditional upon the state in which she came to him, her status as a chaste widow; she has no honorable path towards accepting another marriage.[10] Accepting Troilus' love would bring dishonour upon her from this conditional status of widowhood – she can get away with a private rejection of the signifiers of her widowhood, but not a public acceptance of Troilus' love. Rejecting Troilus courts danger of an entirely different nature. His death, and the nature thereof, would damage her reputation were it to be known, as she thinks immediately before her summation of the situation; "And if this man sle here hymself – allas! - / In my presence, it wol be no solas. / What men wolde of hit deme I kan nat seye" (II.459-61). Criseyde's dilemma, then, is that she can neither accept Troilus nor reject him with honour. Accepting his love would bring her dishonour through the loss of her chaste widowhood; rejecting his love, and causing his death through her rejection, would bring her dishonour as a Trojan citizen more generally.

Criseyde does not immediately decide how to respond to the dilemma of Troilus' love. Her first sight of Troilus is accompanied by a slight inclination in his favor – "For I sey nought that she so sodeyny / Yaf hym hire love, but that she gan enclyne / To like hym first, and I have told you whi" (II.673-5) – but this inclination does not settle her mind about him. She continues, in following passages, to weigh the pros and cons of accepting his love without coming to a

[9] John Maguire, "The Clandestine Marriage of Troilus and Criseyde," *The Chaucer Review* 8, no. 4 (1974): 270. Accessed November 28, 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25093277

[10] Neil Cartlidge, "Criseyde's Absent Friends." *The Chaucer Review* 44, no. 3 (2010): 242. Accessed November 28, 2020. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/chaucerrev.44.3.0227

firm conclusion. When the narrative shifts from her back to Troilus and Pandarus, she is still in this state of indecision, in which love is a thing she fears less than she did before but not a thing she is committed to pursuing; "And ay gan love hire lasse for t'agaste / Than it did erst, and synken in hire herte, / That she did wex somwhat able to converte" (II.019-3). Her key conclusion is only that she would be open to the idea or love; whether she will accept it or not is left ambiguous.

From this position of ambiguity, Criseyde plays her initial meeting with Troilus with an eye towards maintaining both her honour as a Trojan citizen and her estat as an unmarried widow. The meeting takes place following a supposed threat to her estat, feigned by Pandarus to provide pretext for Troilus and Criseyde to meet. Pandarus positions Troilus, along with the other Trojan lords in attendance, as the guarantors of her safety against this threat. This is a positioning Criseyde accepts without question, and it guides her introduction to Troilus; when Troilus, upon first meeting her, offers to rise from his supposed sickbed and 'do yow honour' (III.70), she pushes him back down. Maintaining her estat is her immediate concern, a concern which for the moment takes precedence over preserving her honour, and her request to him is for his help in maintaining it; "Sire, comen am I yow for causes tweye: / First, yow to thonke, and of youre lordshipe eke / Continuance I wolde yow biseke" (III.15-7). That request made, she refuses to answer Troilus' proclamations of love when they come without a clear agreement to it; when pressed, she says only "I not nat what ye wilne that I seye" (III.121). Troilus makes, in response, a plea that he will uphold her estat and her honour both, pledging himself to her service, placing himself under her authority, and (importantly) telling her that he will be "secret" (III.142), that their love will not be made widely known. After these assurances,

Criseyde assents to receive Troilus' love, though not without further conditions. She agrees specifically to taking him into her service on the terms that he stated, "Myn honour sauf, I wol wel trewely, / And in swich forme as he gan now devyse, / Receyven hym fully to my servyse" (III.159-61), emphasizing the importance of the promises Troilus made. Aside from the reference to her honour, she also takes care to preserve the freedom of her current estat; "Ye shal namore han sovereignete / Of me in love than right in that cas is" (III.171-2). Criseyde agrees to accept Troilus' love, resolving the dilemma his advances placed her in, but that acceptance is conditioned upon Troius' respect for her honour and her estat. For the moment, at least, Criseyde appears to have lost nothing by her acceptance.

Criseyde comes away from her initial meeting with Troilus secure in the promises he made her. The narrative gives her thoughts on Troilus midway through Book III;

> For whi she fond hym so discrete in al,
> So secret, and of swich obeisaunce,
> That wel she felte he was to hire a wal
> Of stiel, and sheld from every displesaunce;
> That to ben in his goode governaunce,
> So wis he was, she was namore aferd –
> I mene, as fer as oughte ben requered. (III.477-83).

The qualities Troilus offered in his declaration of service are those Criseyde finds most pleasing. She finds him "secret," and sees him providing the kind of protection and "lordshipe" she requested of him. Both her honour and her estat are safe with him; his patronage offers protection from false accusations against her, and his secrecy keeps her from suffering damage through the spread of accurate rumors. This passage also shows the tradeoffs she makes in acknowledging Troilus' love. There is an amount of freedom she loses from being in Troilus'

'governaunce', even if said governaunce is only 'as fer as oughte ben requered'. But this is a cost she is willing to pay, in exchange for the safety Troilus provides.

That trade off – ensured honour and estate, but ensured by and reliant upon Troilus – is used by Pandarus further in Book II to destabilize the balance of Criseyde's social position. In Book II, Pandarus feigned a threat on Criseyde's estat through false accusations against her; here he forges a threat to her honour by repeating a made-up rumor of her disloyalty to Troilus, after luring her to his home (where Troilus is waiting) with the promise that Troilus is out of town. He tells her Troilus has heard rumor "How that ye sholden love oon hatte Horaste; / For sorwe of which this night shal ben his laste" (III.797-8). The rumor threatens Criseyde's honour most directly through its possible consequence of Troilus' death – as she put the concern in book II, "And if this man sle here hymself – allas! - / In my presence, it wol be no solas. / What men wolde of hit deme I kan nat seye" (II.459-61). Criseyde's decision to accept Troilus' service at the start of Book III makes her danger here much more present than it was in Book II. Not only would his death here be as a consequence of her rejection, that rejection would come accompanied by a dishonorable breach of promise. In Book II, she could walk away from Troilus' love with potential to salvage her honour; as she considers in her deliberations at that time, "For man may love, of possibilite, / A womman so, his herte may tobreste / And she naught love ayein but if hire leste" (II.607-9). Her acceptance of his love has closed off that possibility; having given her love to Troilus, walking away would be seen as betrayal, if known by the public at large. The existence of a rumor about her fidelity makes the danger of such knowledge a real and pressing threat. Pandarus presents the rumor as having come from a friend of Troilus, saying "He seigh hym told is of a frend of his" (III.796). This implies not only

that Criseyde's honour is already being slandered in common conversation, but also that Troilus is a participant in said conversation, and that her breach of promise with him may itself soon be common knowledge.

From this position Criseyde attempts, as best she can, to ward off the present danger to her honour while keeping both estat and honour intact. She tells Pandarus twice that she will meet with Troilus the next day to resolve the issue, and moves from there to suggesting that Pandarus take him a ring of hers, "for ther is nothyng myghte hym bettre plese / Save I myself" (III.885-6). She tries to avoid letting Troilus see her in the moment, attempting to avoid placement in a position where she can be governed by exterior influences. Yet Pandarus insists, and Criseyde ultimately agrees to meet with Troilus. Her control over the situation is in that moment ceded; she is entirely in the governance of Troilus and Pandarus. She can only make the request of them that they preserve her honour throughout, through their discrete handling of the matter, but she cannot exert any direct power to have them do so:

> "And for the love of God, syn al my trist
> Is on yow two, and ye ben bothe wise,
> So werketh now in so discret a wise
> That I honour may have, and he plesaunce
> For I am here al in youre governaunce." (III.941-5)

The consequences of Criseyde's acceptance of Troilus' love (and the night they spend together following her acceptance) are somewhat up for debate. Maguire argues that what occurs in Book III is a clandestine marriage, rather than a sinful act of "fornification." The wording Chaucer uses to describe the bedroom scene in Book III has strong similarities to wedding terminology, with Troilus and Criseyde making oaths of 'troughe', Troilus addressing Criseyde

as 'wommanliche wif', and the exchanging of rings, among other things.[11] Even with this being the case, the lack of an open marriage between the two leaves Criseyde in a delicate equilibrium. Her estat as an unmarried widow, as given to her by Hector, is secure, if infringed upon somewhat by Troilus' governance. Her honour is now even more closely tied to Troilus, through her full acceptance of his love, but that acceptance ensures that her honour as granted by Troilus is secure. But both honour and estat are entirely contingent upon Troilus; in her resolution of the dilemma of Troilus' love, she has placed her social position in his hands.

This placement creates issues for her almost immediately, as Criseyde's newly won equilibrium is shattered by the opening of Book IV, in which the social debate around her position within the city begins anew after it was settled in Book I. The two debates are founded on different premises. In Book I, Criseyde herself was asking after her fate in the wake of her father's betrayal. In Book IV, Greek envoys are asking after her fate on behalf of her traitorous father. Between instances, Hector's answer remains the same; Criseyde may, while she so chooses, remain in Troy. He makes this explicit in the first instance; "Dwelleth with us, while yow good list, in Troie" (I.119), he tells Criseyde. The second instance is less explicit, but equally clear. Hector tells the envoys "Syres, she nys no prisonere" (IV.179), affirming Criseyde's freedom of choice and implying that she has remained in Troy as a freely chosen decision. He reaffirms this principle three lines down, responding to their request for Criseyde in trade for Antenor by saying "We usen here no wommen for to selle" (IV.182). Hector's views on Criseyde's position do not change between Book I and Book IV, yet the outcome of each

[11] Maguire, 271-2.

instance for Criseyde is entirely different; in Book I, she is allowed by Hector to remain in Troy, while the Trojan people override his attempt to rule similarly in Book IV.

The Trojan people's protest against Hector's ruling in Book IV makes sense as springing from their unspoken undercurrent of resentment against Criseyde, referenced by Hector's book I caveat of "as fer as I may ought enquere or here" (I.123). The circumstances of Book IV conspire to give them a greater voice than they had in the similar passage in Book I. The opening of Book IV is the first time in the text when the war goes badly for the Trojans; a sortie specifically led by Hector is defeated, and "in the laste shour, soth for to telle, / The folk of Troie hemselven so mysledden / That with the worse at nyght homward they fledden" (IV.46-8). The fact of Hector's leadership in the sortie, implicating him in the aspect of their defeat which involves the Trojans "mis-leading" themselves, undermines his authority to decide Criseyde's case. So too does the absence of joy which results from this defeat, in which "the folk of Troie / Dredden to lese a gret part of hire joie" (IV.55-6). The absence of joy is significant given Hector's earlier proclamation to Criseyde that "ye youreself in joie / Dwelleth with us, whil yow good list, in Troie" (I.118-9). While the city is in joy, Criseyde may dwell there without challenge. Once the war turns sour, and the city loses that joy, Hector has less authority to decide her fate, or to shield her from the judgment of the Trojan people.

As Hector's authority decreases, that of the Trojan people increases in its place. Much of this increased authority comes from the greater visibility of the people and of their will. Their reaction to Hector's initial speech is described aurally, with "The noyse of peple up stirte thanne at ones" (IV.183), and their call for Priam to respect their will is one of speech: " 'O kyng Priam,' quod they, 'thus sygge we, / That al our vois is to forgon Criseyde' " IV.184-5). The emphasis on

noise ties their protest back again to Hector's caveat in Book I, where he says the city will honor Criseyde "As fer I may ought enquere or here" (I.123). The implication with this is that this faction of Trojan folk has been present throughout *Troilus and Criseyde*, but is only in Book IV given a voice.

The tides of battle and the decreasing weight of Hector's authority are only parts of how they gain this voice. Another part comes from the rhetoric used by Hector himself. Hector in his Book I speech skirts around the issue of whether he speaks for the people of Troy; in "dwelleth with us, whil yow good list, in Troie" (I.119), it is unclear which social group "us" refers to, and the use of "men" in the abstract further along avoids the use of "people," or of "us" in the sense of "all Trojans." In his speech in Book IV, he speaks more directly for the people:

> "Syres, she nys no prisonere," he seyde;
> "I not on yow who that this charge leyde,
> But, on my part, ye may eftsone hem telle,
> We usen here no wommen for to selle."
> - IV.179-82

Hector ambiguates the charge of imprisonment by asking upon whom it is laid, leaving space for the reading that it is the Trojan people at large who are holding her prisoner. "On my part" could serve to disambiguate the idea, letting his disclaimer be true only for himself and not for the people more generally, but his use of "we" on the next line flips the effect; instead of "on my part" setting him aside from the people, it establishes him as their spokesperson, presenting a common view. The use of "usen" and "here" emphasize that he is speaking for the city as a whole. "Usen" makes him appear to describe the customs of the city, not just his personal desires for the case of Criseyde, and "here" ties those customs directly to the city at large.

