CRISEYDE'S *ROUTHE*

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Very near the end of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde,* the heroine predicts her own fate:

> Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,
> Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
> No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende. (V.1058–60)[1]

Correct in her assumption that she would be remembered in literature for her infidelity to Troilus, Criseyde nevertheless underestimates the power of her poet to develop so warm and deep a vision of her that readers still argue passionately in her defense.

Half a century ago C. S. Lewis in *The Allegory of Love* proposed one key to an understanding of Criseyde's motivation when he wrote that "Chaucer has so emphasized the ruling passion of his heroine, that we cannot mistake it. It is Fear."[2] Lewis's strong statement continues to influence critics. Edward J. Milowicki, for example, calls upon Lewis in support of his own argument: "And if Troilus is motivated by hope particularly, Criseyde is driven by fear. This aspect of Criseyde's character, noted some time ago by C. S. Lewis, is a remarkable addition by Chaucer to Boccaccio's tale."[3] Alfred David attempts to diminish the urgency of Criseyde's fear, but his statement still includes a grudging recognition of Lewis's influence: "The fear Lewis regards as the mainspring of Criseyde's character may be real enough, but it is easily aroused and easily allayed."[4] Whether their acceptance has been wholehearted or reluctant, critics have remained in the shadow of Lewis's pronouncement on Criseyde. This is a limited vision, for while fear does drive Criseyde, another, equally powerful force works sometimes in concert with and sometimes in opposition to her fear: it is *routhe.*

The poem opens on a note of compassion, for the poet's act of writing causes the verses to weep (I.7). Chaucer adds this underlying theme to his major source, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato.* Filtering much of his account of the Trojan lovers through the distinctive voice of his narrator, Chaucer,

in his poem, develops a more complex play between action and commentary than does Boccaccio. Compassion is a central theme of Chaucer's narrator, one of whose stated objects at the opening of the poem is to express *compassioun* for love's servants. Boccaccio announces in his proem a more private purpose for his version of the Trojan legend when he claims that he wishes to reflect in his poem his own sorrow for his absent love. Chaucer jettisons Boccaccio's proem, and in so doing advances his poem into the public realm which the social implications of *compassioun* necessarily suggest.

Fear is a cause and consequence of isolation; in the case of Criseyde, her solitary status—"For bothe a widewe was she and allone" (I.97)—places her in a vulnerable position which engenders fear. And her automatic response to fear is to isolate herself further, to protect herself from the potential perils of love through maintaining the status implied by frequent mentions of her widow's weeds. She explicitly separates herself from women who belong in the public sphere when she denounces Pandarus's urgings: "Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves" (II.119). Yet Criseyde often shifts between this tendency to seek safety in isolation and the impulsive fellow-feeling implicit in *routhe.* In his most direct explanation of Criseyde's character, Chaucer describes her as "slydynge of corage" (V.825), and in her constant movement between fear and pity, between private and public emotions, she demonstrates this fundamental instability.

Chaucer offers, in his first mention of Criseyde, a bald statement of her ultimate function in the poem:

> . . . ye may the double sorwes here
> Of Troilus in lovynge of Criseyde,
> And how that she forsook hym er she deyde. (I.54–56)

Echoing the opening line of the poem, the statement immediately connects Criseyde with the double movement of Troilus, "Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie" (I.4), and thereby identifies her as the source of that sorrow for which the poet's verses weep. Chaucer has altered *Il Filostrato* in providing so harsh an introduction to his heroine. He admits nothing of Criseyde's love for Troilus, whereas Boccaccio qualifies his heroine's infidelity with her graciousness toward Troiolo: "E come prima gli fosse graziosa (And how at first she had been gracious to him)" (I.3.6).[5] Chaucer's narrator will qualify the remark explicitly much later in the poem, after Criseyde has yielded to Troilus. In the ominous proem to Book IV, the narrator deliberately reinvokes the imagery of the opening

stanzas of the poem. As his verses wept, now his heart bleeds when he writes of Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus, but here, in correcting his own language, he implies a compassion for his heroine which was absent in his first statement: "For how Criseyde Troilus forsook— / Or at the leeste, how that she was unkynde . . ." (IV.15–16).

Over the course of the poem, therefore, Criseyde's infidelity develops from the bare act of forsaking Troilus to an act of unkindness. In its immediate meaning, *unkynde* reflects the cruelty of Criseyde's act, but *unkynde* also works in a further sense in this passage; in her cruelty toward Troilus, she acts against her own nature. It gradually becomes evident in the poem that it is in Criseyde's nature to behave compassionately toward Troilus, to pity his distress, to be moved in his presence to experience *routhe*. From this first, dispassionate reference to his heroine, Chaucer delicately builds the portrait of the complex figure who, in betraying Troilus, betrays her own nature.

