

1973

Chaucer's Criseyde : the pressures of the courtly love code

Betty Ann Jaffee

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/masters-theses>

Recommended Citation

Jaffee, Betty Ann, "Chaucer's Criseyde : the pressures of the courtly love code" (1973). *Master's Theses*. Paper 358.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

CHAUCER'S CRISEYDE:
THE PRESSURES OF THE COURTLY LOVE CODE

BY
BETTY ANN JAFFEE

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
IN CANDIDACY
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

MAY 1973

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
VIRGINIA

APPROVED BY THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
AND FOR THE GRADUATE SCHOOL BY

F. Elaine Pennington
DIRECTOR

F. Elaine Pennington
CHAIRMAN OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

James E. Duckworth
READER

Edward C. Peple
DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

PREFACE

When Chaucer wrote the poem Troilus and Criseyde, he created a heroine who stands out from other romantic medieval heroines such as Guinevere and Ysolt. He created a heroine of such complexities that critics have debated her motives endlessly and have explored the psychology of her emotions with every literary tool at their command. He created a heroine whose sin was so damning that it inspired Robert Henryson to provide for her what he considered a fitting punishment; and it inspired Shakespeare to try to salvage the wreck left by Henryson to create his masterful play.

It is doubtful whether anyone at any time will ever write the final word on Criseyde although she has been analyzed by expert critics for hundreds of years. Acting on the presumption that this final word on Criseyde is still unspoken, I shall attempt to work out a resolution of one of the central problems of Troilus: should Criseyde be condemned for breaking faith with Troilus? I shall attempt to establish that those critics biased in favor of the courtly love concept are justified in considering Criseyde a courtly love heroine. I shall attempt to show that the concept of a courtly love code can play a vital part, not only in explaining her motivations but in providing the frame of reference for the society in which she moves. I shall show how critics can be justified in seeing Criseyde not as a

stereotype but as a uniquely characterized individual; however, I shall also attempt to show that to judge Criseyde fairly requires that she be regarded as a social creature whose actions and responses are largely determined by society. She has very human weaknesses, in which respect she far transcends mere stereotype; yet these weaknesses are subjected to strains imposed by the courtly code itself.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I	Page 1
Chapter II	Page 26
Chapter III	Page 42
Chapter IV	Page 55
Bibliography	Page 63

CHAPTER I

I want to focus on the question: should Criseyde be condemned for breaking faith with Troilus? One approach to Criseyde has been to take her as a courtly love heroine and to condemn or vindicate her behavior in light of the laws of the courtly code. But there is a great deal of controversy as to what is meant by the term courtly love.

The term amour courtois, introduced by Gaston Paris in 1883, has been used (or misused, according to one's bias) by critics of medieval literature to describe not just physical attraction between two people but "an art, in the medieval sense of a mental and moral discipline . . . a code, implying both a system of rules for conduct and a quasi-judicial method of settling contested points."¹ Clearly, no medieval poet claimed that his work was in the "courtly love tradition" because the term was not invented in medieval times. No matter how confidently courtly love is explained by scholars, it is important to keep in mind the fact that this often-debated term is "the name of a scholar's hypothesis, not of a medieval institution."²

Fairly recently, a few highly skeptical critics (especially D. W. Robertson and E. Talbot Donaldson) have

¹ F. X. Newman, ed., "Introduction," The Meaning of Courtly Love (Albany: State Univ. of N. Y. Press, 1968), pp. vi-vii.

² Ibid., p. x.

sought utterly to discredit the use of the term courtly love (which also goes by the name "fine amour, 'refined love'),³ claiming that such works as De Amore of Capellanus, Chrétien's Lancelot, and Lorrís' Roman are misunderstood, their satire, irony, and humor going unrecognized.⁴ Anyone who sees courtly love in medieval works, according to Robertson, just does not understand the medieval mind. Furthermore, it is his conviction that one must not regard the art form itself but must reconstruct the history of the time in order really to know what Chaucer had in mind. Obviously, Professor Robertson has no doubts that he knows exactly what Chaucer meant to do (regardless of the fact that hundreds of other scholars suspect entirely different intentions). According to Robertson, Troilus and Criseyde is not a poem written to celebrate a tragic but beautiful love but is rather a moral lesson, warning the English people that just as Troy fell, so might they if, like Paris, they embrace pleasure and sensuality over philosophical wisdom.⁵ Robertson's extreme viewpoints serve as an interesting

³ A. C. Gibbs, ed., "Introduction," Middle English Romances (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1966), p. 12.

⁴ D. W. Robertson, Jr., "The Subject of the De Amore of Andreas Capellanus," Modern Philology, 50 (1952-53), 156, 161, claims that "to suppose that Andreas, who was a court chaplain, could seriously recommend that anyone place the sexual act above everything else requires a remarkable stretch of the historical imagination."