Hector's presentation of himself as the people's spokesperson gives the people a specific target for their protest against his policy. Specifically, they paint Hector as being out of touch with the people whom he claims to represent. They ask "what ghoost may yow enspyre" (IV.187), implying that this decision is the result of a singular animating impulse rather than a broader social awareness. They tell him, in regards to defending Criseyde, "a wrong way now ye cheese" (IV.189), implying not only that he is wrong in his decision but that it is a choice, a decision he personally has made, rather than a "custom" that he is simply carrying out. They tell him to "lat tho fantasies be" (IV.193), implying that while this decision may have some basis in customs, it stems from the customs of fantasy rather than the practical political reality of the city. And, most damningly, they say "And we han nede to folk, as men may se" (IV.191). By using "folk" instead of "baroun" (used the previous line to refer to Antenor) or "knight" or the like, this line opens space for a double meaning; "we" (the people speaking) are in need of "folk" (knights) to defend us, or "we" (the city as a political body) are in need of "folk" (common people with a say in the political process).

The use of "folk" as "common folk," and the implications in the second reading of the above line that there is desire for "folk" to join in the political process, is supported by and supports the newly formed structure of the parliament. This is the first passage in which a Trojan parliament is acknowledged as a political entity. King Priam, upon hearing of the Greeks' terms, specifically gives the matter to his Parliment to consider ("The cause itold of hire comynge, the olde / Priam, the kyng, ful soone in general / Let her-upon his parlement to holde" [IV.141-3]). And it is this parliament which gives Criseyde for Antenor against the will of

Hector, establishing the will of the common folk against even the supposed decision maker for the city.

The following debate between Troilus and Criseyde, concerning how to respond to the parliament's decision, deals explicitly with that decision's implications for Criseyde's honour and estat. Both Troilus and Criseyde are concerned here with honour; they have, however, different conceptions of what is honorable. Troilus suggests to Criseyde that they should steal away together, claiming that he has resources enough to sustain them "in honour and plesaunce" indefinitely ("plesaunce" implying the same type of property referenced by "estat"); "And vulgarly to speak of substaunce / Of tresour, may we both with us lede / Inough to lyve in honour and plesaunce / Til into tym that we shal ben dede" (IV.1513-5). Criseyde dissents to this course of action, claiming that to do so would have the people of the city see them in a bad light, and that by such a course of action, "Thus al were lost, ywys, myn herte deere, / Youre honour, which that now shyneth so clere" (IV.1574-5).

The question raised is whether Troilus or Criseyde has the proper conception of the honor of Troilus' proposed course of action. The answer involves the context in which the action is seen. When advising elopement, Troilus situates the honour and the treasure they will have in the context of friends and kin he has outside the society of Troy; "And handily, ne dredeth no poverte, / For I have kyn and frendes elleswhere / That, though we comen in oure bare sherte, / Us sholde neyther lakken gold ne gere, / But ben honoured while we dwelten there" (IV.1520-4). Criseyde pulls the conversation back to Trojan grounds with her dissenting argument; she warns him against abandoning the city's defense for her, especially "And namely, syn Troie hath now swich nede / Of help" (IV.1558-9). She claims that if they are caught

in the act of leaving the city "my lif lay in balaunce, / And youre honour" (IV.1560-1), and says that, were they to successfully escape from the city to "elleswhere," they could never return: "And if so be that pees heere-after take, / As alday happeth after anger game, / Whi, Lord, the sorwe and wo ye wolden make, / That ye ne dorste come ageyen for shame" (IV.1562-5). Both leaving the city in flight and abiding by the city's decision to exchange Criseyde can be seen as acts which give their actors honour. The givers of honour for each are what differ; Troilus' friends and kin elsewhere form the society which will give them honour if they abandon the city, and Trojan society will do the same if they choose to stay.

Criseyde makes her departure from Troy and from Troilus in the expectation that her father would let her return; this is the promise that she makes to Troilus. She expects this to resolve her dilemma without issue – in this way, she both gets to obey the Trojan parliament, preserving her honour within Troy, and return to Troilus, safeguarding what honour she has with him. This expectation is proven false, placing Criseyde in a dilemma where she loses honour whatever course of action she takes. If she fails to return to Troy, as she says, "My Troilus shal in his herte deme / That I am false, and so it may wel seme: / Thus shal ich have unthonk on every side" (V.697-9). Her primary concern here is not for Troilus, but for what the people of the city will say about her when they learn that she was false to him. The threat to her honour from such rumors is twofold; not only will the revelation of her falseness damage her honour, but the revelation of her relationship to Troilus will in itself damage it. Attempting to defy her father and steal away to Troy, while having potential to reduce the damage done to her honour in the city, carries with it the rick of harming her honour among the Greeks. "And if I me putte in jupartie / To stele awey by nyght, and it bifalle / That I be kaught, I shal be holde a

spye" (V.701-3), she says; if she attempts to go back to Troy, she will be seen as a traitor to the Greeks, as her father was seen as a traitor to the Trojans. There is as well a potential danger to her estat and her personal safety, if caught by someone of ill repute; "Or else – lo, this I drede moost of alle - / If in the hondes of some wrecche I falle, / I nam but lost, al be myn herte trewe" (V.704-6). She is stuck at this point in the narrative between the Greek camp and Troy, and from the localized, contextualized nature of honour, she cannot help but lose honour in one of the two locations.

The presence of the Greek lord Diomede complicates her decision between the two choices. Diomede and Criseyde meet as she is leaving Troy, with Diomede being the lord entrusted with making the exchange happen, and he presents himself quickly as a lord much different from Troilus. Like Troilus, he falls quickly for Criseyde. His fall, however, is much more restrained. He thinks not that he will die if Criseyde rejects him; he thinks, rather, that events might turn out well if he pursues her, "For at the werste it may yet shorte oure weye" (V.96) – if she rejects him, the only outcome is that they have passed some of the time between Troy and the Greek camp in conversation. He recognizes also that Criseyde has feelings for Troilus, and that he must give those feelings time to subside before looking for success, in marked contrast to Troilus' lack of thought for Criseyde's widowhood except as a factor in his own attraction. From this position, Diomede's conversation moves slowly, with an eye towards ensuring Criseyde's comfort. Their first quoted line of dialogue has Diomede assuring Criseyde that her honour will be safe in the Greek camp – "Iwis, we Grekis kan have joie / To honouren yow as wel as folk of Troie" (V.118-9) – with mentioning of 'folk' and 'joie' to assure her that said honour will be genuine, and that she will have the support of the people as she did not in

Troy (see the use of both words in the opening scenes of books 1 and 4). Diomede assures her that she is among friends in the Greek camp, and pledges himself to her service, telling her "So fro this forth, I pray yow, day and nyght / Commandeth me, how soore that me smerte, / To don al that may like unto youre herte" (V.131-3). Troilus offered similar assurances of service, but only in Book III, well after Criseyde was informed of his love and tied conditionally to her acceptance of such. While Diomede does speak of love, he does so after promising Criseyde service and protection. Moreover, he phrases his love in such a way as to reinforce his service, without making his service conditional on her acceptance. He tells her, "I am, and shal ben ay, / God helpe me so, while that my lyf may dure, / Youre owene aboven every creature" (V.152-4); this statement is made absolutely, without explicit need for Criseyde to accept or reject his love. Criseyde's response is, ultimately, a deferral; she says that she is struck for the moment with such sorrow that she barely heard a word he said. She accepts, however, his offer of friendship, made midway through his speech ("And thatye me wolde as youre brother trete, / And taketh naught my frendshipe in despit" (V.134-5)); she tells him that she appreciates "that hym list his frendshipe hire to bede; / And she accepteth it in good manere" (V.185-6). This acceptance given, Diomede fades from the narrative, stepping back without further mention to make room for Criseyde's meeting with her father. The whole scene presents Diomede in stark contrast to Troilus' behavior, a contrast made starker with the presentation of Troilus several lines down as mourning Criseyde's absence in Troy; "To chaumbre he wente; of nothyng took he hede, / Ne non to hym dar speke a word for drede. // And ther his sorwes that he spared hadde / He yaf an issue large, and "Deth!" he criede" (V.202-5).

Diomede's second meeting with Criseyde comes after she has already made up her mind about the resolution of her dilemma; she chooses to return to Troilus, and to Troy, regardless of what people might think. She says, in consideration, "For whoso wol of every word take hede, / Or reulen hym by every wightes wit, / Ne shal he nevere thryven, out of drede" (V.757-9). She resolves the dilemma by disregarding her considerations of honour entirely, seeking to get honour from Troilus and from his Book IV plan of flight than from either the Greeks or the Trojans; "I shal to-morwe at nyght, by est or west, / Out of this oost stele in som manere syde, / And gon with Troilus as hym lest" (V.751-3). Stuck as she is between Greek and Trojan considerations of honour, it's an understandable impulse. The objection she posed to Troilus' plan in Book IV was that she would lose honour within Troy from it. In her current circumstances, that honour is already lost, and without her father's permission to return there is no clear way to regain it. It's a solid plan, but immediately after she makes it, the narrative says that it will fail; "For both Troilus and Troie town / Shal knotteles throughout hire herte slide; / For she wol take a purpos for t'abide" (V.768-70).

Foremost among the reasons why it fails are considerations of estat. Criseyde's deliberations around whether to go to Troilus or to stay in the Greek camp focused entirely on the implications for her honour from each course of action. Her ultimate decision is made in the knowledge that she will forfeit a great measure of her honour, but the impact of said decision on her estat is left unexplored, and assumedly neutral. Diomede makes sure to highlight this impact in his second conversation with Criseyde. He tells her to abandon consideration of love for any Trojans (with Troilus being heavily implied) as worthless, as "The folk of Troie, as who seyth, alle and some / In prisoun en, as ye youreselven se" (V.883-4). He ties this back to her

estat with the reminder that her father rescued her from the city in the knowledge that it would fall, and offhandedly eliminates any possibility of her escaping with Troilus to find estat among his relatives elsewhere by claiming that no Trojan will survive the fall uncaught;

> "What! Wene ye youre wise fader wolde
> Han yeven Antenor for yow anon,
> If he ne wiste that the cite sholde
> Destroied ben? Whi, nay, so mote I gon!
> He knew ful wel ther shal nat scapen oon
> That Troian is; and for the grete feere
> He dorste nat ye dwelte lenger there."
> - V.904-10

With this perspective, Criseyde's decision to return to Troilus carries a far higher cost than she initially conceived; she stands a good chance of losing not just her honour but her estat with that decision.

Criseyde makes her ultimate decision to remain in the Greek camp with full consideration of what Diomede said concerning estat. She thinks, when deciding, of "His grete estat, and perel of the town, / And that she was allone and hadde nede / Of frendes help" (V.1024-6), a set of considerations similar to those which led her to seek Hector's assistance in Book I. There are other parallels to her earlier decision making in how she chooses to stay in the Greek camp, and to accept Diomede's love. She tells Diomede that she does not commit either way to him – "I say nat therfore that I wol yow love, / N'y say nat nay" (V.1002-3) – and the narrator emphasizes that she took a great deal of time to make up her mind in that decision, paralleling the moment in Book II where she 'inclines' to like Troilus; "But trewely, how longe it was bytwene / That she forsok hym for this Diomede / Ther is non auctour telleth it, I wene" (V.1086-8). The moves she makes in the Greek camp are similar to those she made in Troy, and

made towards a similar purpose. In both scenarios, she is trying to preserve what she can of her honour and her estat in a threatening, insecure environment. The difference lies in how much of both she has available to her. The compromises she had to make in resolving dilemmas to her honour and her estat throughout the narrative, from accepting Troilus' advances time and time again to leaving the city of Troy, risked more and more of both, and by the end, she is left to mourn her dishonoured state alongside the bad hand of cards she was given that led her there;

> "Thei wol seyn, in as muche as in me is,
> I have hem don deshonour, welaway!
> Al be I nat the first that did amys,
> What helpeth that to don my blame awey?"
> - V.1065-9

Criseyde's journey throughout *Troilus and Criseyde* is one governed from first to last by constraint. Her father's flight leaves her without defense against the anger of the Trojan people. Hector's offer of support constraint her, at least in public, to a state of chaste widowhood, while the support she finds from Troilus ties her to the fulfillment of his affections. When Hector and Troilus fail her against the Trojan people, she is constrained to leave the city in accordance with their will; once in the Greek camp, she is constrained to remain by Diomede and by her father. At each stage of this (albeit simplified) course of events, she makes choices about how to respond to the dilemmas by which she is constrained, but each choice involves submission to the plans of an other, and the loss of some of her agency.