As he presents his poem both as object for compassion with its weeping verses and as a potential expression of compassion for love's servants, so does Chaucer offer in Book I an image of Criseyde as both object and potential source of pity. After his first stark assertion of her infidelity, he shifts his tone entirely, describing her as she kneels to beg Hector's mercy and protection. Two elements stand out in this portrayal of Criseyde as supplicant, her beauty and her sorrowful condition, both of which affect Hector:

> Now was this Ector pitous of nature,
> And saugh that she was sorwfully bigon,
> And that she was so fair a creature. (I.113–15)

Sly in his development of this character to whose instability he will not give a name until Book V, Chaucer refuses in Book I to fix on one image of Criseyde; rather he describes her from a variety of perspectives and in contrasting attitudes. When Pandarus takes his turn at describing his niece, his terms are such that the "hevenyssh perfit creature" of early in the book now acquires an earthy, colloquial reality:

> For of good name and wisdom and manere
> She hath ynough, and ek of gentilesse.
> If she be fayr, thow woost thyself, I gesse. (I.880–82)

Pandarus, like Boccaccio's Pandaro, continues his praise of Criseyde's qualities through a series of double negatives. Chaucer uses this device far more often than Boccaccio in descriptions of his heroine, heightening the

sense of instability about her. The inherently equivocal form of expression, while logically equivalent to a positive statement, subliminally suggests the negative. Rather than describing his niece directly as the most bounteous, the friendliest, the most gracious, Pandarus undermines his praise by couching it in this contradictory rhetorical style.

Chaucer moves away from his source as Pandarus reaches the conclusion of his speech, leading to an emphasis quite distinct from Boccaccio's, and resulting in the completion of the inversion from Criseyde as supplicant for mercy to potential bestower of mercy. Whereas Boccaccio's Pandaro compares Criseida's courage to that of a king, courage is not an attribute that Chaucer will apply to his heroine lightly or without qualification. He adjusts the simile, therefore, so that honor is the regal quality in Criseyde. To Boccaccio's Pandaro, however, Criseida's honor stands as the sole obstacle confronting Troiolo: "Ella è più che altra donna onesta, / e più d'amore ha le cose dispette (She is more honorable than other women and has more contempt for the matters of love)" (II.23.3–4). Chaucer, through Pandarus, turns this coarse opinion on its head; Criseyde's virtue becomes the symbol of hope that Pandarus offers Troilus:

> And also thynk, and therwith glade the,
> That sith thy lady vertuous is al,
> So foloweth it that there is some pitee
> Amonges alle thise other in general. (I.897–900)

Pandarus knows his niece well, as will become evident in his manipulation of her in Book II, his cunning simultaneous exploitation of her fear and of her pity. He does not view her as pitiable; rather, he knows that it is in her nature to feel "some pitee." Chaucer, in choosing the word *vertuous* to replace Boccaccio's *onesta,* allows Pandarus to speak at once of Criseyde's virtue and of her power. Just as Hector, from his position of power, has granted mercy to the pleading Criseyde, she will soon be in a similarly powerful position with respect to Troilus, and as Pandarus suggests, she will prove equally "pitous of nature."

Much of Chaucer's characterization of Criseyde develops through the machinations of her uncle. In Boccaccio's version of the first conversation between his heroine and her cousin, Pandaro jokes briefly with Criseida, stares at her intently, tells her that a man is in love with her, and within ten stanzas reveals the name of her lover. Such a direct approach would never suit the delicate sensibility of Chaucer's Criseyde, and his Pandarus, with keen psychological understanding, leads up to his subject artfully. Well aware that his news will frighten Criseyde, whose speech is

punctuated with reminders of the fear so easily induced in her, Pandarus works first to counter this potential anxiety. He is so cautious, in fact, that while he succeeds in heightening his niece's curiosity about his news, he also intensifies her fear. By the time he has gazed at her, warned her more than once not to take his news amiss, and protested in advance of his own good intentions, Criseyde is quaking with fear, reduced to monosyllables as she demands that he end his circumlocutions: "Say on, lat me nat in this feere dwelle" (II.314). Despite his anticipation of her anxiety and his effort to soften the shock, Pandarus has brought Criseyde's pervasive fear to a new pitch. He operates shrewdly, however, turning to indirect means to dismiss her fear, while he refocuses his argument on the other quality he recognizes as central to Criseyde's being, her *routhe.*

Pandarus initially responds to his niece's command in a stanza remarkable for its linguistic economy; he manages, in seven lines, to remind Criseyde of each of Troilus's virtues, to proclaim Troilus's love, and to open his new subject, her life-or-death power over Troilus:

> Now, nece myn, the kynges deere sone,
> The goode, wise, worthi, fresshe, and free,
> Which alwey for to don wel is his wone,
> The noble Troilus, so loveth the,
> That, but ye helpe, it wol his bane be.
> Lo, here is al! What sholde I moore seye?
> Doth what yow lest to make hym lyve or deye. (II.316–22)

In contrast to the economy of his opening stanza, and despite his suggestion that he has no more to say, Pandarus continues for another nine stanzas, absent from *Il Filostrato,* before he allows any response from Criseyde. He accuses her in advance of cruelty toward Troilus, and uses anaphora to brilliant effect to imply the unnatural quality of such cruelty:

> Wo worth the faire gemme vertulees!
> Wo worth that herbe also that dooth no boote!
> Wo worth that beaute that is routheles!
> Wo worth that wight that tret ech undir foote! (II.344–47)

In addition to the obvious comparison being made between a *routheles* beauty and objects in nature behaving unnaturally, in rhyming *routheles* with *vertulees,* Chaucer again emphasizes the connection between power and pity. While Pandarus strengthens his case against Criseyde's anticipated lack of *routhe,* he also laces his harangue with passing remarks designed to soothe her fear: his demands on Troilus's behalf are for nothing more than "frendly cheere," "bettre chiere," and "love of frendes"

(II.332, 360, 379). After this rather delicate play between Criseyde's pity and her fear, Pandarus launches a cruder attack with a two stanza *carpe diem* speech, and this ignites his niece's ire. Responding angrily to what she terms the "paynted proces" of her uncle (II.424), she concentrates immediately upon the subject which provides her most natural line of defense, not pity but fear.