⁵ D. W. Robertson, Jr., "The Concept of Courtly Love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts," Newman, ed., The Meaning of Courtly Love, pp. 3-12.

illustration of the fact that each person interprets literature according to his personal bias.

Robertson suggests that the concepts of courtly love are invalid because historical records show that medieval people were practical minded rather than romantically inclined; and that, therefore, it is not logical that so sentimental and "inconvenient" a notion could have existed during that time.⁶ Now, with all due respect to Professor Robertson, is it not true that the imagination of man--and of poet--is not limited to the everyday practicality of life and that literature may have a separate life from reality? Whether or not courtly love existed in reality seems utterly beside the point. Is it not possible that the poets created some highly artificial convention, which they may not have named at all, but which they formed--like Topsy--with an idea borrowed here and inspired there, until it became fairly well codified?

Professor Donaldson's arguments against the term courtly love stem from the many inconsistencies to be found in any attempt at defining it and the fact that "no two scholars ever seem to mean the same thing by it."⁷ He points out, with logic that is hard to refute, that " . . . a definition of courtly love based on all the literature of the Middle Ages is too broad to be useful, while one derived from only

⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

⁷ E. Talbot Donaldson, "The Myth of Courtly Love," Ventures, 5 (1965), 17.

selected primary documents fits well only those documents from which it has been derived."⁸ The only principle which Donaldson feels is all inclusive is the one dealing with the sublimation of love.⁹

Despite the logic of most of Donaldson's conclusions, there are many critics who feel that there is sufficient value in the concept to continue its use, as a few samplings of recent (1968) critical evaluations of the meaning of the term courtly love will show.

Charles S. Singleton states:

. . . curiously enough, there have been those who have found a special problem in the matter of courtly love and its meaning, as if we somehow cannot allow that good Christians, Christians who know that there is only one God of Love, could play with a convention of venus that had, as a central figure, either a god of love in no way identifiable with the God of Love of the Christian faith, or else, at the center, had a woman, midons, enthroned and worshipped in his stead (or had, more commonly, both figures).¹⁰

W. T. H. Jackson states, " . . . courtly love is a social matter. Whatever our view of the existence of a courtly code, of a type of love called courtly, there is no denying that the French romances and many of their German imitators see love as a part of a system of social behavior. It bestows dignity and honor on a man, it gives respect to a woman."¹¹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁰ Charles S. Singleton, "Dante: Within Courtly Love and Beyond," Newman, ed., The Meaning of Courtly Love, p. 47.

¹¹ W.T.H. Jackson, "Faith Unfaithful--The German Reaction to Courtly Love," Newman, ed., The Meaning of Courtly Love, p. 72.

Theodore Silverstein, who feels that courtly love is a "very complex phenomenon," believes that each scholar finds important those particular points which are brought out by the source which he is using.¹²

How then should one properly regard the term courtly love and the various conventions associated with it? There is simply no pat answer available, and any attempt to pin it down requires circular thinking that only leads back to itself for "proof." If one accepts the general concepts usually associated with the term, one can find or "prove" that these exist in certain medieval poems. If one has a different bias, one can find what passes for evidence to "prove" a contrary point. For instance, *Troilus and Criseyde* contains sensual love. To one scholar, using sensual love as a criterion for courtly love, this is evidence that Troilus is a courtly love poem; but to another scholar sensual love is merely human nature at work and not courtly love at all.

It seems clear that if one were operating from a bias favorable to the concepts associated with courtly love, one would find in much of Chaucer's poetry (for instance, The Knight's Tale, The Merchant's Tale, The Book of the Duchess, The Parliament of Fowls, Troilus and Criseyde) elements of courtly love which are treated sometimes seriously and sometimes satirically, even though Chaucer would have never used

¹² Theodore Silverstein, "Guenevere, or the Uses of Courtly Love," Newman, ed., The Meaning of Courtly Love, p. 89.

any such term as courtly love in connection with his work. It may all come down to a problem in semantics. There are literary documents showing that lovers act according to certain formulas, whether named or not. In these documents it appears that certain patterns of behavior were expected by society. It is not relevant to discuss whether these same patterns were carried out by living men and women. The society that Troilus, Hector, Helen, Pandarus, and Criseyde knew is real enough for our purposes.

I believe that Criseyde may best be understood in light of her need to obey the arbitrary rules of that society in which she lived, a society that expected her to follow certain patterns of behavior.