This progression had led some commentators to view Criseyde as an entirely passive character, without any real agency to affect her position within the narrative. As Gretchen Mieszkowski puts it in the essay, "Chaucer's Much Loved Criseyde," "She is assertive only in order to be submissive, full of plans only in order to avoid the other person's plans ... a heroine

who initiates nothing of any consequence; who lets decisions happen to her; who rarely takes responsibility for her actions; who reacts and responds, but never acts; and who goes back on her word whenever she commits herself to a position."[12] If Criseyde's actions are judged entirely by their results, this is a compelling perspective. Criseyde rarely makes a decision within the text that does not result in the reduction of her future decision making capabilities, or is not begun as a reaction to someone else's decision. If judged by her intentions, the reasoning she has for choosing how she does and her desired outcomes, she appears much less passive. Criseyde never has an entirely free field of choice in *Troilus and Criseyde*, but the other characters in the poem are similarly constrained, and she stands foremost among them in trying to act with agency despite said constraints.[13] Her actions within the text leave room for her to be regarded as an active, self-determining figure, and as the following chapter will discuss, there are cues within the authorship of the text that lend support for this reading.

[12] Gretchen Mieszkowski, "Chaucer's Much Loved Criseyde," *The Chaucer Review,* 26.2 (1991): 119-20, accessed December 7, 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25094189

[13] Mary Behrman, "Heroic Criseyde," *The Chaucer Review,* 38(4), 315, accessed December 7. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25094261

Chapter 2: The Narrator

Troilus and Criseyde has multiple stated authors. Chaucer is the extra-textual author of the work, but has only a light presence within it; the poem makes reference towards the end to "O moral Gower" (V.1856), a real world friend of Chaucer's, but moments of such clear presence are rare. The foremost authorial presence within the text is that of the narrator, a narrator who appears again and again while making choices of self-presentation and narrative that set their voice entirely apart from Chaucer's.[14] Their most fundamental choice is, paradoxically, the decision to present themself as having no choices at all. They accomplish this decision by introducing a third author, claiming that their work is a translation of an earlier text. An example of the relation between the narrator and the text's supposed author occurs at the opening of Book II, where the narrator attempts to excuse themself of blame for the poem's poor treatment of love:

> Forwhi to every lovere I me excuse,
> That of no sentement I this endite,
> But out of Latyn in my tonge it write.
>
> Wherfore I nyl have neither thank ne blame
> Of al this werk, but prey yow mekely,
> Disblameth me if any word be lame,
> For as myn auctour seyde, so seye I.
> - II.12-18

The narrator here claims that every "sentement" in the poem is a direct translation from the original Latin. "Sentement," according to the Middle English Dictionary, has the dual meanings

[14] This project will use 'they' to refer to the Narrator and 'he' to refer to Chaucer, to make it clear which is being discussed in any given moment.

of "intention" and "emotion," with the general sense of personal involvement.[15] The sentiments the narrator attributes to the author are the intentions behind the work; they claim, in essence, that any authorial intent present in the work can be attributed to the author, that they have added nothing of their own but made a faithful translation of the author's words and intentions both. This is a claim which refutes itself; in the process of making it, they reveal their agency, and the choices they are, in fact, making in the construction of the text. The open presentation of their work as a translation is a choice, one that sets their work apart from the original text. This section would not make sense in an original, untranslated work; it is itself a product of the narrator's intent, and not the author's. If the narrator were serious about their work being soley a translation, they couldn't have such a presence in the text; they could write only what their author wrote, without commentary or addition. The narrator's attempt within this section to distance themself from their "auctour," the original Latin source for the story of Troilus and Criseyde, is another distinct choice. The narrator presents this passage in an attempt to shield themself from criticism, stating that any objectionable aspects of the poem's treatment of love can be attributed to their author (several lines further on, referring to their author and love, they say, "A blynd man kan nat juggen wel in hewis" [II.21]). The narrator doesn't restrain themself to presenting their work as a translation, and giving themself the freedom to interject their own sentiments. They imply their disagreement with the way their author handles certain topics, creating space for an involved audience to read between the lines.

[15] "sentement, n.," Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan, November 2019, accessed November 28, 2020, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED39445/track?counter=1&search_id=4721332

The narrator's choice to both present themself as a translator and to take on a non-translatory role in the work becomes more complex with their claims about the source from which they are translating. The narrator claims to take the story of *Troilus and Criseyde* from the Latin author Lollius, saying that every word of their text is the same as in Lollius' text, "save oure tonges difference" (I.395). From the scholarship around the historicity of Lollius, it is reasonably well established that "[Chaucer] believed that there was once a Lollius, long before his time, who had written something about the matter of Troy."[16] It is also reasonably well established that Chaucer's belief was mistaken, although the origins of the mistake are still contested.[17] Together, these claims paint Lollius as an author Chaucer believed to have existed but whose work was lost; in citing him, Chaucer is creating an imaginary text, and giving it the appearance of authority through ties to an older literary tradition.

The benefits for Chaucer of this rhetorical device are fairly straightforward. As Kittredge describes, "When Chaucer came to write this novel, he wished ... to lend his work an air of truth and authenticity. A ready and familiar device was, and still is, to appeal to some source that might be accepted as authoritative."[18] Referencing a fictional source lets Chaucer pretend his own writing is authoritative, deriving from an ancient source to which only he has access. The

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[16] George Lyman Kittredge, "Chaucer's Lollius," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 28 (1917): 48. Accessed November 28, 2020. https://www.jstor.org/stable/310641

[17] There are a range of theories as to the source of Chaucer's Lollius. One theory, mentioned by Kittredge and supported by Robert Armstrong Pratt, holds that a misunderstanding of one of Horace's *Epistles* led to the error, one which includes the phrase 'maximum lolli' in such a context that 'lolli' could plausibly be read as (a) a name and (b) an authority on the Trojan war. Another theory, suggested by Lillian Herlands Hornstein, suggests that Chaucer's Lollius can be identified as Lellius Pietri Stephani de Tosettis, a friend of Petrarch's and a possible link through which Chaucer could have recieved Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*. A third theory, promoted by Boyd Ashby Wise, suggests that 'Lollius' is a tongue in cheek translation of 'Boccaccio' ('Boccaccio' meaning 'ugly mouth', and 'Lollius' a Latinized form of the English word 'lollard'). The author of this project finds the first theory the most plausible of the three, but believes the project's analysis of Lollius' effect within the text stands apart from Lollius' extra-textual origins.

[18] Kittredge 49.

benefits for *Troilus and Criseyde*'s fictitious narrator are more complicated. The creation of Lollius establishes a fictitious text on which *Troilus and Criseyde* is based; the creation of a fictitious narrator, one separate from the historical Chaucer, expands the fiction of Lollius and creates room for a precise type of narrative work. It establishes a middle layer of textual space, between the fictional world of Criseyde's Troy and the real world of Chaucer's England, a textual space in which the fictional text of Lollius exists to be translated by an unreal narrator for the benefit of an imagined audience.

This chapter will discuss the multiple layers of authorship within *Troilus and Criseyde*, taking the premise of a fictitious narrator for whom Lollius is an extant text and exploring how said theorized narrator interacts with said extant text. This chapter will examine several of the techniques the narrator uses to convey their own voice while continuing the pretense of translation, including pointed omission of specific narrative moments (also known as "elision") and paralleled moments of similarity and contrast between Criseyde and Troilus. This chapter will focus on how the narrator uses said techniques in discussing Criseyde, how the narrator attempts to treat Criseyde in a way which aids her attempted presentation of honour and estat (as described in Chapter 1), and will attempt to define the effect which the narrator intends their treatment of Criseyde to have upon their imagined audience.

An early example of the narrator's use of elision comes soon in Book I. Following Criseyde's acquisition of sanction from Hector, as she is establishing her estat within the city of Troy, the narrator interjects a brief two lines about her children; "But wheither that she children hadde or noon, / I rede it naught, therfore I late it goon" (I.132-3). Were the narrator to translate directly from Lollius, these two lines would be unnecessary. They could have left the question

of Criseyde's children as they found it, as an absence, and left it unmentioned in their poem. They could, alternately, have assumed that the lack of mention of Criseyde's children meant that she had no children, and left that assumption unmentioned or stated as fact. The only purpose of stating an ambiguity as to whether Criseyde had children is the existence of that ambiguity, and the introduction of the possibility that Criseyde had children where none existed in the original text.

The narrator's assertion is even more striking because, while the narrator lacks access to information about Criseyde's children, Chaucer does not. Boccaccio, in his *Il Filostrato*, a work Chaucer relied on heavily to write *Troilus and Criseyde*, has his Criseyde say in her deliberations about Troilus:

> "I am young, fair, lovely, and carefree, a widow, rich, noble, and beloved. I have no children and lead an undisturbed life. Why should I not be in love?"[19]

For comparison, a similar passage in Chaucer's depiction of Criseyde's deliberations reads:

> "I am myn owene womman, wel at ese –
> I thank it God – as after myn estat,
> Right yong, and stonde unteyd in lusty leese,
> Withouten jalousie or wich debat:
> Shal noon housbonde seyn to me 'Chek mat!'
> For either they ben ful of jalousie,
> Or maisterfull, or loven novelrie." (II.750-6)

The Criseyde of Boccaccio's version frames her freedom in terms of the benefits she has, her childless state among them; as she tells it, there are no external impediments to her loving again. Chaucer's Criseyde frames her freedom more specifically in terms of her unmarried state,

[19]Boccaccio, *Filostrao*, trans. Nathaniel Griffin and Arthur Myrik (Cambridge, Ontario: In Parentheses Publications, 1999), 69.

without husband or other social tie to constrain her. This state would be even more free if she did not have children, if they, along with a husband, were absent. This is a possibility open to Chaucer; he could include Boccaccio's detail about Criseyde having no children without drastic change to his narrative. Instead, he elides it from the fictional source (that is, Lollius) to which his narrator has access, leaving the narrator free to ambiguate about the status of Criseyde's children.

Why Chaucer chooses to elide this piece of information from his narrator's sources is speculation outside the scope of this project. The use the narrator makes of the elision is well within said scope, and a critical example of how the narrator uses elision to manipulate their readers' perception of Criseyde. As described in Chapter 1, Criseyde's Book II position has her walking a delicate balance between the status of a widow and that of an unmarried, maiden woman. She adopts the signifiers of widowhood to preserve her honour in the public eye, while dropping them to adopt the freedom of an unmarried, maiden estat. There is a limit to how effectively this gambit can function – the citizens of Troy presumably know whether or not she has children – but her ability to alter the signifiers of her position is an important (if limited) part of her personal agency. The ambiguity introduced by the narrator in whether or not she has children is a key part of how this balance is maintained in the mind of their reader. If the narrator said she had children, she would be closely tied to her widowhood. If instead they said she did not have children (as Boccaccio does), a great part of her honour as a widow would be diminished; the possibility of civic honour stemming from her childbearing would be eliminated. By leaving it open whether or not she had children, the narrator allows their reader the freedom to see Criseyde both ways, depending on which signifiers she adopts at any given

moment. They see Criseyde as a widow when she wants to be seen as such, and they see her as an unmarried woman free of the ties of widowhood (in this instance, children) when she wishes to create that impression.

Criseyde's children are not the only figures noted to be absent from the first scene of Book I. Just before the lines about her children, the narrator mentions the estat which she will keep, going forward, in the City of Troy: "And whil she was dwellynge in that cite, / Kepte hir estat, and both of yonge and olde / Ful wel biloved, and wel men of hir tolde" (I.129-3). Criseyde is here described as an entirely solitary figure, taking up an individual's place in society, but other individuals are alluded to, the "yonge and olde" and the men who speak well of her. The allusion leaves it unclear at what remove these figures are from Criseyde. They could be little more than uninvolved Trojan citizens, making comments on a figure of public renown without being at all connected to that figure. They could also be much closer to Criseyde. One of the secondary meanings of "estat" is "retinue, attendants": that is, the people involved in establishing the trappings of a societal position. It is possible to see the people who speak well of her as part of this retinue. With Criseyde's position being that of a high ranking noblewoman, her rendering as an individual here bereft of attendants is noteworthy. That there are figures who speak well of her gestures towards the existence of such attendants without confirming or denying anything outright, either of which would constrain the narrator's range of options in their portrayal of Criseyde.