Criseyde's response splendidly suits the emotional pitch to which Pandarus has brought their conversation. As he has used tears to persuade her of his sincerity, so does Criseyde begin "to breste a-wepe anoon" (II.408). She cries "allas" five times in three stanzas, mentions her own death twice, turns her disillusionment with Pandarus's breach of faith into despair at "this false world" (II.420), and calls upon Pallas Athena to protect her. But Criseyde's comparatively amateur theatricals fail to daunt her uncle; rather they provoke him. In his three stanzas he cries "allas" only once, but makes five references to death—Troilus's and his own—and he calls upon Mars, the Furies, and finally Neptune as he rises to storm away, suggesting that his niece will never see him alive again. Although Pandarus's suicide threat—"Fro this forth shal I nevere eten bred" (II.443)—strikes the reader as comically feeble, Criseyde's fear overwhelms her skepticism at this point, and the narrator steps in to identify this source of her gradual movement away from outright rejection of love:

> Criseyde, which that wel neigh starf for feere,
> So as she was the ferfulleste wight
> That myghte be. (II.449–51)

Fear alone does not move Criseyde to accept the attentions of Troilus, however. As she considers her uncle's frightening words and observes the "sorwful ernest of the knyght" (II.452), Criseyde begins to feel compassion: "She gan to rewe" (II.455). Her fear moves her to exactly the *pitee* which Pandarus has held out to Troilus as a basis for hope.

Finding a mode through which to reconcile her conflicting emotions, fear and pity, becomes Criseyde's theme as Chaucer allows the reader a sharper focus on the processes at work in her mind. She recognizes first how delicately she must labor to achieve a balance: "It nedeth me ful sleighly for to pleie" (II.462). As Joseph P. Salemi suggests, in this phrase Criseyde "expresses not just a momentary precaution, but also a general cast of mind and perception."[6] As she speaks to Pandarus now, her language reflects her sense of conflict. She asserts that she will achieve two seemingly opposite aims: "I shal so doon, myn honour shal I kepe, / And ek his lif" (II.468–69). This will require, however, a choice between "harmes two" (II.470), which will in turn lead to inner turmoil: "I shal

myn herte ayeins my lust constreyne" (II.476). She submits a rather formal "protestacioun" to Pandarus, that should he "depper go" into the affair—if he should upset her balance—he may expect no more of her "routhe" (II.484–9). Pandarus grants her request, on his "trowthe" (II.490), demonstrating one of Chaucer's more pointed variations on the *routhe / trouthe* rhyme with which he so often ends his stanzas in the poem. Criseyde's intentions are honest when she places a condition on her *routhe;* Pandarus's intentions are anything but honest as he glibly offers his empty *trowthe.*

When Pandarus leaves Criseyde alone with her thoughts, she displays considerable self-knowledge as she works to find a way around the fear which grips her. She understands that to examine the questions before her properly she must address this issue first. Her sense of peril diminishes as she tells herself the obvious: a man may love a woman, "and she naught love ayein, but if hire leste" (II.609). Chaucer chooses exactly this moment of calm to interrupt Criseyde's thoughts with the appearance of Troilus. As the victorious warrior rides past her window he exemplifies in every detail the praise which Pandarus has heaped upon him: "So fressh, so yong, so weldy semed he, / It was an heven upon hym for to see" (II.636–37). The crowd cheers and Troilus blushes, and the mingling of images—bloodied, Mars-like warrior and blushing youth—intoxicates Criseyde: "Who yaf me drynke?" she asks (II.651). Donald R. Howard describes this as "the moment of consciousness during which the balance is tipped."[7] Her conversion from fear to compassion is sudden, bringing with it so heady a sense of power that Criseyde, too, blushes at her own realization:

> Lo, this is he
> Which that myn uncle swerith he moot be deed,
> But I on hym have mercy and pitee. (II.653–55)

In a stanza which Criseyde will repeat, almost verbatim, aloud to Troilus immediately before being sent from Troy, the narrator describes her reviewing in her mind Troilus's attractive qualities, his martial prowess, estate, renown, wit, shape, and *gentilesse;* but in the last lines of the stanza, the narrator identifies that quality which most moves Criseyde. It is not one of his obvious strengths which most appeals to her, but his weakness:

> But moost hire favour was, for his distresse
> Was al for hire, and thoughte it was a routhe
> To sleen swich oon, if that he mente trouthe. (II.663–65)

Pity has completely overtaken fear at this moment, and Chaucer emphasizes the movement in Criseyde with this new variation on the recurring end-rhyme. In this instance the *trouthe* belongs to Troilus, while the *routhe* belongs at once to Criseyde and to the poet, for Troilus will remain true in his love for her, and yet he will be slain—albeit indirectly—through her eventual abandonment of *routhe.*