Therefore, whether or not the term courtly love is historically applicable, let us temporarily suspend disbelief in order to explore these patterns, which we shall call the courtly love code for the sake of convenience. In order to determine whether or not Criseyde is subjected to the pressures of the courtly love code, it is necessary to state just what the female protagonist in a courtly love poem would be like and to analyze the poem in light of the following questions: (1) where and in what ways did Chaucer choose to stick closely to the courtly love tradition? (2) do the numerous changes that Chaucer made in his source, Boccaccio's Il Filostrato, enhance the appearance of Criseyde as a typical courtly love heroine?

The ideal courtly love heroine is invariably a golden-haired beauty with "laughing eyes, red lips, fair skin, even teeth, slender figure," who is as gracious and courteous as she is beautiful.¹³ Let us see how Criseyde's description compares. Chaucer first describes her when he likens her beauty to an angel beyond compare:

So aungelik was hir natif beaute,
That lik a thing inmortal semed she,
As doth a hevenyssh perfit creature,
That down were sent in scornynge of nature.(I.102-5)¹⁴

The poet depicts the beautiful widow standing

In widewes habit blak; but natheles,
Right as oure firste lettre is now an A,
In beaute first so stood she, makeles.
Hire goodly lokyng gladed al the prees.
Nas nevere yet seyn thyng to ben preysed derre,
Nor under cloude blak so bright a sterre . . . (I.170-5)

Chaucer continues his description by discussing her figure and her femininity:

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

This lovely lady has "ownded heer, that sonnyssh was of hewe" (IV.736), and near the end of the entire poem in the last detailed description, the poet adds an unexpected item--eyebrows which meet.

¹³ William A. Neilson, The Origins and Sources of the Court of Love (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), p. 228.

¹⁴ All references to Troilus refer to F. N. Robinson, ed., The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1933).

Criseyde mene was of hire stature,
 Thereto of shap, of face, and ek of cheere,
 Ther myghte ben no fairer creature.
 And ofte tyme this was hire manere,
 To gon ytressed with hire heres clere
 Doun by hire coler at hire bak byhynde,
 Which with a thred of gold she wolde bynde.

And, save hire browes joyneden yfere,
 Ther nas no lak, in aught I kan espien.
 But for to speken of hire eyen cleere,
 Lo, trewely, they writen that hire syen,
 That Paradis stood formed in hire yën
 And with hire riche beaute evere more
 Strof love in hire ay, which of hem was more. (V.806-19)¹⁵

In her physical description Criseyde measures up quite well to the traditional heroine. What else is required beyond mere beauty? Beauty has to move in the proper setting. It seems so natural even today to think of love in terms of springtime and gardens, flowers blooming, birds singing, nature at her most exciting season, that one may be tempted to take such details for granted. While it is not necessary to dwell on them, there may be value in briefly examining the role of such details in setting the mood of the medieval love poem.

¹⁵ Thomas A. Kirby states that this description comes not from Filostrato but from Frigii Daretis Ylias of Joseph of Exeter. Chaucer's Troilus: A Study of Courtly Love (Univ., La., 1940; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959), p. 226.

Since eyebrows joined together seems a rather unexpected characteristic to be mentioned in the description of otherwise perfect beauty, this item is the subject of discussion by Nathaniel E. Griffin, "Chaucer's Portrait of Criseyde," JEGP, 20 (1921), 39-46, in which he states that this information came from Benoit and Guido. He believes Chaucer wished to be historically accurate in describing Criseyde.

Allegorical works such as Guillaume de Lorris' Roman de la Rose and Chaucer's The Book of the Duchess, to name just two, abound with instances of glorious halcyon gardens where May beauty never fades, and nightingales serenade lovers whose heavenly beauty, stalwart courage, and gentility are beyond compare.¹⁶ In this idyllic setting the God of Love wounds the lover through the eyes when he looks at his lady's beauty for the first time.¹⁷ Once so smitten, the hapless fellow can only be saved by one glorious physician, the lady of his heart, who forever more has power of life and death over him.¹⁸

One notes how at the very beginning of Troilus, Chaucer sets the romantic mood associated with courtly love. Of course, the season is spring.

And so bifel, whan comen was the tyme
Of Aperil, whan clothed is the mede
With newe grene, of lusty Veer the pryme,
And swote smellen floures white and rede,
In sondry wises shewed, as I rede,
The folk of Troie hire observaunces olde,
Palladiones feste for to holde. (I.155-61)

¹⁶ C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936; rpt. Galaxy Books, 1958), pp. 167-168, asserts that Chaucer's poems are never true allegories as de Lorris' work is. He says that Chaucer uses parts of the Roman in The Book of the Duchess in which "the bereaved lover has passed through all the same phases as the dreamer in the Roman."