An example of the narrator utilizing their range of possible options comes at the opening of Book V, when Greek prince (and soon to be love interest) Diomede comes to lead her away to the Greek camp. Criseyde should have, according to her position, a significant amount of

personal property and a requisite number of personal attendants accompanying her out of the town. She declares to Troilus her intentions to bring property and, possibly, people with her in their Book IV deliberations, saying that "The moeble which that I have in this town / Unto my fader shal I take" (IV.1380-1); she plans to bring with her a significant amount of personal property as a bargaining chip to help convince her father to let her return to Troy. When the time comes, it is Troilus who is described as traveling with a major retinue ("With hauk on hand and with a huge route / Of knyghtes" (V.65-6)), while Criseyde is given a single horse to ride. She is later mentioned as having a certain number of attendants, "Upon that other syde ek was Criseyde, / With wommen fewe, among the Grekis strange"(V.687-8), but it is not made clear whether they are newly acquired from the Greek camp or whether they accompanied her from Troy. The personal property she had planned to bring with her is entirely absent; the negotiations with her father in which she meant to use this property are elided from the text, and in Criseyde's description of them, she says only, "My fader nyl for nothyng do me grace / To gon ageyn, for naught I kan hym queire" (V.694-5). Criseyde's estat, like her children, is in an ambiguous position within the text, hypothetically present, but absent in the moments of the narrative where it should, in theory, exist.

The absence of her attendants is not an absence as clearly noted as that of her children. The narrator's influence here is not established through their direct intervention, but through the absence of such. The narrator demonstrates at other points in the text their willingness to intervene to clear up potential contradictions or misrepresentations; their defense of Criseyde's 'sodeyn love' (to be described later on in this chapter) can be described as one such point. The fact that they do not intervene here can be read as a deliberate choice, made by the narrator to

encourage a dual perception of Criseyde. Whether that is the case or not, the ambiguity of Criseyde's estat has the same effect as the ambiguity of her children. The narrator's audience can see her both as a well-attended noblewoman and as a resourceless individual, and the narrator can plausibly cast her in both roles when such roles suit their intent.

Criseyde's friends are as ambiguous and as seldom seen as her estat throughout the narrative of *Troilus and Criseyde*. She is described early on as "allone / Of any frend to whom she dorste hir mone" (I.97-8), and this description is fairly accurate to her portrayal in Book I; she is described as a solitary figure, who has to rely on Hector's sense of mercy for social stability. The narrator offers the reader glimpses of another side to Criseyde, however, starting with the opening of Book II, where Pandarus goes to tell Criseyde of Troilus' love and finds "two othere ladys sete and she, / Withinne a paved parlour, and they three / Herden a mayden reden hem the geste / Of the siege of Thebes, while hem leste" (II.81-4). The immediate item of note is the company Criseyde is keeping. When Pandarus finds her, Criseyde is sitting reading with "two othere ladys": two women also of her social set. What set that is remains for a moment unclear. She tells Pandarus to "Let maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves" (II.119) when he suggests she dance with him, declaring herself to be neither a maiden nor a wife, but she is not living the "widewe's lif" she suggests as an alternative, reading of the Theban saga in a garden in preference to reading saints' lives in a cave. Regardless, this brief moment in the text, between her initial power play with Hector and the web of dilemmas Pandarus ensnares her in, shows Criseyde, in her own time, seeking the companionship of women considered her peers.

The narrator treats Criseyde's friends with similar ambiguity all throughout Book II. After discussing how to handle Troilus' love in the first half of Book II, Criseyde goes back into

the garden with her women, joined this time by her nieces. Here they walk about the garden, discuss poetry (this time in the form of a song sung by Antigone), and generally enjoy each other's company. The makeup of said company is different than it was earlier in the book – earlier her company was described as consisting of other women of the same social status, while here the women who follow her are assumed to be attendants, who follow her around and bring her to bed at the day's end. The character of each occasion remains the same; both instances are of Criseyde enjoying time with her women. Similarly, an extended passage towards the end of Book III describes a gathering of Criseyde's closest friends and relatives, ostensibly to discuss and deal with a threat upon her honour. Pandarus tries to establish this occasion as a political meeting similar to Criseyde's conference with Hector in the opening of Book I; he goes to the lord Deiphebus on Criseyde's behalf and begs him to be "frend to a cause which that toucheth me" (II.1406-7), while speaking of Criseyde and her predicament in impersonal, supplicative terms. Deiphebus immediately challenges this framework, seeing Pandarus' description of Criseyde as odd – "O, is nat this, / That thow spekest of to me thus straungely, / Criseida, my frend?" (II.1422-4) – and the gathering of nobles summoned to pledge aid to Criseyde progresses with strong undertones of personal friendship between Criseyde and those nobles in attendance. Of Hector specifically, Dephebus says, "It nedeth naught to preye hym frend to be" (II.1451), implying that he is already her friend. Yet the narrator inserts a gap in their narrative just at the point where Criseyde is about to enter the scene, the point at which such friendship would be most in evidence; following the entrance of Criseyde, Antigone and Tarbe, the narrator says, "But fle we now prolixitee best is, / For love of God, and lat us faste go / Right to th'effect, withouten tales mo" (II.1564-6). The 'effect' the narrator turns to afterwards

is the matter of Troilus, setting up a pattern which persists throughout the end of Book II. Whenever the narrator begins to shift towards Criseyde's friendships, away from the politics of Pandarus' trick or from consideration of Troilus' love, the narrator makes a comment that glosses over the new subject and returns the narrative to its Troilus-centric path.

As with the earlier described ambiguities, Criseyde gains the benefit of a greater freedom of action through this ambiguous nature of her friendships. The precise freedom she acquires is described by Neil Cartlidge in his essay "Criseyde's Absent Friends." Cartlidge specifies that the type of friends Criseyde is said to lack are those acquaintances and kinspeople who are responsible for providing young maidens and older widows with social safety and position in the absence of that provided by a husband. They would form, in a sense, a family unit, something Criseyde lacks because of the established absence of her husband and the new absence of her father. These friends are also the people whom Criseyde could have relied upon to make a second marriage, that being the social role of such friends in Chaucer's day.[20] Their absence places Criseyde in a position, as Cartlidge describes it,

> free of the restrictions, but also of the protections, on which she could usually expect to rely ... This is freedom of a kind, of course – particularly as long as she is prepared to enjoy the state of respectable, but chaste, widowhood that Hector's intervention apparently secures for her – but it is also an enforced freedom, and it brings hazards of its own along with it, and in particular the temptation to enter into a relationship that has none of the status or security implicit in any marriage that her friends might have arranged."[21]

Criseyde's friendlessness does have this effect in the poem. The absence of friends implies the absence of security in Book I, and her resultant relationship with Troilus is one of which her

[20] Cartlidge 233.
[21] Cartlidge 242-3

friends would likely not approve. Considering the narrator in this context, together with their ambiguous treatment of Criseyde's friends, adds an interesting wrinkle to this position. Criseyde's friends may be absent from much of the text, but in the moments of their presence, they appear to serve the function attributed to them by Cartlidge. Her noble friends arrange for her security in the latter part of Book II, not out of political obligation (as Hector did in Book I) but from personal friendship. In conversation with her women following Antigone's song, she is able to ask advice about a hypothetical pair of lovers, advice she goes on to apply to her own situation. Their absence in other moments of the text indicates not that Criseyde has no one on whom she can rely, but that the narrator is creating gaps in the narrative to make it seem as if that is the case. The narrator can portray Criseyde as enjoying the freedoms of the state of unattached, chaste widowhood Hector grants her and as having access to the security of friendships, depending on what impression they wish to convey.

The omissions of Criseyde's children, attendants and friends all follow a similar pattern, and all have a similar effect. The presence of such figures in the story outright would constrain the audience's perception of Criseyde in certain ways, while giving her certain advantages; their outright absense would have similar effects, though with different constraints. Presenting Criseyde unambiguously as having children or not, as having friends to rely on or not, would constrict her presence in the text, having the choices of social positioning she makes throughout the work be less easily accepted by the narrator's audience. Leaving them ambiguous, as the narrator chooses to do, lets the narrator portray Criseyde as having more freedom, as their audience is primed to accept Criseyde in whatever state she presents herself.

The narrator uses omission in similar ways at moments in the text when Troilus and Criseyde's emotions are put in parallel, such as the moments of love at first sight, or "sodeyn love," when each falls in love with the other.[22] Both moments are accompanied by extensive commentary from the narrator excusing their presence in the work. The presence of such commentary itself says a lot about their audience's potential reception – the narrator expects complaint from their audience, and for each instance, must offer an excuse. The different excuses they give for Troilus' and for Criseyde's moments of "sodeyn love" says much more about the narrator's differing views of each character, and provides an example of how they are trying to expand their audience's possible perceptions of Criseyde.

Troilus' moment of "sodeyn love" comes early in Book I, when he and Criseyde each attend the festival in honor of the Palladium. Troilus is introduced to the reader after Criseyde in this scene, walking up and down in the temple and making comments about love. His comments suggest that love is not worth the trouble it brings, and he claims to the men of his party that they go through significantly more trouble in love than the women whom they pursue: "God woot, she slepeth softe / For love of the, whan thow turnest ful ofte" (I.195-6). With reference to the different levels of passion felt by Troilus and Criseyde throughout the rest of the narrative, Troilus seems at least partially correct in what he says. He gets very little time to enjoy this accuracy, and his resultant conclusion that he will abstain from love. Immediately after he makes his statements, the God of Love judges him impertinent, and shoots him with an arrow of love that causes him to fall for Criseyde.

[22] Chaucer uses both 'love at first sight' ("Right for the firste syghte") and "sodeyn love" to refer to this concept in the narrator's aside following Criseyde's first sight of Troilus. This project will use the latter in place of the former, to avoid conflation with the modern trope of 'love at first sight'.

This is the point at which the narrator intercedes. The general gist of their speech, which runs for eight verses, is that Troilus deserves this fate as penance for his pride, and that it is inescapable. They warn their readers to take Troilus' example as a message not to scorn love:

> Forthy esample taketh of this man,
> Ye wise, proude, and worthi folkes alle,
> To scornen Love, which that so soone kan
> The fredom of youre hertes to hym thralle;
> For evere it was, and evere it shal byfalle,
> That Love is he that alle thing may bynde,
> For may no man fordon the lawe of kynde.
> - I. 232 – 8

The mention in the last line of the "lawe of kynde", or "natural law,"[23] is especially important, drawing together as it does both the inevitability of Troilus' fate and how he is deserving of it. According to the narrator, it is the "law of kynde" that love can bind all things; love is in the nature of all creatures, and no creature can go against their nature. Troilus' stance against love, then, is a stance against the natural order of things, and his fall into love is both a just punishment and a reassertion of that natural order.

With love established as the natural order of things, Troilus' moment of 'sodeyn love' is played straight. Upon seeing Criseyde, he falls for her without any hesitation or doubt. His affections are also portrayed as intrinsically connected to virtue. The narrator makes this connection in their aside, saying that love is a force which brings out the best in people and telling their readers, "Now with it may not goodly ben withstonde, / And is a thing so vertuous in kynde, / Refuseth nat to Love for to ben bonde" (I.253-5). Troilus' attraction of Criseyde is

[23] "kīnde, n.." Middle English Dictionary. University of Michigan, November 2019. accessed November 29, 2020. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED24248/track?counter=2&search_id=4727188

portrayed in terms that emphasize the virtue of that connection. His invocation upon seeing her is to the divine: "O mercy, God," thoughte he, "when hasten woned, / That art so feyr and goodly to devise?" (I.276-7). The description the narrative gives of her emphasizes her feminine virtue specifically:

> "She nas nat with the leste of hire stature,
> But alle hire lymes so wel answerynge
> Weren to wommanhod, that creature
> Was nevere lasse mannyssh in semynge;
> And ek the pure wise of hire mevynge
> Shewed wel that men myght in hire gesse
> Honour, estat, and wommanly noblesse." (I.281-7)

The mention of 'honour' and 'estat' looks outwards to the concepts discussed in Chapter 1; their use here suggests that Troilus sees Criseyde as an ideal, upstanding Trojan citizen, at the pinnacle of her honour and estat, and loves her in that position. The reference to 'wommanly noblesse' further refines the position in which he sees her, defining her honorable place in society as one dependent upon her feminine virtue. This is the context in which Troilus' love is called virtuous. He loves a virtuous woman, and this love calls him to act in a more virtuous manner, as the narrator mentions in their aside; "And ofte it hath the cruel herte apesed, / And worthi folk maad worthier of name, / And causeth moost to dreden vice and shame" (I.250-2). And at the end of Book I, Troilus is described as feeling the effects laid out by the narrator. "For he becom the frendlieste wight, / The gentilest, and ek the mooste fre, / The thriftiest, and oon the beste knyght / That in his tyme was or myghte be" (I.1079-82). Love for Criseyde has made him a better knight; his earlier personality, one of "japes" and "cruelte" (I.1083), is entirely overthrown.