Chaucer follows Boccaccio in providing Criseyde with a soliloquy through which her inner struggle rises to the surface of the poem, yet the two heroines argue very differently. As B. A. Windeatt notes, Boccaccio's Criseida opens on a tone of pure hedonism,[8] proclaiming her youth, her beauty, her sense that she deserves the pleasures of love; she asks aggressively: "Perché esser non deggio innamorata? (Why should I not be in love?)" (II.69.4). Chaucer's Criseyde begins not with thoughts of herself, but of Troilus, and she moves very slowly to the point where she asks her own version of Boccaccio's heroine's question: "Shal I nat love, in cas if that me leste?" (II.758). In addition to the difference in position of the questions, Chaucer also adds the note of qualification; Criseyde's "in cas if that me leste" leaves open the possibility that she may not wish to love Troilus, making completely credible the turn her thoughts take, whereas Boccaccio's Criseida includes no comparable statement of qualification in her deliberations. As the influence of her first stirring glimpse of Troilus wanes, Criseyde moves back into a state of anxiety: "A cloudy thought gan thorugh hire soule pace" (II.768). Her thoughts clear again, yet she remains in a state of vacillation, "betwixen tweye" (II.811).

Chaucer follows Criseyde's soliloquy with a public scene not found in his source. She returns to her garden, where her niece indirectly responds to each of Criseyde's private fears. Antigone sings a love song, beginning and ending with the notion that love precludes fear, allowing a life of "seurte out of drede" (II.833); "ther is no peril inne" (II.875). Touched by the song, Criseyde grows "somwhat able to converte" (II.903). Evidence of her conversion follows immediately, as she retires to her room and dreams of an act of supreme violence, as a bone-white eagle

> Under hire brest his longe clawes sette,
> And out hire herte he rente, and that anon,
> And dide his herte into hire brest to gon. (II.927–29)

She has transformed an image from Antigone's song, of lovers exchanging hearts, into this primitive vision, yet she has so fully internalized the spirit of the song—"ther is no peril inne"—that of the dream exchange "she nought agroos, ne nothyng smerte" (II.930). David Aers writes that

"the dream highlights the violence and perils of loving. . . . Chaucer shows us that although the dreamer feels no pain she perceives herself as *passive* in the face of an aggressive, dominating, and savage male."[9] Aers is right to stress the violence, but for Criseyde the dream marks equally her growing capacity to elude pain, to numb herself to that which ought to be both frightening and agonizing. This capacity, another aspect of her "slydynge of corage," will allow Criseyde to dismiss her fear when she yields to Troilus; but it will also allow her to survive the separation from Troilus and to betray him.

Although capable of dreaming of an exchange of hearts, in her waking life Criseyde continues to hold back. She remains only "somwhat able to converte," completely unlike the voluptuary Criseida of *Il Filostrato,* who reads Troiolo's letter and says to herself: "Or foss'io nelle braccia / dolci di lui stretta e faccia a faccia! (Would that I were now in his sweet arms, pressed face to face with him!)" (II.117.7–8). Criseyde's steady resistance urges Pandarus to more active and imaginative scheming, and each step in his shaping of her fate draws more directly upon her *routhe.* He arranges a second appearance of Troilus under Criseyde's window, the effect of which exactly suits Pandarus's intention, for her pity for Troilus intensifies: "Nevere, sith that she was born, / Ne hadde she swych routh of his destresse" (II.1269–70). Chaucer follows the mention of Criseyde's *routh* at once with another variation of the *routhe / trouthe* end-rhyme. Pandarus, taking a formal and severe tone with his niece asks, "A womman that were of his deth to wite, / Withouten his gilt, but for hire lakked routhe, / Were it wel doon?", and Criseyde finishes the couplet emphatically: "Quod she, 'Nay, by my trouthe!' " (II.1279–81). By reversing the speakers of the rhyme words here, Chaucer emphasizes Criseyde's conversion. In the first use of this rhyme, Criseyde's limiting of her *routhe* had prompted Pandarus's hollow *trouthe.* Now Pandarus refers to insufficient *routhe,* and the *trouthe* that Criseyde so forcefully asserts will, in the end, prove as empty as her uncle's.

The pretence which Pandarus uses to lure Criseyde to the house of Deiphebus exploits her fear, but the scene which he arranges for her first encounter with Troilus arouses her pity. She arrives at his home "al innocent" of Pandarus's intent (II.1562), yet she quickly grasps one aspect of the situation of which her fellow guests, aside from her uncle, are completely ignorant. While they discuss Troilus, praise his virtues, and suggest remedies for his mysterious illness, the narrator coyly reports of Criseyde: "But ther sat oon, al list hire nought to teche, / That thoughte, 'Best koud I yet ben his leche' " (II.1581–82). This heightened awareness

gives Criseyde a considerable sense of power, "For who is that ne wolde hire glorifie, / To mowen swich a knyght don lyve or dye?" (II.1593–94). Although she has come to the house of Deiphebus out of fear, throughout the scene she gives an impression of dignity and growing confidence. As Book II closes, Pandarus urgently whispers monosyllabic instructions to her, the narrator asks an anxious question about how Troilus will behave, but Criseyde maintains an air of regal calm.