¹⁷ William G. Dodd, Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower (Boston: Ginn, 1913), p. 14, cites Cliges of Chrétien de Troies where it is explained that "as the sunlight penetrates glass without breaking it, so the light of beauty pierces the eye without harming it, and reaches the heart."

¹⁸ Ibid.

Chaucer uses a rather typical romantic garden scene at what could be considered the most critical point in Criseyde's life--the moment when she decides to give love a chance to blossom in her widowed life. She has just seen Troilus for the first time and has been rationally weighing the advantages against the disadvantages of permitting Troilus to be her courtly lover. Love, however, is more emotional than rational, as Chaucer clearly shows. Still in a mental whirl, Criseyde goes into the garden where she joins her nieces and listens to the charming Antigone sing praises of courtly love. It is in this section of Troilus that "the poem comes closest to pure romance."¹⁹ It has been suggested that Chaucer selected the verses for Antigone's song to answer each objection that Criseyde had voiced while debating whether or not to love again.²⁰

The emotional effect of this setting is revealed when the poet writes:

But every word which that she of hire herde,
 She gan to prenten in hire herte faste,
 And ay gan love hire lasse for t'agaste
 That it dide erst, and synken in hire herte,
 That she wex somewhat able to converte. (II.889-903)

The garden scene and song of love are reinforced almost immediately by another familiar symbol of romance--the singing

¹⁹ Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1957), p. 158.

²⁰ Sister Mary C. Borthwick, "Antigone's Song as 'Mirour' in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," MLQ, 22 (1961), 232.

bird--in this case, a nightingale, which

Under the chambre wal ther as she ley,
 Ful loude song ayein the moone shene,
 Peraunter, in his briddes wise, a lay
 Of love, that made hire herte fressh and gay.
 That herkned she so longe in good entente,
 Til at the laste the dede slep hire hente.

(II. 919-24)²¹

When Criseyde is at last lulled to sleep by the nightingale's song of love, she experiences an allegorical dream in which a snowy white eagle tears out her heart from her breast and leaves another in its place. The heart transplant in the dream may go back to the notion that the courtly lover's heart remains with his beloved;²² the white eagle brings to mind the noble eagles in the Parliament of Fowls; and the dream itself is highly suggestive of other courtly love poems which revolve around dreamers and their dreams, as, for instance, The Book of the Duchess.

It appears, then, that Criseyde looks the part of a typical courtly heroine, and, what is more, she moves in an appropriately romantic setting. There are many other ways in

²¹ Sister Borthwick, p. 234, calls the song of the nightingale "an obvious reflection of Antigone's song" and believes that it is intended to reinforce the effectiveness of the earlier scene.

For an unusual discussion of birds and myths in connection with Criseyde, see Marvin Mudrick, "Chaucer's Nightingales," The Hudson Review, 10 (1957), 88-95.

Neilson, pp. 210-227, discusses the role of birds of all kinds, especially nightingales, in courtly love poetry. The singing of birds concluded the service in the Court of Love, and in the Roman de la Rose the God of Love is described as being surrounded by nightingales over his head.

²² Dodd, p. 14.

which Chaucer shows that the poem is true to the code. For one thing, the traditional courtly method of falling in love (through the eyes to the heart) is assigned to young Troilus, the fierce warrior who scorns love until he looks upon Criseyde one April morning.²³

And of hire look in him ther gan to quyken
So gret desir and such affeccoun,
That in his hertes botme gan to stiken
Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun. (I.295-8)

Troilus is generally considered by critics to be a perfect example of the courtly lover. Even though Boccaccio's Troilo, on whom Chaucer based his hero, was also conceived within the courtly doctrine, Chaucer made certain changes which further enhanced the image, such as emphasizing Troilus' religious attendance at church and changing the hero's public and private emotional reactions.²⁴ The code is followed so diligently that one critic has been led to comment, "It would almost seem that Chaucer were rearranging the text of Boccaccio with the code of courteous love open before him."²⁵

²³ Kirby, pp. 215-216, notes another instance of this concept of love entering through the eyes to the heart in the passage where Criseyde (having heard that she will be sent to the Greeks in exchange for Antenor) weeps and wails and wishes she had never looked at Troilus "with the two eyes that cause her such pain." This passage has no counterpart in the Filostrato.

²⁴ Karl Young, "Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde as Romance," PMLA, 53 (1938), 47-48.

Kirby, p. 208, points out that even minor modifications are significant because these changes add up to a total impression.

²⁵ Young, p. 51.