Criseyde sees Troilus in the guise of a virtuous knight during her own moment of "sodeyn love." She sees him from her window, passing in the street moments after he has won a significant victory against the Greeks, some time after she has been told that he loves her. He is presented in this moment as a paragon of masculine, knightly virtue, as Criseyde was presented as a paragon of feminine virtue in Book I:

> So lik a man of armes and a knyght
> He was to seen, fulfilled of heigh prowesse
> For both he had a body and a myght
> To don that thing, as wel as hardynesse;
> And ek to seen hym in his gere hym chesse,
> So fressh, so yong, so weldy semed he,
> It was a heven upon hym for to see. (II.631-7)

The wrinkle here is the repeated use of "seemed" and similar words in relation to Troilus' knighthood. Chapter 1 in this project discussed Criseyde's self-presentation in the opening book as intentional, done in an attempt to appear as a worthy Trojan citizen and to further her case with Hector. The use of "seemed" here does not necessarily suggest Troilus' demonstration of knighthood is a product of the same kind of intentionality; the narrator in Book I laid out fairly clearly that this was a result of the affliction of love. What it does suggest is that Troilus' newfound knighthood is more show than substance, that love inspired him to portray the virtues of masculine knighthood without inspiring him to attain those virtues in reality.

Wrinkles aside, the general effect of Troilus and Criseyde's individual presentations is the same; both Troilus and Criseyde fall in love based on the virtuous qualities presented by the other. The similarities of general effect between these moments could lead to a similarity of narrative handling thereof. Instead, the tone of the narrator's aside for Criseyde's moment of

"sodeyn love" disregards these similarities entirely, presenting a near contradictory perspective.

The narrator introduces their aside (a brief three verse speech, this time), by quoting potential critics of Criseyde's "sodeyn love": "Now myghte som envious jangle thus: / "This was a sodeyn love; how myghte it be / That she so lightly loved Troilus / Right for the firste syghte, ye, parde?" " (II.666-669). The narrator here imagines their audience, or a subsection thereof, finding fault with the suddenness of Criseyde's love, while the suddenness of Troilus' love in Book I passed unquestioned. In refuting this question, as they go on to do, the narrator could have returned to the themes with which they justified Troilus' 'sodeyn love', themes of the inevitably and rightness of love. They choose, instead, to refute directly the idea that Criseyde's emotions upon seeing Troilus were love:

> For I sey nought that she so sodeynly
> Yaf hym hire love, but that she gan enclyne
> To like hym first, and I have told yow whi;
> And after that, his manhod and his pyne
> Made love withinne hire for to myne,
> For which by proces and by good servyse
> He gat hire love, and in no sodeyn wyse. (II.673-9)

Here the narrator suggests that the process of Criseyde falling for Troilus was in truth a process, and an extensive one at that. They recast the initial moment of her attraction as a beginning ("For every thing a gynnyng hath it nede" (671)), a time at which she began to "enclyne" towards him, and they state that Troilus eventually won her over with "proces" and with "good servyse." It's a striking re-imagining of "sodeyn love," one the narrator continues to hold true for Criseyde. Describing much later Criseyde's acceptance of Diomede's courtship, they say, "But trewely, how longe it was bytwene / That she forsok hym for this Diomede, / Ther is non

auctour telleth it, I wene" (V.1086-8). Criseyde continues throughout the poem to engage in love as a slow and steady process, in contrast to the "sodeyn love" by which Troilus is afflicted.

The contrast between these two conceptions of love lets the reader perceive Criseyde with flexibility, to a much greater extent than they could perceive Troilus. Troilus falls in love after the god of love shoots him with an arrow. He has no choice in the matter, and according to the narrator's aside, this is both inevitable and right. The narrator's rigid framing of his love offers their audience no alternative interpretation, and no space in which to insert their own. By contrast, the framing of Criseyde's 'sodeyn love' as an inclination leaves the text's audience free to interpret her in multiple ways. The first thing she does after Troilus passes from her sight and the narrator's aside ends is consider what to do – "she sat allone, and gan to caste / Where on she wolde apoynte hire atte laste" (II.690-1) – and the moment is situated in the middle of a book filled with Criseyde's back and forth deliberations around Troilus. That the audience gets to take those deliberations seriously is in large part due to the narrator's contrasted framing of her love and Troilus'; the audience can believe that Criseyde is making up her mind, because her affections are not presented as fixed.

The narrator emphasizes the difference between Troilus and Criseyde towards the other end of their shared narrative arc as well, contrasting their separate reactions of grief when they learn that Criseyde is to be given over to the Greeks. Following the negotiations at the start of Book IV, Troilus leaves the parliament in a state of near madness. He dismisses his few attendants, shuts himself in his room, and starts to rave; "And in his brest the heped wo bygan / Out breste, and he to werken in this wise / In his woodnesse, as I shal yow devyse" (IV.236-8). The narrator describes Troilus' woe, with beautiful analogies and poetry, and continues to

describe it throughout his conversation with Pandarus, painting him as a man gone almost mad with grief. Throughout all this description, the narrator never renders themself speechless, never describes a portion of Troilus' grief as too much to relate. The narrator does describe Troilus' woe as almost too much for his body, saying that "But tho bygonne his teeris more out breste, / That wonder is the body may suffise / To half this wo which that I yow devyse" (IV.257-9). They describe, too, Pandarus as rendered speechless, together with Troilus, by the outpouring of their shared grief; "For which the sorwful Pandare, of pitee, / Gan for to wepe as tendreliche as he; / And specheles thus ben thise ilke tweye, / That neither myghte o word for sorwe seye" (IV.368-71). Yet the narrator does not in Book IV imply that Troilus' grief goes beyond what is written on the page; it is only within the world of the text that Troilus' grief inspires silence.

The narrator's description of Criseyde's grief is markedly different. Criseyde, like Troilus, shuts herself away to express her grief, injuring herself and making complaint to the heavens as he does. Unlike with Troilus, the narrator suggests that her woe is even greater than they can describe:

> "How myghte it evere yred ben or ysonge,
> The pleynte that she made in hire destresse?
> I not; but, as for me, my litel tonge,
> If I discryven wolde hire hevynesse,
> It sholde make hire sorwe seme lesse
> Than that it was, and childisshly deface
> Hire heigh compleynte, and therfore ich it pace."
> - IV. 799-805

The specificity of the narrator's restraint is notable. The narrator describes Criseyde's woe not as something which cannot be described, but as something they do not know how to properly

relate; they made an active choice to not describe Criseyde's sorrow because, they say, their attempt to describe it wouldn't do it justice. They imply that the extent of Criseyde's grief has not been properly related in the narrative tradition from which they are working – "How might it ever have been read or sung" – and they describe their own lack of description as a conscious choice, made because they could not fill the gap in a way which would do her justice. Were the narrator to try and repair the omission, to describe her grief, "It should make hire sorwe seme lesse / Than what it was." In choosing to leave her grief undescribed, the narrator calls upon their readers to imagine her grief for themselves; by highlighting the "heigh compleynte" of that grief, the narrator ensures that said imagining will not sell Criseyde's grief short.

The narrator does ultimately describe Troilus' grief as too extensive to relate. Following Criseyde's transfer to the Greek camp in Book V, the narrator leaves Criseyde to talk with her father (in the process eliding her negotiations from the narrative, as previously discussed), and turns to describing Troilus in his grief. Early on in this description, the narrator protests their own inadequacy for the task:

> "Who koude telle ought or ful discryve
> His wo, his pleynt, his langour, and his pyne?
> Naught alle the men that han or ben on lyve.
> Thow, redere, maist thiself ful wel devyne
> That swich a wo my wit kan nat diffyne;
> On ydel for to write it sholde I swynke,
> Whan that my wit is wery it to thynke."
> - V. 267-73

At first glance, the narrator's claim here appears similar to their earlier claims concerning the depth of Criseyde's grief. The details point in an entirely different direction. The narrator does not claim that to relate Troilus' grief would be to lessen it, or that their omission thereof is a

conscious choice in order to avoid such lessening, as they did for Criseyde. They say, instead, that they are "wery" of thinking of Troilus' grief, that they are unable to "diffyne" it, "diffyne" having the sense of "description" with finality, a sense of describing something entirely and coming to an end.[24] Whereas the problem the narrator faces in relating Criseyde's grief is one of depth, in that said grief is too great to be properly and respectfully conveyed, the problem of Troilus' grief is one of breadth. Troilus continues to grieve past the point at which the narrator is tired of describing it, past the point at which the depth of his grief has been already sufficiently portrayed. As the narrator says, "On ydel for to write it sholde I swink"; it is useless to continue to work at describing something which has already been described.

The narrator's methods in portraying Criseyde are as have been described above. Their reasons for doing so seem remarkably clear. They describe their treatment of Criseyde in an extended passage following Diomede's second attempt at courting Criseyde;

> But trewely, how longe it was bytwene
> That she forsok hym for this Diomede,
> Ther is non auctour telleth it, I wene.
> Take every man now to his bokes heede,
> He shal no terme fynden, out of drede.
> For though that he bigan to wowe hire soone,
> Er he hie wan, yet was ther more to doone.
>
> Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde
> Forther than the storye wol devyse.
> Hire name, allas, is publysshed so wide
> That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise.
> And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,
> For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,
> Iwiw, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe.
> - V. 1086-99

[24] "diffīnen, v.." Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan, November 2019, accessed November 28, 2020. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED11586/track?counter=2&search_id=4724920

The first verse of this passage is a crystal-clear example of the narrator's methods. Echoing their earlier description of Criseyde as needing time to fall for Troilus after her initial inclination towards him, the narrator inserts a gap of time between her initial hearing of Diomede's courtship and her ultimate acceptance thereof. They play upon the omission in their sources to do so, protesting that there is 'no auctour' who includes the length of time in their works. As with the narrator's earlier omissions, this is not an element of the story they needed to highlight. They could have easily left it unmentioned; the reader's knowledge that Criseyde eventually accepts Diomede's suit is not substantially altered by the inclusion of details about the length of time before that happens. Such strong insistence gives Criseyde more space in which to operate, and in addition, it gives her the benefits mentioned earlier of a gradual, chosen love.

The narrator's second verse provides a clear statement of intent behind such leaning on omissions: they do not want to "chide" Criseyde any more than absolutely necessary. There are limits to how much slack the narrator can give her. As they say, her name is widely published, and their readers already know of her guilt. They start the poem talking of the double sorrows of Troilus, expecting their reader to know already what such sorrows are. They cannot change what Criseyde does in the narrative without deviating from their sources and their narrative tradition, something they have earlier stated no intention of doing. They can, however, utilize the gaps in that tradition, the things that earlier writers left unsaid, to make space for Criseyde to 'excuse' her of some of her actions.

One problem remains to complicate the narrator's simple portrayal of their own motives, the problem of the intended reader. The narrator is clearly aware of a reader present as they tell the story of Troilus and Criseyde. They refer to the reader as such only once, in the

aside mentioned earlier where they discuss Troilus' grief, but they address a potential "you" throughout; a representative passage of such address comes early on in Book III, with the narrator saying, "His resons, as I may my rymes holde, / I yow wol telle, as techen bokes olde" (III.90-1). The identity of this reader remains, however, undefined. This creates the possibility of problems for the narrator's depiction of Criseyde, and for the omissions they use in the process.

In his essay on Chaucer's Lollius, Kittredge describes two types of real world readers for *Troilus and Criseyde*, and explains how each of them would respond to the conceit of the translation:

> Chaucer counted on two classes of contemporary readers: first, the gentlemen and some of the ladies of his time, who were cultivated but not scholarly; and second, a very limited group of men of learning, like Gower and Stode, the pair to whom the *Troilus* is dedicated. If the first class accepted his citation as gospel truth, and were convinced that he had unearthed a Trojan history by one Lollius in some old parchment volume, well and good! If the second class saw through the device and recognized Lollius as a part of the fiction, still well and good! Everybody would be content. The ladies and gentlemen would raise no question anyhow; the scholars would compliment him on the success of his poetic device.[25]

Kittredge's explanation suffices for the real world readers of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer's readership. Neither of these two types of readers exactly fits the narrator's addressed audience. As proposed in this project, Lollius is not a literary device for the narrator and their audience but an extant text – the second class of reader Kittredge refers to would not exist for the narrator. The narrator's audience is closer to the first type of reader, one who accepts Lollius as a source for the narrator's authority, but the narrator's reader can be more precisely defined. The narrator's mentions of Criseyde's reputation throughout the story, their stated closeness to

[25] Kittredge, 55-6.

their sources, and the use of omission itself all paint a picture of an audience intimately familiar with the story of Criseyde – just one not familiar with Lollius' interpretation thereof. Were the narrator's readers lacking any knowledge of the story told in *Troilus and Criseyde*, they would have to take the narrator at their word; the narrator could describe Criseyde however they wished, without the audience being any the wiser. Their reliance on gaps in the narrative, their constant need to justify their interpretation of Criseyde as consistent with their sources, implies a challenging reader, one knowledgeable of the story of *Troilus and Criseyde* and with expectations for how the story will be told but without access to the sources (Lollius among them) which the narrator is claiming to relate.