The opening of Book III parallels the opening of the poem, as Criseyde stands again before a son of Priam to ask his protection against her persecutors in Troy. Yet Chaucer has prepared the reader carefully for the enormous contrast between the two scenes. The pitiable woman who had knelt as supplicant before Hector now bends gently over Troilus as he attempts to kneel to her; as she lays her hands softly upon him, she exhibits in her gesture the mercy which it is now in her power to grant. Troilus, flustered by her presence and her gesture, forgets the speech he has rehearsed, and Criseyde, completely in control at this point, is fully aware of her effect upon him: "Criseyde al this aspied wel ynough, / For she was wis" (III.85–86). When he begins to recover, Troilus strikes exactly the right tone when he twice begs her mercy, and claims that his life depends upon her. Criseyde, so at ease in her position of power and so removed from her usual fear, urges Troilus to continue his suit, and agrees to accept the service he offers. She adds a condition, however, again placing a limit on the extent of her *routhe.* At her most assured, Criseyde speaks in the language and tones of the Wife of Bath[10] when she warns Troilus:

> A kynges sone although ye be, ywys,
> Ye shal namore han sovereignete
> Of me in love, than right in that cas is. (III.170–72)

The narrator explains Criseyde's absence of fear as a result of the perfect love which develops from this episode; Troilus comes to know her thoughts, becomes for her "a wal / Of stiel" so that "she was namore afered" (III.479–82). Yet in this scene at his sickbed, Troilus seems anything but a wall of steel as he blushes, pleads, and allows himself to be kissed by Criseyde. Her strength arises instead from within. Her capacity to grant mercy, to act in accordance with her *routhe,* fills her with a sense of power which temporarily banishes her fear.

To bring the lovers from this first kiss to their scene of consummation Pandarus, always mindful of his niece's way of thinking, must invent a threat to this perfect love. Through his fabricated rumor of her infidelity

to Troilus, Pandarus returns Criseyde to a state of fear by upsetting her new-found balance. Although she easily dismisses the immediate difficulty when she assures her uncle that she will sort the matter out with Troilus the next day, the idea that Troilus thinks her unfaithful moves her to provide for the first time a philosophical basis for her fear. She expresses the core of her four stanza lament in one line: "O brotel wele of mannes joie unstable!" (III.820). Though a common Boethian theme in many of Chaucer's works, it is significant that he places it here, at the center of Book III and in the voice of Criseyde. In its lingering over details, in its slow building to the climax, and even in its last lines, where Troilus remains, as if for eternity, with Criseyde, all of Book III represents a resistance to this theme of the fragility of worldly happiness. In having Criseyde bring into Book III the idea that "joie is transitorie" (III.827), Chaucer hints that she senses in herself the possibility to cause the swing from joy to misery. Although her intention throughout Books III and IV is to remain true to Troilus, she recognizes how easily she might shatter their fragile "fals felicitee" (III.814). With this suggestion of her own instability, Criseyde surrenders responsibility to Pandarus: " 'Than, em,' quod she, 'doth herof as yow list' " (III.939).

Thus Criseyde allows Pandarus to admit Troilus to her bedroom; when Troilus conveniently swoons, she allows Pandarus to put him into bed beside her; and when Pandarus orders her to take an active part in the resuscitation efforts, she obeys. Yet as she again finds herself called upon to behave mercifully toward her weakened lover, she grows bolder. In answer to his sighs, she takes a gently mocking tone: "Is this a mannes game? / What, Troilus, wol ye do thus for shame?" (III.1126–27). As Troilus takes her in his arms, the poet recalls Criseyde's dream, as he returns to the image of her timid passivity: "What myghte or may the sely larke seye, / Whan that the sperhauk hath it in his foot?" (III.1191–92). Troilus sustains the imagery when he triumphantly claims that he has caught her, yet, as she was able in her dream to dismiss both pain and fear, Criseyde denies the vision of herself as victim: "Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere, / Ben yolde, ywis, I were now nought heere!" (III.1210–11). In insisting that she has chosen to yield to Troilus, Criseyde powerfully asserts her sense of control.

The circumstances of Book IV provide Criseyde with a new and harsher reason to pity Troilus. Although the narrator opens the book with the warning of her *unkynde* behavior toward Troilus, until she actually leaves Troy she behaves both with kindness and in accordance with her nature.

Yet the opening episode of the book is an act of unkindness, connecting the fate of Troilus with the fate of Troy, as the Trojans agree to the proposed exchange of Crisyede for Antenor. In what John V. Fleming describes as "Hector's finest moment,"[11] Criseyde's former protector speaks out, compassionately, against the proposal: "Syres, she nys no prisonere. . . . / We usen here no wommen for to selle" (IV.179, 182). Unmoved by the moral rightness of Hector's objection, the people bring ruin upon themselves in trading Criseyde for the future betrayer of Troy. Disastrous consequences result from this first failure of compassion; the destruction of Troilus similarly will follow from Criseyde's gradual dismissal of *routhe.*