One might ask how this enriching of the courtly love content of Filostrato affects our consideration of Criseyde as a courtly love heroine. Since one would expect to find consistency in so masterful a poet as Chaucer, it seems reasonable that if he intended Criseyde to be a true courtly love heroine, he would make whatever modifications and/or additions necessary to unify the total effect of his poem. As the evidence already cited would seem to indicate, this is just what he did. Moreover, the changes in the heroine herself are the most pervasive of all.²⁶ The coquettish young girl in the Roman de Troie was transformed in Il Filostrato into what Boccaccio probably regarded as the ideal mistress-- a mature, highly voluptuous widow, who will be referred to as Griseida to distinguish the two distinctly different widows.²⁷

One of the main ways in which he accomplished this change was to raise Criseyde's social level to conform more closely to the courtly code, which applies to high-born ladies who are in a social position that commands respect and insures sovereignty, since the position of lady to lover is comparable to that of lord over vassal. Critics note that Criseyde is never shown to be of an inferior social standing, as is Griseida. This improvement in status is shown by such

²⁶ See Sanford B. Meech, Design in Chaucer's Troilus (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1959), p. 395, where he calls Criseyde a "new woman."

²⁷ Young, pp. 42, 44.

passages as the one in which Pandarus comes to Criseyde's home to find her in a "paved parlour," where to pass the time of day her maidens are reading aloud a classical poem (II.82-4). The impression of the lady living in a high-born and gracious manner is enhanced by references to her garden, which is described as large and well shaded, with railed walkways (II. 820). Most of all, one is convinced of Criseyde's social superiority by the way she moves at ease among royalty at the dinner party at Deiphebus' home where the lovely Helen shows great personal concern that Hector and Troilus should intervene on behalf of the young widow.

Young points out that since the father is a priest in both versions, Griseida should be as high socially as Criseyde, but clearly Chaucer wishes to make it appear otherwise when he deliberately omits references to the heroine's low rank. An example of such a reference may be found in Filostrato, IV, 69, 7-8, where Troilo tells Pandaro that if Griseida had been of higher birth he would not hesitate to tell his father of his love and ask him to keep Griseida from being sent to replace Antenor.²⁸

Many critics have noted the remarkable increase in the sovereignty which upper-class Criseyde claims over Troilus as compared to her less noble counterpart in Filostrato.²⁹ That Criseyde apparently has no doubts as to her worthiness

²⁸ Young, p. 52.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 53; Meech, pp. 397-401; Kirby, p. 205.

and desirability as the object of a prince's affection is illustrated by this passage:

"Ne me to love, a wonder is it nought;
For wel woot I myself, so God me spede,
Al wolde I that noon wiste of this thought,
I am oon the faireste, out of drede,
And goodlieste, whoso taketh hede,
And so men seyn, in al the town of Troie.
What wonder is though he of me have joye?"(II.743-9)

She respects his rank and recognizes the power of his position:

"Ek wel woot I my kynges sone is he;
And sith he hath to se me swich delit,
If I wolde outreliche his sighte flee,
Peraunter he myghte have me in dispit,
Thorugh whicch I myghte stonde in worse plit.
Now were I wis, me hate to purchase,
Withouten nede, ther I may stonde in grace?"(II.708-14)

Yet in true courtly lady fashion, Criseyde lets the love-sick prince know that he stands in the position of vassal to lord (or lady) when she tells him in the bedchamber of Deiphebus' home (where Pandarus had arranged their first meeting):

"But natheles, this warne I yow," quod she,
"A kynges sone although ye be, ywys,
Ye shal namore han sovereignete
Of me in love, than right in that cas is;
N'y nyl forbere, if that ye don amys,
To wratthe yow; and whil that ye me serve,
Chericen yow right after ye disserve."(III.169-75)³⁰

It seems that Chaucer has in mind the conventional notion that only the courtly lady can cure the lover who is dying of love sickness when after hearing Helen and the others

³⁰ Young, p. 54, points out that there is no corresponding declaration of sovereignty made by Griseida, who, in fact, on the night when the love affair is consummated, actually makes "an apology for an indignity to his royal person," (Filostrato II. 76, 1-4).

propose remedies to cure Troilus of his mysterious malady, Criseyde thinks, "Best koud I yet ben his leche" (II.1581-2).