A set of lines towards the end of the poem hints at how the narrator's audience has acquired the story of *Troilus and Criseyde*. While addressing their "litek bok" and sending it off into the world, the narrator claims to worry about how their words will be misconstrued:

> And for ther is so gret diversite
> In Englysh and in untying of oure tonge,
> So prey I God that nonn myswrite the,
> Ne the mysmetre for default of tonge;
> And red wherso than be, or elles songe,
> That thow be understonde, God I biseche!
> - V. 1793-8

The narrator is, in this passage, concerned about how their story will change as it goes out into the world, about how it will be "mis-written" as it is transcribed into different manuscripts and how it will be "mis-metered" as it is recited by different voices. Their concern speaks to the presence of an oral culture of literacy within the narrator's world. The narrator expects their story to be altered as it is retold, and is concerned about the implications thereof. Their audience's pre-existing knowledge of Criseyde's story can be assumed to come from the same

mechanism, given that they lack access to the ancient sources with which the narrator is familiar. In using said sources, then, the narrator is attempting to alter the version of the narrative that has made its way into the oral culture, overwriting it by their appeal to the original authorities from which that version would have come.

Chapter 3: Texts

The first two chapters of this project have considered the narrative and the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* as separate worlds. Criseyde takes what actions she does for the purposes of preserving her honour and her estat, both of which concepts exist entirely within the world of the text. The narrator occupies a semi-fictional middle ground between the world of Troy and that of Chaucer's England, but their territory is kept carefully separate from either of the others (aside from a few moments of overlap). The narrator is telling a story about Criseyde, and while she indicates an awareness that she will be subject to a literary tradition, she has no specific engagements with it.

What bridges the gap between narrator and narrative is the engagement both have with the texts extant within the city of Troy. There is a vast array of textual materials available within the narrative of *Troilus and Criseyde*, with which the characters and the narrator alike engage. The mythic tradition of the Theban siege (also known as the Theban saga), an event which occurs within the canon of *Troilus and Criseyde* some time before the narrative begins, provides one body of textual material, which takes the form of both written histories and second hand accounts. Another body of textual material is the series of letters sent between Troilus and Criseyde, letters through which they define themselves to one another and carry out their relationship when at a distance. These texts are augmented by a loose collection of prophecies, legends, rumors, books, and dreams, each of which offers its own unique vantage point on Trojan society. This chapter will examine how the characters of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Criseyde herself foremost among them, read and analyze these texts as means of analyzing their social environment. It will also consider the narrator, who engages with the texts of the Trojan literary

culture alongside the characters and uses them to make their own allusions and to further impose their influence upon the narrative.

The Theban saga is the most broadly referenced body of textual material within Troilus and Criseyde. The stories of the Theban saga, originally related in a group of lost epic poems known as the Theban Cycle, stand with those of the Trojan War in relating the two great conflicts of the Greek mythic tradition.[26] The details of the saga vary somewhat in the surviving retellings, but the broad strokes remain mostly consistent. The Theban King Oedipus sends himself into exile and leaves behind his sons to rule in alternate years, first Eteocles, then Polynices. Eteocles refuses to give up the city once his year is over, leading Polynices to assemble an army of seven generals to retake the city. All except one of the generals are killed in the war, as are Eteocles and Polynices, and the city is ultimately saved from invasion.[27] Later myth has the descendants of the dead generals (including Diomede, an important figure in the Trojan War and in *Troilus and Criseyde)* return to Thebes and successfully sack it, avenging the deaths of the previous generation.[28] There is more material surrounding these wars – the story of Oedipus is well represented in the mythic tradition, as are the consequences of both the initial and the final war – but for the characters of *Troilus and Criseyde*, ensnared in the siege of Troy, the heart of the saga is the siege of Thebes itself.

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[26] *Greek Epic Fragments: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC*, ed. and trans. Martin L. West (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003), 4-5.
[27] Hyginus, "Stories," in *Anthology of Classical Myth: Primary Sources in Translation*, ed. and trans. Stephen M. Trzaskoma, R. Scott Smith, and Stephen Brunet (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 236-7.
[28] Apollodorus, "Library," in *Anthology of Classical Myth: Primary Sources in Translation*, ed. and trans. Stephen M. Trzaskoma, R. Scott Smith, and Stephen Brunet (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 53.

The use of this story within *Troilus and Criseyde* begins in Book II's introduction of Criseyde. Pandarus finds her reading with her women, and he asks her if they are reading a work about love: "Is it of love? O, som good ye me leere!" (II.97). She tells him that she is reading the "romaunce" of Thebes; this description could align with Pandarus', but the passages she highlights from the story deal with anything but love: "And we han herd how that kyng Layus deyde / Thorugh Edippus his sone, and al that dede ... How the bisshop, as the book kan telle, / Amphiorax, fil thorugh the ground to helle" (II.101-5). Criseyde makes reference to the tragic elements of the Theban saga, the moments in which fate brings its participants to ruin. Oedipus kills his father, and incurs a host of other tragedies, in an ill-informed attempt to avoid his fate; Amphiorax (one of the seven generals who went against the city) attempted to back out of any part of the siege of Thebes, knowing it through prophecy to be doomed, but is forced to attend anyway, and is slain for it. These are not stories which place emphasis on love, but on war, and on the tragedy inherent within. Criseyde reading them with her women is, as Behrman puts it, a "potentially subversive" act: "[Criseyde and her women] represent a cluster of women reading about the actions of men – they are feminine readers of a masculine text, the epic."[29] Through them, Criseyde is engaging with the political matter surrounding a war, and surrounding a siege.

In his response to Criseyde's statement, Pandarus tries to turn the conversation towards love, attempting to take control of the story and its implications away from Criseyde. He asserts his scholarly authority by saying "Al this knowe I mselve, / And al the'assege of Thebes and the

[29] Behrman, 319.

care; / For herof han ther maked bookes twelve" (II.106-8), and he tries to usurp Criseyde's authority and shift the conversation to love in one breath, with "Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce" (II.111). In doing so, Pandarus is acting from a place of masculine authority, and attempting to assert that authority over Criseyde's own: "The behavior of Criseyde and her ladies makes Pandarus, the only man who enters this feminine realm, anxious, and he feels compelled to determine the book's content ... his goal is to entice his niece to reenter patriarchal society by engaging in the game of courtly love with the Trojan prince."[30] Pandarus is trying to shift Criseyde's views of the Theban saga in order to shift her engagement with Trojan society.

The distinction between Pandarus and Criseyde in their readings of the Theban saga is highlighted by the difference in their views on the current siege. Pandarus tells Criseyde, following their exchange about Thebes, that he has good news for her, "Yet koude I telle a thyng to doon yow pleye" (II.121); he is referring to the love of Troilus, but Criseyde immediately takes it to mean that the siege is lifted, saying "For Goddes love, is than the'assege aweye? / I am of Grekes so fered that I deye" (II.123-4). They have different priorities, and read entirely different stories into their surroundings; their different readings of the Theban saga inform their different readings of the political reality of Troy. They move away from the topic of Thebes after that exchange, and do not settle who's interpretation of the saga is dominant. Their conversation does, however, firmly establish the contrast between their interpretations of the Theban saga, the contrast between the saga as a story of romance and as a story of war, a contrast of storytelling traditions set to continue throughout the rest of the work.

[30] Behrman, 319-20.

The way the narrator establishes this exchange offers a third type of story to set alongside the other two, drawing on a mythic tradition aside from the Theban saga. Before Pandarus goes to Criseyde, the narrator presents him in connection with the story of Philomel;

> The swalowe Proigne, with a sorowful lay,
> Whan morwen com, gan make hire waymentynge
> Whi she forshapen was; and evere lay
> Pandare abedde, half in a slomberynge,
> Til she so neigh hym made hire cheterynge
> How Tereus gan forth hire suster take
> That with the noyse of hire he gan awake (II.63-70)

The myth referenced here is retold by Chaucer in his *The Legend of Good Women*.[31] In it, the Thracian lord Tereus marries the Athenian princess Procne, and brings her back to Thrace. From there, Procne begins missing her sister Philomele, and asks Tereus to go to Athens and bring Philomele to Thrace. He does so, but falls in love with her on the way, such that when they get to Thrace, he takes her to a cave and rapes her. He cuts out her tongue and imprisons her in a castle to keep her from telling what happened, and returns to Procne with the news that Philomele has died. Philomele weaves a tapestry to tell what has happened, and has it delivered to Procne, at which point they are reunited. Here the version from *The Legend of Good Women* ends, but in other versions (including that referenced in *Troilus and Criseyde* with "the swalowe Proigne" and "Whi she forshapen was"), Procne and Philomele kill Tereus' child by Procne in

[31] There is a case to be made that the myth told in *The Legend of Good Women* is told specifically by the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*, and not just by Chaucer. The narrator of *The Legend of Good Women*, in the introduction of that work, is accused by the god of Love of writing *Troilus and Criseyde* ("Hast thow nat mad in Englysh ek the bok / How that Criseyde Troilus forsok" [LGW G 264-5]), and of harming his cause by doing so. This would let the parallels between Criseyde's story and Philomele's, as mentioned later in this project, be read as if originating in the same text. At the least, the reference to *Troilus and Criseyde* in *The Legend of Good Women* suggests that Chaucer saw the texts as thematically connected, and lets them be read in parallel.

revenge and, in fleeing from Tereus, pray to be turned into birds: Procne turns into a swallow, Philomele turns into a nightingale, and Tereus turns into a hoopoe.[32]

The narrator's choice to present the myth at this moment in *Troilus and Criseyde*, with the swallow Procne coming to Pandarus and telling him "how Tereus gan forth hire suster take" contextualizes Criseyde's story in a particular way. It offers an implicit connection between the actions Tereus takes and those of Pandarus; both are guardians and legal relatives of women whom they deliver into compromising positions, although Tereus' actions are orders of magnitude worse than Pandarus'. The comparison between Tereus and Pandarus is furthered by references to the legend twice elsewhere in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Following Criseyde's deliberations about Troilus at the center of Book II, she goes to sleep accompanied by the song of a nightingale, who sings "a lay / of love, that made hire herte fressh and gay" (II.921-2). The mention of the nightingale already gives the scene an ominous undertone; the dream she has afterwards, of an eagle tearing out her heart and replacing it with his own, solidifies these into overtly threatening images. A nightingale is also mentioned in the middle of the Book III scene where Troilus and Criseyde confess their love for one another, just after Troilus has taken Criseyde in his arms. The narrator explicitly equates Criseyde to a nightingale, describing her as "the newe abaysed nyghtyngale / That stynteth first whan she bygynneth to synge, / Whan that she hereth any herde tale" (III.1233-5). As the nightingale, she is caught by Troilus, but the emphasis is on Pandarus, who put her in that position in the first place.

[32] Hyginus 230-1.

The Book II placement of the Philomele myth specifies the negative implications it has for Pandarus' character. Within the myth, Philomele's tongue is cut out by Tereus as a form of narrative control; without speech, Tereus believes she cannot attest to his villainy or contest his lies that she is dead. She takes back control of the narrative by weaving the tapestry she sends to Procne – as Chaucer describes it, "She coude eek rede and wel ynow endyte, / But with a penne coude she nat wryte. / But letters can she weve to and fro" (*LGW* F 2356-8). Specifically, she is able to do this because she "lerned hadde in youthe / So that she werken and embrande couthe / And weven in hire stol the ravedore / As it of wemen hath be woned yore" (*LGW* F 2350-3). The means by which she regains a voice are tied specifically to a feminine tradition of weaving, one which "of wemen hath be woned yore," which bears a strong similarity to the Book II vision of Criseyde and her women reading of the siege of Thebes. The narrator's reference to this myth as prefatory material to the introduction of Criseyde emphasize the importance of Criseyde's reading ass an act of narrative agency, and suggests that in attempting to take the interpretation of the Theban saga from Criseyde, Pandarus is performing an act of silencing similar to that which Tereus performs on Philomele.