Chaucer stays close to his source in presenting Criseyde's reaction to the news of the exchange and, like Boccaccio, he stresses first the connected issues of her isolation and her fear. Both heroines receive the rumor in silence, not daring even to question it for fear that it is true. Both are immediately surrounded by the gossiping women of Troy, who, in their ignorance of the hidden love affair, only heighten the sense that the heroines are alone. Chaucer tells of Criseyde:

> Although the body sat among hem there,
> Hire advertence is alwey elleswhere,
> For Troilus ful faste hire soule soughte. (IV.697–99)

Like Boccaccio's heroine, she retires to her chamber, but in her lamentations she returns repeatedly to a theme which Boccaccio's Criseida barely touches. Chaucer's heroine associates her own pain with that of Troilus:

> Wo worth, allas, that ilke dayes light
> On which I saugh hym first with eyen tweyne,
> That causeth me, and ich hym, al this peyne! (IV.747–49)

Even when she cries out against her own fate—"What is Criseyde worth, from Troilus?" (IV.766)—she frames her personal anguish with her worries about her lover:

> O deere herte eke, that I love so,
> Who shal that sorwe slen that ye ben inne?
> . . . . . .
> But how shul ye don in this sorwful cas?
> How shal youre tendre herte this sustene? (IV.759–60, 794–95)

So complete is Criseyde's compassion for Troilus that her concern for him exactly matches in language and in spirit the expression that he himself has given to his suffering:

> O my Criseyde, O lady sovereigne
> Of thilke woful soule that thus crieth,
> Who shal now yeven comfort to my peyne? (IV.316–18)

While Boccaccio's heroine aggressively calls upon Troiolo to act in some way to relieve her pain, such a thought never occurs to Chaucer's Criseyde. Rather than expecting Troilus to act, she becomes self-effacing as she gropes for a way to stop his suffering: "But, herte myn, foryete this sorwe and tene, / And me also" (IV.796–97).

With the arrival of Pandarus, Criseyde gives vent to her despair by returning to her theme of false felicity. Chaucer then takes a stanza from *Il Filostrato,* but transfers it from the voice of Pandaro to that of Criseyde, thereby allowing her to imply, through a catalogue of suffering, that language is insufficient to express the depth of her pain:

> Whoso me seeth, he seeth sorwe al atonys—
> Peyne, torment, pleynte, wo, distresse!
> Out of my woful body harm ther noon is,
> As angwissh, langour, cruel bitternesse,
> Anoy, smert, drede, fury, and ek siknesse. (IV.841–45)

This sorrow which is inexpressible would become unendurable; Criseyde will find a way to elude it, and Pandarus unwittingly provides the key. With his first loyalty always toward Troilus, Pandarus works again to exploit Criseyde's *routhe.* He offers her no comfort, but instead describes how near Troilus is to death as a result of the news. Criseyde responds with an echo of the first line of the poem: "Iwis, his sorwe doubleth al my peyne" (IV.903). The double sorrow of Criseyde, her own pain and the pain that arises from her pity for Troilus, proves too strong for her *slydynge* courage. As Pandarus leaves, he urges Criseyde to devise a plan to assuage Troilus's grief, insisting that "Women ben wise in short avysement" (IV.936). He plants a seed here which is absent in *Il Filostrato,* and when Criseyde drifts into her fantasy of escape, she acts under this influence from Pandarus.

Although, like Boccaccio's heroine, Criseyde assures Pandarus that she will attempt to hide the physical ravages of her suffering from Troilus, she drops almost immediately into a deathlike swoon in his presence. When

she regains consciousness and finds that he was preparing to kill himself, she makes him a brave promise: "But with this selve swerd, which that here is, / Myselve I wolde han slawe" (IV.1240–41). Yet the claim rings false, for Chaucer has already added a detail to his heroine's private reaction to the news of the exchange which her current bit of bravado contradicts. Both Boccaccio's and Chaucer's heroines have determined that they will, when separated from their lovers, starve themselves to death, but only Chaucer's Criseyde has added the parenthetical qualification: "syn neither swerd ne darte / Dar I noon handle, for the crueltee" (IV.771–72). David notes of this contradiction, "Criseyde is no Juliet, and we cannot believe her when she tells Troilus that if he had killed himself, she, too, would have slain herself with his sword."[12] Forced to confront the extent of Troilus's suffering, she imagines that she could plunge his sword into her breast; from this first impulsive departure from what she knows of herself, Criseyde enters in earnest into the realm of fantasy.

Chaucer recalls the influence of Pandarus on Criseyde's plan when he has her preface her scheme with an echo of her uncle's words: "I am a womman, as ful wel ye woot, / And as I am avysed sodeynly . . ." (IV.1261–62). More than doubling the length of the parallel episode in *Il Filostrato,* Chaucer provides Criseyde with a speech in which she moves from the general to the particular, from discussion of emotion to plan of action, from a tone of passive acceptance to one of active defiance. That it is pure fantasy is absolutely clear, for her scenarios of escape are tied to her denial of the fate of Troy. She shapes her scheme with an attention to detail and intention to manipulate worthy of Pandarus. Marjorie Curry Woods comments on this similarity between Criseyde and her uncle: "She is constructing a pleasant fabrication. . . . Her worldliness and self-assurance here . . . are as dismissive of Troilus's fears and suffering as were Pandarus's reactions to the fears of both Troilus and Criseyde earlier in the poem."[13] Chaucer's narrator steps in at the conclusion of Criseyde's speech to defend the truth of her "good entente" (IV.1416), but in stressing her good intentions, he implicitly admits her eventual failure. E. Talbot Donaldson refers to this interjection when he writes of the "discrepancy between Criseyde's words and her future action . . . [The narrator] is coming to terms—though reluctantly—with the inevitability of her infidelity."[14] Yet while Criseyde will fail to fulfill the promises of her speech, she does succeed in her immediate intent; she has found a way to calm Troilus. She has brought him from the brink of suicide to a sense of slender hope: "But fynaly, he gan his herte wreste / To trusten hire, and took it for the beste" (IV.1427–28). In the presence of Troilus, Criseyde's