The striking differences in the behavior and motivation of Criseyde and Griseida are clearly summarized by Karl Young:

. . . the overwhelming contrast between Boccaccio's voluptuous woman of real life and Chaucer's elusive young creature of romance is disclosed in the two accounts of the consummation of the amour. Here the English poet expended himself to make his longest narrative addition to his original, and his most substantial transformation in the personality of his heroine. In Boccaccio's poem, after the periods of the "balcony" and the "letters" have run their formal course, Griseida herself takes aggressive charge of the arrangements for the physical culmination. She proceeds with zest and promptitude, and on a dark and cloudy night summons Troilo to a remote room in her own house. Dispatching the servants to bed, she descends to the room where Troilo waits, and with an apology to him for the indignity of his reception, plunges into his embraces. Without delay she conducts him to her bedchamber, and, with a sensual relish and detail to which one can only refer, the lovers achieve their desire: "D'amor sentiron l'ultimo valore."
(Filostrato, II. 140-143; III. 21-151.)³¹

Young believes that "To associate Criseyde with the realities of Griseida's bed-chamber would be sacrilege" because the experiences of the Italian heroine represent reality whereas Criseyde and her lover are "lifted into the region where live personages such as Flore and Blancheflor, Renaud and Dame de Fayel, and Alexander and Soredamors, who delight in love altogether, but never exhibit voluptuousness."³²

³¹ Young, p. 45.

³² Ibid., p. 46.

Another instance of Chaucer's enhancing the dignity of his heroine may be noted by Criseyde's gracious reception of Diomedes in her father's home in the Greek camp where she seats her visitor (V. 848-54) instead of Diomedes seating himself as he does in Filostrato (VI. 11/7-8).³³

One critic contrasts the two heroines in the following way:

Almost every alteration and addition has as its result the portrayal of a woman less approachable, more reluctant, more modest, and more timorous; needing more persuasion from Pandarus before she is willing to accept even the most humble service; yielding finally only when every circumstance points the way, and then yielding for 'pitee' rather than desire³⁴

These alterations and additions all serve to enhance the appearance of Criseyde as a traditional courtly love heroine, but before the consideration of the ways in which Chaucer sticks closely to the courtly tradition can be considered complete, it is necessary to refer again to some of the particulars involved in the code.

Although the nature of this love, which Andreas calls "the fountain and origin of all good things,"³⁵ is highly sublimated, elevated, artificial, and sophisticated, it

³³ Meech, p. 113.

³⁴ Dorothy Everett, "Troilus and Criseyde," Essays on Middle English Literature, ed., Patricia Kean (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 124.

³⁵ Lewis, p. 34.

definitely has sexual consummation as its goal.³⁶ There does not appear to be any question but that Troilus hopes to fulfill his sexual desires and that Pandarus plots to that end. Some critics feel sure that Criseyde also expected to consummate their love eventually; however, according to the code, this sexual relation was "an ideal relation, with all the sanctity which modern feeling casts about an ideal marriage."³⁷

However, the question of marriage never arises in Troilus, and critics have expressed varying opinions as to the significance of this fact. According to one view, the unmarried status of the lovers is not to be regarded as celebrating illicit love because the love affair is treated as an honorable one, implying that we should accept the love as being moral. Chaucer probably would have let them marry if he could have, but his matiere would not permit this; therefore, the less said, the better, except that Chaucer does say that customs differ from time to time and place to place.³⁸ Another view explains that marriage was not considered for three

³⁶ Alexander J. Denomy, The Heresy of Courtly Love (New York: D. X. McMullen, 1947), pp.25-6, distinguishes between pure love, which is frustrated desire, false love, which is beast-like, and mixed love, which starts out as pure love but ends in physical union. He claims that mixed love could be true love because "true love . . . is desire and, as desire, it is productive of every good."

³⁷ R. K. Root, The Poetry of Chaucer, 2nd ed. (1922; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1957), pp. 104-5.

³⁸ D. S. Brewer, "Love and Marriage in Chaucer's Poetry," MLR, 49 (1954), 461-4.

reasons: (1) Troilus could not marry Criseyde because she was the daughter of a traitor and he was a prince; (2) the source poem Filostrato did not include marriage; and (3) marriage does not fit in a courtly love story.³⁹ A third view agrees that while the love may not be legal, it is "as highly moral as its author, and in the best sense."⁴⁰

The contradictory courtly love code usually does exclude marriage, although Slaughter names three romances by Chrétien de Troyes where "love leads to marriage and exists in marriage" and points out other instances which challenge the idea that love and marriage are unrelated in medieval romance.⁴¹ On the other hand, Lewis states that in medieval times marriage was for practical considerations, not for love,⁴² and, in discussing the question of marriage as Andreas presents it in De Arte Honeste Amandi, he states that a wife, who has a duty to love her husband, can not fulfill the role of the midons "whose grace is the goal of all striving and whose displeasure is the restraining influence upon all uncourtly vices."⁴³ Now this is not to say that affection between husband and wife is ruled out, but this affection is in no way comparable to virtue-inspiring courtly love.⁴⁴

³⁹ Dodd, pp. 150-2.

⁴⁰ Donaldson, "The Myth of Courtly Love," p. 22.

⁴¹ Eugene E. Slaughter, Virtue According to Love--In Chaucer (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957), pp. 190 ff.