Pandarus' attempt at usurping Criseyde's interpretation ultimately fails; Criseyde does not give up her interpretation of the Theban saga, and she returns to referencing it in Book V, when she is trying to come to terms with her delivery unto the Greek camp. Indeed, Criseyde's portion of the narrative goes beyond referencing the story, and has her meet a relative of one of the war's participants. Diomede, in his courtship of Criseyde, tells her that his father Tideus fought at Thebes, and that, through him, Diomede would be a king, "But he was slayn – allas, the more harm is! - / Unhappily at Thebes al to rathe, / Polymyte and many a man to scathe"

(V.936-8). In his connection to the Theban saga, Diomede establishes his understanding of it as akin to Criseyde's – Diomede, like Criseyde in Book II, speaks to the tragedy of the Theban cycle, showing both the death of his father and the "harm" that came of it, with "many a man to scathe" – and with this similar understanding, Diomede and Criseyde are positioned well to share an understanding of the Trojan siege. In making his case to Criseyde, Diomede emphasizes that the city of Troy is fated to fall: "For Troie is brought in swich a jupartie / That it to save is now no remedie" (V.916-7). Criseyde debates the point – "That Grekis wolde hire wrath on Troie wreke, / If that they myght, I knowe it wel, iwis; / But it shal nought byfallen as ye speke, / And God tofan!" (V.960-3) – but ultimately finds some level of agreement, considering the "perel of the town" (V.1025) in agreeing to stay with Diomede and the Greeks.

Troilus is also shown to make reference to the Theban saga to deal with Criseyde's departure from Troy, but his analysis tacks closer to that of Pandarus than that of Criseyde. Following Criseyde's departure for the Greek camp in Book V, Troilus is preoccupied by thinking whether Criseyde will be faithful. This anxiety comes to a head, midway through the book, as a dream in which Criseyde is lying in the arms of a boar. Pandarus tries to tell him that he has no cause for concern, saying "thow kanst no dremes rede" (V.1281), and offering alternate interpretations of what Troilus saw. His reading of the dream falls in line with his reading of lore (Theban and otherwise) as centered around love, a reading he uses to try and convince Troilus of Criseyde's faithfulness; "But whoso wil nought trowen reed ne loore, / I kan nat sen in hym no remedie, / But lat hym worthen with his fantasie" (V.327-9). He is ultimately proven wrong – it is 'fantasie' that Criseyde would stay faithful under the circumstances, not that she would turn from him – and he is, in any case, unable to calm Troilus' fears. Troilus

decides to seek council from Cassandra, his sister and herself a prophet, to ask her for an interpretation of his dreams. She starts her interpretation by retelling the Theban saga, citing it as knowledge Troilus requires in order to understand his dream;

> She gan first smyle, and seyde, "O brother deere,
> If thow a soth of this desirest knowe,
> Thow most a fewe of olde stories heere,
> To purpos how that Fortune overthrowe
> Hath lordes olde, thorugh which , withinne a throwe,
> Thow wel this boor shalt knowe, and of what kynde
> He comen is, as men in bokes fynde." (V.1457-63)

Cassandra goes on to try and align Troilus' understanding of the Theban saga, and of the general situation with Criseyde's. She tells him of the siege, and of it's doomed nature, how "Fortune overthroew" the participants in the saga and, eventually, how Diomede is descended from Tideus: "This ilke boor bitokneth Diomede, / Tideus sone, that down descended is / Fro Meleagre, that made the boor to blede" (V.1513-5). Troilus refuses the knowledge, accusing her of lying and of telling him a "fantasie" (V.1523), but her interpretation of the dream proves correct. The tragic vision of Thebes, as adopted by Criseyde and by Cassandra, proves better able to reflect reality than the more romantic vision adopted by Troilus and by Pandarus.

A similar deviation between literary conceptions permeates the letters exchanged by Troilus and Criseyde. Their initial exchange of letters between occurs midway through Book II, after Pandarus has made his first visit to Criseyde. Troilus hears from Pandarus what transpired during that visit, and while he takes hope from it, he is ultimately unsatisfied, asking Pandarus what is next to do. It is at this point that Pandarus suggests writing a letter:

> "I woot wel that thow wiser art than I
> A thousand fold, but if I were as thow,
> God help me so, as I wolde outrely

> Of myn owen hond write hire right now
> A lettre, in which I wolde hire tellen how
> I ferde amys, ad hire biseche of routhe."
> - II.1002-7

In giving the advice he does – and the advice continues for another five verses after this one – Pandarus is not just telling Troilus to write a letter. He is, in addition, defining the type of literacy involved in his vision of letter writing. Pandarus has been established earlier in the narrative as the more experienced between them in matters of love (says Pandarus in Book I, "Sith thus of two contraries is o lore, / I, that have in love so ofte assayed / Grevances, oughte konne, and wel the more, / Counseillen the of that thow art amayed" [I.645-48]) and he calls upon that authority here. He grants that Troilus is wise in a general sense, and (by inference) that he knows in general how to write a letter. He recommends that, for this particular letter, Troilus adopt the form of writing that he himself would adopt.

The type of writing Pandarus recommends places greater emphasis on style than on substance. He tells Troilus that the letter should be written "Of myn owen hond" (II.1005), that it should not be written too "scryvenyssh" or "craftyly" (II.1026), that Troilus should "Biblotte it with thi teris ek a lite" (II.1027), and that he should avoid touching on any one topic too extensively (II.1028-36). He even tells Troilus how best to arrange the circumstances in which the letter will be read, telling him to ride past Criseyde's window "in thi beste gere" (II.1012) after Pandarus has taken the letter to her. The letter is conceived of as a piece of Troilus' self-presentation before Criseyde, as a way for him to appear in the guise of a courtly lover. Troilus takes this conception to heart. Expressing misgivings about his ability to write the letter, Troilus says not that he is worried about his meaning getting across, but that he is ashamed "Lest of

myn innocence I seyde amys" (II.1048) – he is worried about coming across as ignorant of the conventions of courtly love through the sending of an inappropriate letter. The goal of the form of literacy Pandarus recommends is for Troilus to present himself as a proper knight, to show that he knows the forms of a certain type of love.

When Criseyde receives Troilus' letter, she takes it as he means it, as a way for him to show that he is a proper courtly lover. Criseyde reads and judges the letter quite briefly, without much engagement; "Avysed word by word in every lyne, / And fond no lak, she thoughte he koude good, / And up it putte, and wente hire in to dyne" (II.1177-9). She is looking for whether Troilus knows how to act, and judges from what she reads that he does; she need not pour over every line to seek the depths of Troilus' heart. When it comes to writing her own letter, however, Criseyde takes an entirely different approach. She claims to never have written a letter before, giving up any claim to the wisdom or the literacy Pandarus grants to Troilus, but withdraws from Pandarus to write her letter unassisted: "And into a closet, for t'avise hire bettre, / She wente allone, and gan hire herte unfettre / Out of desdaynes prisoun but a lite, / And sette hire doun, and gan a lettre write" (II.1215-9). For Criseyde, letter writing is not about following a pre-arranged system of signals and codes, proving to the letter's recipient that she "koude good." She writes to Troilus in an attempt to convey something of what is in her heart.

This being the case, what she writes in her letter should, in theory, be more revealing than what Troilus writes in his. Various factors make reading her letter more complicated. Criseyde herself is conflicted about writing it. She initially tells Pandarus that she will neither accept Troilus' letter nor write him one in return. She changes tack after Pandarus forces the letter upon her, but complains that she has been 'constrained' into doing so: "As wisly help me

God the grete, / I nevere dide thing with more peyne / Than writen this, to which ye me constreyne" II.1230-2). The letter itself conveys her true feelings only at a remove; she unfetters her heart "but a lite" when she sits down to write it, and the narrator presents only "th'effect, as fer as I kan understonde" (II.1220). There is room within the letter for Criseyde's true feelings to hide, as Troilus acknowledges when he reads it, thinking that "Al covered she tho wordes under sheld" (II.1327). Troilus takes hope from her letter, and as the narrator describes it, it is somewhat encouraging. Whether his hope is well founded remains unclear. All the complicating features around Criseyde's letter leaves the analysis of it uncertain; she both opens her heart and writes her letter without aid or and without guidelines, and conceals her heart enough to cast uncertainty upon it.

The narrator does not recount the text of Troilus and Criseyde's opening letters to one another, leaving both of them paraphrased. They continue this mode of description into Book III, where a lengthy correspondence between the two is entirely glossed over. The narrator states two reasons for this elision. They do not desire to recount the text of the letters, because such is not the custom ("For sothe, I have naught herde it don er this / In story non, ne no man here, I wene" [III.498-9]), and even if they did desire to do so, they could not, because of the length of the letters ("For ther was som epistle hem bitwene, / That wolde, as seyth myn auctour, wel contene / Neigh half this book, of which hym liste nought write. / How sholde I thanne a lyne of it endite?" [III.501-4]). They do not want to present the text of the letters for reasons of custom, and even if they wanted to, they could not, for reasons of length; this much seems clear. As with the narrative elisions covered in Chapter 2, however, the narrator's stated

avoidance of the text of the letters serves to put attention upon it. The narrator goes into significant detail in their description of what they have elided:

> "But now, paraunter, som man wayten wolde
> That every word, or sounde, or look, or chere
> Of Troilus that I rehersen sholde,
> In al this while unto his lady deere –
> I trowe it were a long thyng for to here –
> Or of what wight that stant in swich disjoynte,
> His wordes alle, or every look, to poynte."
> - III.491-7

This verse makes several interesting distinctions in quick succession. It begins by positing the existence of an audience with a certain expectation for the story they are hearing, the expectation that the story will cover "every word" that passes between the lovers. The narrator's claim to be the translator of an older, written tradition of the story, as established in Chapter 2, specifies where this expectation lies; the audience expects that the Latin source which the narrator is translating from contains these details. The narrator makes it clear that it doesn't – they imply that their author paraphrased the letters as they do themself – but the expectation is revealing all the same. In describing what their reader may expect, the narrator starts with details of Troilus' love – "som man wayten wolde / That every word, or soonde, or look, or chere / Of Troilus that I rehercen sholde" (III.491-3) – then moves outward and ambiguates what is expected – "Or of what wight that stant in swich disjoynte, / His wordes alle, or every look, to poynte" (III.496-7). His hypothetical reader expects him to describe the actions of Troilus, but if not, those of "what wight" (or "any person") with the same romantic troubles will do.

The narrator's elision here covers more than just Troilus and Criseyde's letters. "Every word, or soonde, or look, or chere" that passes between them is included. This passage foregrounds the letters in what is elided, through portraying letters as the primary means of communication between the lovers, and through mentioning the length of the letters as a primary reason for the elision. The narrator claims that Troilus' actions are equivalent to those of "what wight" in his position, and in so doing, implies another reason for the elision. The narrator does not need to include Troilus' actions or the letters he sends, this suggests, because both are in accordance with a set code of romance. Like with his letter in Book II, Troilus is described in this passage as following a set pattern of love, to the point where

> "But thilke litel that they spak or wroughte,
> His wise goost took ay of al swych heede,
> It semed hire he wiste what she thoughte
> Withouten word, so that it was no nede
> To bidde hym ought to doon, or ought forbede."
> - III.463-7

Nothing Troilus writes needs to be related, because it is the same as what anyone in his situation would relate. This tracks with how Troilus and Pandarus conceive of the literacy of letter writing in Book II, as an exercise in displaying the forms of a certain type of love. faithful – he suggests that perhaps the boar in the dream is her father, and that Criseyde is laying with him because he is dying – and suggests in addition that dreams are an invalid form of text from which to draw conclusions about the real world; "Have I not seyd er this, / That dremes many a maner man bigile? / And whi? For folk expounden hem amys / ... Lat be this thought; thow kanst no dremes rede" (V.1276-81). Troilus is correct in reading the dream as a

sign of Criseyde being false; Pandarus tries to invalidate not only his interpretation, but also the interpretability of dreams as a whole.