compassion is such that not only does she believe herself capable of feats of courage, but she convinces Troilus of her capacity as well.

Once he is in a calmer frame of mind, however, Troilus's conviction gives way to doubt. He proves himself not at all averse to employing the methods of Pandarus as he, too, operates on Criseyde's *routhe:*

> Certes, if ye be unkynde,
> And but ye come at day set into Troye,
> Ne shal I nevere have hele, honour, ne joye. (IV.1440–42)

His more realistic view of the situation between the Greeks and the Trojans leads him to dismiss Criseyde's plan as "but a fantasie" (IV.1470), yet he counters her scheme with his own equally impracticable proposal when he urges her to flee Troy with him. Whereas Boccaccio's heroine dismisses Troiolo's accusation in half a stanza (IV.146), Chaucer's heroine devotes three stanzas to her vows. The language of her protestations, however, undermines the ferocity of her denial, for in each stanza she poses a case: "For thilke day that I . . . / Be fals to yow" (IV.1534, 1537); "If I be fals" (IV.1547); "That thilke day that ich untrewe be" (IV.1551). In having her deny the possibility that she could betray Troilus, Chaucer allows the possibility to ring through the stanzas: false, false, untrue.

As she works to persuade him, Criseyde's compassion for Troilus grows so strong that she speaks in his voice as she closes her argument. She threatens him, as he has threatened her, that should he betray her she will die, and she finishes with the word which the narrator so carefully selected to describe *her* at the beginning of Book IV: "For Goddes love, so beth me naught unkynde!" (IV.1652). Troilus responds tersely to her appeal, denying, in four lines, that he has ever been, or will ever be, false to Criseyde. Boccaccio's Troiolo follows this with a three stanza review of his reasons for loving Criseida, but Chaucer instead gives this theme to his heroine.

Throughout this back-and-forth between the lovers the *routhe / trouthe* end-rhymes have been echoing, and Criseyde's last speech is framed about the familiar pair. Repeating the stanza which the narrator had given in Book II as evidence of her conversion, Criseyde lists the qualities in Troilus which she claims were not her primary motives for loving him—estate, nobility, martial prowess, wealth—and she reveals to him the deeper source of her love: "But moral vertu, grounded upon trouthe— / That was the cause I first hadde on yow routhe!" (IV.1672–73). Speaking these lines at the end of Book IV, Criseyde gives voice to what has been at the core of each of the lovers' characters, Troilus's *trouthe* and her own *routhe.*

In the circumstances of Book V, however, while Troilus will remain true, Criseyde's pity for him will give way to the forces, from within and from without, which will move her toward betrayal.

As the narrator's heart bled at the beginning of Book IV, so does Criseyde's as she is led away from Troy by Diomede. Pity does not die immediately in her; it takes a considerable effort on the part of Diomede to turn her affection away from Troilus. Chaucer's Criseyde would not have been seduced by Boccaccio's Diomede, and as Windeatt notes, Chaucer reaches beyond his major source and draws more directly upon Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* to present a Diomede whose manipulations exactly coincide with aspects of Criseyde's character.[15] Chaucer's Diomede knows the language of courtly love and uses it all too glibly as he sets himself up as a suitable replacement for Criseyde's Trojan lover: he claims to be as true and as "kynde" as any Trojan; he promises to be Criseyde's friend, to act as her brother, to serve her faithfully; and he asks for her mercy. Absent in Diomede is the obligatory sense of unworthiness characteristic of the true courtly lover, but Criseyde is not in a position in the Greek camp to dismiss lightly an offer of protection. Far more isolated than she was in Troy, she is now "with wommen fewe, among the Grekis stronge" (V.688). Diomede works to win Criseyde almost exclusively by heightening her sense of isolation and her fear. His second effort at seduction takes on an incantatory tone as he refers again and again to the imminent fall of Troy.

Chaucer provides a further clue to the eventual success of Diomede when he presents, at greater length than does Boccaccio, the thoughts of the Greek warrior as he debates with himself whether or not to woo Criseyde. He views the winning of her love as a challenge and as he dismisses the possibility of failure, he speaks in the commonplace language of proverbs: "He that naught n'asaieth naught n'acheveth" (V.784), and "Happe how happe may" (V.796). Even these casual remarks form part of the case which Chaucer is building for a Diomede whose methods are consonant with qualities in Criseyde. She, too, has resorted to proverbs, and at moments of crisis has exactly anticipated Diomede's words. Torn between pity and fear in Book II, she ended her early soliloquy, "He which that nothing undertaketh, / Nothyng n'acheveth" (II.807–8). Torn again in Book V between her lingering compassion for Troilus and her fear for her own safety, she closes a later soliloquy: "Bityde what bityde" (V.750). Both of these proverbs imply an acceptance of circumstances, a dismissal of personal responsibility in the face of Fortune, and Criseyde uses them as comforting buffers between herself and her fear. In suggesting this lin-

guistic link between Diomede and Criseyde, Chaucer displays the likeness in their patterns of thought.