⁴² Lewis, p. 13.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

While marriage is generally excluded from the code, adultery, on the other hand, is generally included, although this point is hotly debated among critics. Lewis includes adultery in his famous summary of the main points of courtly love--"Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love."⁴⁵ He explains the presence of adultery by stating, "Any idealization of sexual love in a society where marriage is purely utilitarian, must begin by being an idealization of adultery."⁴⁶ This position has been termed an oversimplification by Gibbs,⁴⁷ ridiculed by Robertson,⁴⁸ and thoroughly refuted by Donaldson.⁴⁹ The fact that Criseyde, like Griseida, is widowed rather than married rules out the inclusion of adultery in Troilus anyway; but, as Donaldson points out, adultery actually plays a rather small part in courtly love literature until Malory; and even the allegorical heroine of Guillaume de Lorris' Roman does not appear to have a husband.⁵⁰

Lewis has a great deal to say about the Religion of Love, the fourth point in his courtly love summary. He explains that this so-called religion developed out of the rejection of certain edicts of the Christian Church, such as the

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁷ Gibbs, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Robertson, "The Concept of Courtly Love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts," p. 1.

⁴⁹ Donaldson, "The Myth of Courtly Love," pp. 18, 22.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

argument that passionate love even for a wife is evil. This rejection led the poets into taking an opposite stand (love cannot exist in marriage) that made it impossible to reconcile Christian beliefs with courtly love. It was to fill the needs of the poets that a quasi-religion of love emerged which often parodied Christianity. To Lewis the Religion of Love was "a temporary escape, a truancy from the ardours of a religion that was believed into the delights of a religion that was merely imagined."⁵¹

It is difficult to determine whether or not this hypothesis concerning the development of a Religion of Love is correct, but it is not difficult to see that this so-called religion borrows heavily from Christian ritual. According to Neilson, "Venus, in fact, was put in the place of the Virgin; or rather, the modes of adoration of the Virgin were transferred to the shrine of Venus."⁵² Similarities are frequently noted between worship of the Virgin and homage to the courtly lady. Marion N. Green states:

This aspect of the code undoubtedly partook of certain elements of the worship of the Virgin Mary Parallelism existed between the religion of Christ and the religion of Cupid in the use of such expressions as conversion, penance, service, prayer, fasting,

⁵¹ Lewis, pp. 17-21. D. W. Robertson, Jr., "Chaucerian Tragedy," ELH, 19 (1952), 24, disagrees entirely with the idea that love had its own religion.

⁵² Neilson, p. 220.

martyrdom, sanctity, faith, works, and hope
in the lover; grace, piety, mercy and
stableness in the lady."⁵³

Lewis points out that Lancelot kneels before Guinevere and even makes genuflexion before her as to a shrine.⁵⁴

Chaucer greatly enhances the religiosity of his poem as compared to Boccaccio's work, which does not suggest a religion of love filled with Christian implications as does Chaucer's poem. The following sampling will illustrate the abundant religious imagery in Troilus:

(1) Pandarus tells Troilus to repent to the god of love and suggests that "converted" heretics make the strongest believers (I. 995-1008).

(2) Pandarus tells Criseyde that Troilus had said a "mea culpa" to love (II.519-25).

(3) Troilus' speech after the consummation brings to mind Dante's tribute to the Virgin (III. 1261-7).

(4) Criseyde "speaks of her coming life of separation from Troilus as the state of a female religious--an 'ordre,' the 'observance' of which is to be sorrow, complaint, and abstinence" (IV. 782-4).⁵⁵

The religious tone is so striking that it has led one critic to disparage Criseyde's aubade, begging for a longer night (III. 1436-42), on the grounds that Criseyde "recalls and

⁵³ Marion N. Green, "Christian Implications of Knighthood and Courtly Love in Chaucer's Troilus," Delaware Notes, 30 (1957), 66.

⁵⁴ Lewis, p. 29.

⁵⁵ Meech, pp. 262-6.

alters the very scriptural passage which concerns the creation of night and day . . ."⁵⁶

Dodd's rather aged but inclusive description of a typical courtly lady points out that she is cold and elusive to her lover, presumably because she hesitates to endanger her reputation. "Once the lady has satisfied herself that the aspiring lover would be true to her, her greatest fear is that their liaison would become known, and that she might be subjected to the aspersions of tale-bearers."⁵⁷ The idea of cruel beauty may be traced to Chrétien's Lancelot, in which Guinevere rewards Lancelot's humiliation of riding in a cart usually used to transport thieves by refusing to speak to him because he had hesitated momentarily before entering the cart.⁵⁸ While Criseyde in no way corresponds to a "cruel beauty," this image is evoked by Pandarus in his effort to persuade Criseyde to consider Troilus' suit:

"If it be so that ye so cruel be
That of his deth yow liste nought to recche,
That is so trewe and worthi, as ye se,
Namooore than of a japer or a wrecche,--
If ye be swich, youre beaute may nat strecche
To make amendes of so cruel a dede.
Avysement is good byfore the nede." (II.337-43)

Although neither cold nor cruel, there is present in Criseyde the elusiveness of the courtly love heroine which may correspond

⁵⁶ Saralyn R. Daly, "Criseyde's Blasphemous Aube," N & Q, 108 (1963), 443.