Troilus returns to letters as a textual medium on which to base social interpretation just at the point in the text when Criseyde (and Cassandra) return to using the Theban saga. Following the dream of Criseyde's faithlessness described earlier, Pandarus tries to have Troilus set it aside and interpret the situation based on letters. He tells Troilus "My red is this: syn thow kanst wel endite, / That hastily a lettre thow hire write, / Thorugh which thow shalt wel brynggyn it aboute / To know a soth of that thow art in doute" (V.1292-5). He suggests that Troilus has the requisite skill at composing letters that he may do so quickly, and in such a fashion that he can know for certain whether Criseyde has remained faithful or not. It's a return to form of sorts, a return to the kind of courtly letter writing and romantic carriage which distinguished Troilus' behavior in Book II, but the intentions behind it are entirely different. Writing his letter in Book II, Troilus was trying to present himself as the consummate courtly lover; the emphasis was on being read well by Criseyde. Here, Troilus is writing to elicit a response, one which will set his mind at rest about whether Criseyde is unfaithful. This comes through in the manner of composition. He is still adopting the guise of the courtly lover, by writing a letter in the vein of Pandarus' tradition, but (as described in Chapter 1) it was not as a courtly lover that Troilus won Criseyde. His initial letters helped incline her towards him; it was when he swore to preserve her honour and estat that Criseyde took him into her service, and he has proven unable or unwilling to fulfill that promise. As Behrman puts it, "These sophilistic missives to Criseyde seal his fate, for they leave no question that Troilus remains a

courtly lover. He does not consider the needs of his auditor, for instead of tender, solicitous queries concerning the hardships she must have endured, he stresses his own affliction."[33]

The narrator summarizes Criseyde's response quite briefly, compared to the length of Troilus' letter; "But in hire lettre made she swich festes / That wonder was, and swerth she loved hym best, / Of which he fond but botmeles bihestes" (V.1429-31). She writes to tell him what he wants to hear – that she still loves him, and that she will, at some point, return to the city – and, like with the letters of courtly romance described in Book III, the exact text of her letter is unimportant. She writes what anyone in her position would write, her letter amounting to little more than platitudes, while her true feelings remain out of sight. The next letter she writes, responding to correspondence Troilus sends her following his conversation with Cassandra, is more illuminating. This time, Troilus' letter is summarized by the narrator, while Criseyde's letter is depicted in full. Troilus' letter, as paraphrased, differs little from his first; he asks Criseyde when she will return to the city, and mentions his suffering as a result of her unproven faithfulness. Criseyde, in contrast, writes a letter entirely unlike her earlier reply. The letter is a definite rejection of Troilus, if masked somewhat by the language she uses. As Mary Behrman describes it, "Criseyde sees through Troilus' importune letter, and, instead of playing the expected role of the bereft lady, she assumes the role of a courtly lover herself" (331). She accuses Troilus of being selfish in writing as he does, saying that "Nor other thyng nys in youre remembraunce / As thynketh me, but only youre plesaunce" (V.1607-8). Though she praises his knightly qualities, calling him "esample of goodlyheede, / O swerd of knyghthod" (V.1590-1),

[33] Behrman 330.

she refuses to engage with him on the terms he has laid out, responding to his request for succor by reminding him that she, too, is suffering; "How myght a wight in torment and in drede / And heleles, you sende as yet gladnesse? / I herteles, I sik, I in destrese!" (V.1592-4). She turns Troilus' narrative around on him, taking his claims of being hurt and rejected by her actions and accusing him of having the same effect on her. She accuses him of being false to her in the same was he accused her in earlier moments in the text; "And beth nat wroth, I have ex understonde / How ye ne do but holden me in honde" (V.1614-5). Altogether, Criseyde lays greater criticism upon Troilus in this letter than she has in the rest of the text.

Despite everything she says against him in the letter, Criseyde ends it by assuring him that she will return, as she did in the earlier letter she sent. Her earlier assurances failed to entirely convince Troilus of her fidelity. After reading this letter, Troilus becomes entirely convinced that she will never return, and that his romantic intentions towards her have ended in failure: "And fynally, he woot now out of doute / That al is lost that he hath ben about" (V.1644-5). There is a strong case that Criseyde writes the letter the way she does in order to bring about this effect. Criseyde tells Troilus that she will return to him, despite the claims she makes against him, but in so doing, she fills the letter with invitations for Troilus to read between the lines. Early in the letter, Criseyde writes that there are matters she will leave out because she fears the letter getting intercepted; "But whi, lest that this lettre founden were, / mencioun ne make I now, for feere" (V.1602-3). The specific details she omits are those regarding why Troilus expects her to return to the city; she essentially elides the relationship between her and Troilus from a record she anticipates might become public. The effect of this is to convince Troilus that she will not return; the pact of romance between them has been broken.

Troilus spends most of the poem understanding his situation through the lens of courtly love, as taught to him by Pandarus. He repeats the same lines about loving Criseyde or dying ad nauseum, in conversations and letters with her and with Pandarus, and he rarely steps outside the box of an obsessive, romantic hero. In one of the few moments of exception, he turns from viewing his situation in terms of courtly love to viewing it in terms of prophecy and predestination. This occurs midway through Book IV, as Pandarus is occupied conveying regards back and forth between Troilus and Criseyde. While Pandarus is in transit, Troilus is in a temple praying to "the goddes everichone" (IV.949); while there the implication is a prayer to pagan gods, besides that moment and a closing invocation to Jove, the soliloquy he makes has entirely Christian overtones. Within it, Troilus presents a debate on whether or not predestination exists. He begins by saying that God has precognition of future events, that this necessitates predestination – how could God know what was to happen in the future if the future was not set? – and that he was always destined to be separated from Criseyde. Immediately afterwards, however, he contradicts his own certainty:

> "But natheles, allas, whom shal I leeve?
> For then ben grete clerkes many oon
> That destyne thorugh argumentes preve;
> And som men seyn that nedely ther is noon.
> But that fre chois is yeven us everychon.
> O, welaway! So sleighe are clerkes olde
> That I not whose opynoun I may holde."
> - IV.966-73

Troilus here is shown to engage in careful, analytic work with a multitude of texts. He says he has compared the works of 'clerkes' with opposing views in an attempt to discover which is true, and rather than accepting either view without question, he acknowledges that clerkes are

"sleighe" and their works require individual interpretation. Troilus is, moreover, engaging in this type of interpretation with an eye towards how it can explain his current situation. If the scholars who believe in destiny are right, his own situation is fixed, and Criseyde (in his interpretation) is lost to him. If the reverse is true, there may still be hope for his romantic endeavors. Troilus here isn't interpreting an individual prophecy for its value in explaining his situation. The dream which he will ask Cassandra to explain is still in his future; as of now, Troilus does not have access to a prophetic text which he can interpret. He is asking whether events are predestined in order to understand the present situation, in which Criseyde is being delivered from him into the Greeks, and to decide whether there is anything he can do about it.

From his initial discussion of free choice as it compares to destiny, Troilus goes into an extensive comparison between the different arguments on offer. The comparison he makes are fairly theologically sophisticated; he presents, for instance, an argument that a lack of foreknowledge would imply an imperfect God as a mark in favor of predestination, with careful language and attention paid to the intricacies of the argument. These comparisons ultimately lead him to make an argument of his own, which he attempts to explain through the use of a metaphor. If a man is sitting on a fence, Troilus says, and an observer sees this man, the observer's sight does not predestine the man to sitting on the fence; "But thow mayst seyn, the man sit nat therfore / That thyn opynyoun of his sittynge soth is, / But rather, for the man sit then byfore, / Therfore is thyn opynyoun soth, ywys" (IV.1037-40). It's a piece of textual work which goes beyond that which Troilus has attempted in the rest of the passage. Rather than coming down on one side or another of the existing clerks' arguments, he develops an argument of his own, turning the process of reading and interpretation towards a more creative

end. The language of the metaphor blurs the lines between the world of the text and the world of its readers. The context of Troilus' discussion of predestiny has him in the role of the one predestined. He is, in the terms of his metaphor, the man sitting on the bench. For most of the passage, the observer of the equation is God, the being with the foreknowledge that might require predestination. In his example, Troilus addresses the figure placed in the observer role directly. He asks the observer to pay attention to his words – "now herkne, for I wol nat taric" (IV.1029) – and addresses the observer directly as watching the man on the bench; "For in hym nede of sittynge is, ywys, / And in the, nede of soth; and thus forsothe, / There mot necessite ben in yow bothe" (IV.1034-6). It is necessary, according to Troilus, that the man sit on the bench, and that the observer recognize that he is sitting on the bench, but the one does not necessitate the other.

Conclusion

Towards the end of *Troilus and Criseye*, the narrator takes a moment to talk about their hopes and fears for the poem they have just written:

> Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye,
> Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye,
> So sende myght to make in som comedye!
> But litel book, no makyng thow n'envie,
> But subjit be to alle poesye;
> And kis the steppes wher as thow seest pace
> Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lican, and Stace.
> - V.1786-92

It's an interesting passage, especially when read in the context of the narrator's earlier decisions. The narrator has been shown throughout this project as aiming to amend the story they are telling. Their omissions and their qualifications of Lollius' text, made throughout for the benefit of Criseyde and for her agency, are balanced against the narrator's need to stay close to the traditional story their audience expects them to tell. Yet this passage, one of the final statements that the narrator gets to make, seems to indicate that the attempt at balance was a failure. The narrator tells their 'litel bok' to 'kis the steppes' trod by its forefathers in the literary canon, condemning it to a slavish devotion to those texts, while asking God for the ability to (one day) make a work a comedy, a work where events might end well. There is no indication that the narrator's aims are fulfilled, no suggestion that their narrative work came to fruition.

Criseyde too ends the poem in something of a state of failure. Her estat at the poem's end is secure, to a certain extent. Between her father and Diomede, she has sufficient guarantors of her estat in the Greek camp, and with the prophesied fall of the city, her position among the Greeks is much more secure than it would have been among the Trojans. But her estat is

diminished, with friends and property having been left behind in her flight from Troy, and her honour is entirely compromised. The last speech Criseyde makes in the poem makes it clear that, despite her best efforts to the contrary, her honour has been wholly lost:

> Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,
> Shal neyther ben ywritten nor ysonge
> No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
> Oh, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!
> Thorughout the world my belle shal be ronge!
> And wommen moost wol haten me of alle.
> Allas, that swich a cas me sholde falle!
>
> Thei wol seyn, in as muche as in me is,
> I have hem don deshonour, welaway!
> Al be I nat the first that dide amys,
> What helpeth that to don my blame awey?
> - V.1057-69

For all Criseyde's care for her honour, for all the actions she takes to preserve it (aided and abated by the narrator), she is left ultimately without honour, poorly regarded by the Trojan society she left behind and the authors who will come after her. She claims that her dishonorable state is not her fault – "I nat the first that dide amys" – but this makes little difference. The intentions she had of preserving her honour matter not in the face of its loss.

The obvious question – why don't Criseyde or the narrator find success in their aims? – has, perhaps, an obvious answer. This project has attempted to show that Criseyde and the narrator are each operating within their own set of constraints. Criseyde is bound by the social environment of Troy, and by the actions of the other characters who inhabit that environment with her. The narrator is bound by the expectations of their audience and by their self-declared role as a translator of ancient texts. Neither Criseyde nor the narrator can truly succeed in their aims, because there is only so far they can push against the structures which surround them.

That answer being taken as given, there is room to ask perhaps a less obvious question: Why does the work done by Criseyde and by the narrator matter? The fact of their failure would seem to argue that it doesn't. The plot of *Troilus and Criseyde* would have been little different had Criseyde been more of a passive participant to its events, and had the narrator described them without the pointed omissions and asides that they include. On the other hand, the same evidence can be taken as an argument that the work done by Criseyde and the narrator does matter, to a certain degree. Chaucer could have written *Troilus and Criseyde* without including these moments of subversion; the story still functions without an active Criseyde or an opinionated narrator. The inclusion of such elements implies the work they do to be of some importance.

That importance lies in the work's existence, apart from its success or failure. The plot of *Troilus and Criseyde* is fixed – Troy is fated to fall, and Criseyde is fated to depart from Troilus – and the work done by Criseyde and by the narrator cannot change it. This is the conclusion Troilus comes to in his discussion on prophecy; if events are known in advance (and with the first stanza of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the narrator ensures that they are), then they are predestined. Their work can, however, alter the narrative implications of said predestined events.

Troilus and Criseyde is a work obsessed with the ideas of reading and being read. Criseyde's awareness of her honour is an awareness that others (both Trojans and distant, descendent authors) are looking to her and reading her actions, while her engagement with the textual materials of Troy is a way of comprehending her social environment through reading her literary one. The narrator reads Criseyde in the awareness that they are not the first to do so, and that they will in turn be read as their sources were before them. Together, they are able to

create a text that testifies to the existence of a Criseyde who desires to be honorable, a Criseyde that is an incredibly sympathetic and complicated character. When the narrator says, "And if I myghte excuse hire any wise, / For she so sory was for hire untroughte, / Iwis, I would excuse hire yet for routhe" (V.1097-9), they are encouraging their audience to read Criseyde in a certain way, to excuse her of her crimes as Hector excused her of her father's – because it was only "meschaunce" that had her commit them. Criseyde had no choice but to lose honour and estat within the society of Troy; that loss, and the events which ensured it, were predestined by the structures of her society and by the structures of her textual tradition. In letting Criseyde present herself the way she does, the narrator gives her the chance to attain honour within another structure, that of the text's audience.

The original question guiding this project was how Chaucer challenges tradition while telling a story with roots within it. The narrative work accomplished by Criseyde and by the narrator provides an answer. The text of *Troilus and Criseyde* has Criseyde pushing against the traditional constraints of her society, and though she comes up short, her attempt lets the narrator model and encourage a certain type of readership from their audience, a type of readership which would have them drastically rethink the meaning of the traditional tale they have read.

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