As the reality of her current situation becomes clearer to Criseyde, she comes to accept Diomede's part in her new circumstances. There is nothing romantic, or compassionate, about her drift into his embrace, as is evident in a stanza which contrasts starkly with her last words to Troilus in Book IV:

> Retornyng in hire soule ay up and down
> The wordes of this sodeyn Diomede,
> His grete estat, and perel of the town,
> And that she was allone and hadde nede
> Of frendes help; and thus bygan to brede
> The cause whi, the sothe for to telle,
> That she took fully purpos for to dwelle. (V.1023–29)

Criseyde's defection to Diomede is slower and more tortuous than that of Boccaccio's heroine. She thinks often, and compassionately, of Troilus, and even resolves to ignore her fears and escape by night from the Greek camp, but she proves, as always, "slydynge of corage." She berates herself for her infidelity, but finally turns away from lingering *routhe* when she forms a new resolution: "And that to late is now for me to rewe, / To Diomede algate I wol be trewe" (V.1070–71). This is a jarring revision of the familiar end-rhyme. Chaucer has Criseyde use a verb rather than noun here to emphasize the active movement away from *routhe* and toward her new *trouthe.* The process of her sliding from Troilus to Diomede is evident in the absence of the present tense: the couplet marks the moment of her shift from past *routhe* to future *trouthe.*

The narrator steps in at this point to make a last attempt to soften the reader's potential condemnation of Criseyde:

> 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,
> Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe. (V.1093–99)

Concerning this stanza, Robert P. apRoberts writes that "So great was her sorrow and her punishment that Chaucer himself would excuse her for pity," but he makes a dangerous assumption in attaching the sentiment

to Chaucer rather than to Chaucer's narrator.[16] The narrator's end-rhyme belies his intention here, for in this single instance of rhyming not *trouthe* but *untrouthe* with *routhe,* Chaucer accentuates not the excusable nature of Criseyde's betrayal, but the betrayal itself.

The difficulty of resisting the strong temptation to ally oneself with the narrator in the pardoning of Criseyde in part explains the emphasis that critics since Lewis have placed upon her fear. Her betrayal of Troilus so shocks the reader in its cruelty that one looks to her fear as a justification for her act. But Chaucer's vision of Criseyde is larger than his narrator's; Chaucer admits that she is "slydynge of corage," and portrays her in such a way that her instability remains present throughout the poem. He grants the reader a complex portrait of Criseyde, in which her *routhe* matches her fear as a potential source of action. Under the pressure of the circumstances of Book V, Criseyde allows her compassion for Troilus to give way to her fear for her own safety. Thus her behavior in turning from Troilus is in every sense *unkynde,* for her cruelty toward him represents also a betrayal of her own nature.

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NOTES

1. All quotations from Chaucer refer to *Troilus and Criseyde,* ed. Stephen A. Barney in *The Riverside Chaucer,* general ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1987).

2. C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (1936; repr. Oxford, 1985), 185.

3. Edward J. Milowicki, "Characterization in *Troilus and Criseyde:* Some Relationships Centered on Hope," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature,* 11 (1984): 15.

4. Alfred David, "Chaucerian Comedy and Criseyde," *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde,* ed. Mary Salu (Cambridge, 1979), 96.

5. All quotations from *Il Filostrato* refer to the parallel text edition of Chaucer's and Boccaccio's poems in *Troilus and Criseyde,* ed. B. A. Windeatt (London, 1984). The translations are my own.

6. Joseph P. Salemi, "Playful Fortune and Chaucer's Criseyde," *Chaucer Review,* 15 (1981): 215.

7. Donald R. Howard, "Experience, Language, and Consciousness: *Troilus and Criseyde,* II, 596–931," *Medieval Literature and Folklore Studies: Essays in Honor of Francis Lee Utley,* ed. Jerome Mandel and Bruce A. Rosenberg (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1970), 174.

8. Windeatt, 187n.

9. David Aers, "Criseyde: Woman in Medieval Society," *Chaucer Review,* 13 (1978): 186.

10. See, for example, in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale,* lines 312–14, 813–22, 1037–41, and 1236–38.

11. John V. Fleming, "Deiphebus Betrayed: Virgilian Decorum, Chaucerian Feminism," *Chaucer Review,* 21 (1986): 190.

12. David, 100.

13. Marjorie Curry Woods, "Chaucer the Rhetorician: Criseyde and her Family," *Chaucer Review,* 20 (1985): 32.

14. E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (New York, 1970), 73.

15. Windeatt, 451n.

16. Robert P. apRoberts, "Criseyde's Infidelity and the Moral of the *Troilus,*" *Speculum,* 44 (1969): 394.