⁵⁷ Dodd, pp. 7, 12, 15.

⁵⁸ Francis L. Utley, The Crooked Rib (Columbus: The Ohio State Univ., 1944), p. 32.

to the concept of "Danger," one of the many opposing forces operating in de Lorris' Romance of the Rose, which, according to Lewis, greatly influenced Chaucer in the writing of Troilus.⁵⁹ "Danger," which Lewis calls "the rebuff direct, the lady's 'snub' launched from the height of her ladyhood, her pride suddenly wrapped about her as a garment, and perhaps her anger and contempt,"⁶⁰ is very nearly aroused when Criseyde warns Pandarus:

"But that I nyl nat holden hym in honde;
Ne love a man ne kan I naught, ne may,
Ayeins my wyl; but elles wol I fonde,
Myn honour sauf, plese hym fro day to day.
Therto nolde I nat ones han seyde nay,
But that I drede, as in my fantasye;
But cesse cause, ay cesseth maladie.

"And here I make a protestacioun,
That in this proces if ye depper go,
That certeynly, for no salvacioun
Of yow, though that ye sterven bothe two,
Though al the world on o day be my fo,
Ne shal I nevere of hym han other route."(II.477-89)

She knows that she is not obliged to love Troilus just because he is dying of love for her:

For man may love, of possibilite,
A womman so, his herte may tobrete,
And she naught love ayein, but if hire leste.(II.607-9)

And the poet assures us that she did not love him too easily or without good cause:

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

⁵⁹ Lewis, pp. 179-182.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 124.

Made love withinne hire herte for to myne,
 For which, by proces and by good servyse,
 He gat hire love, and in no sodeyn wyse. (II.673-9)

Properly concerned for her reputation, Criseyde is impressed by Troilus' reputation for discretion:

"And eke I knowe, of longe tyme agon,
 His thewes goode, and that he is nat nyce.
 N'avantour, seith men, certein, he is noon . . ."
 (II.722-4)

She has relied upon his loyalty and found that he could be trusted:

For whi she fond hym so discret in al,
 So secret, and of swich obēisaunce,
 That wel she felte he was to hire a wal
 Of stiel, and sheld from every displesaunce . . .
 (III. 476-80)

The evidence seems to indicate that Chaucer's heroine exhibits most of the characteristics which one might expect in the female protagonist of a courtly love poem and that the poem itself carries out this motif to a very substantial degree. The point which I have tried to establish in this chapter is that Chaucer has put Criseyde into a situation where her self-image and her public image are determined by the behavior pattern we are calling courtly love. Next we shall see how the social pressures which accompany this system of values affect her choices of action in the course of the poem.

CHAPTER II

Critics, seeking to understand what character trait or traits cause Criseyde's final, awful betrayal of Troilus, have described her in various ways. Robertson, perhaps her severest critic, considers her a self-seeker. He says she will remain "true to herself; she will always seek to escape from the fear of misfortune, no matter what effects her actions may have on others."¹ At the other extreme, Everett sees that the explanation may be found in the timid nature of those who have the qualities of the courtly love lady.² Lewis finds that timidity or fearfulness is the dominant characteristic which determines the entire course of her actions.³ Bayley disagrees with Lewis forcefully, stating that Criseyde's problem is not fear but indecisiveness and an absence of passion.⁴ Root includes Criseyde's indecisiveness as well as "her irresolute tendency to drift with circumstance" as probable traits which "have brought her to the depths of ignominy."⁵ Lanham feels that " . . . pliability is her real character," indicated by the fact that she adjusts

¹ Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," p. 22.

² Everett, p. 137.

³ Lewis, p. 185.

⁴ John Bayley, The Character of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality (London: Constable, 1960), pp. 107, 114.

⁵ Root, p. 114.

almost too easily from one lover to another.⁶ Meech, who feels her need for security is a dominant characteristic, calls her "too soft for defiance";⁷ and Tatlock appears in agreement when he says, "The only trait which in the least prepares us for her undoing is her softness."⁸ Fred Manning Smith makes an interesting comparison when he states, "Criseyde might have cared no more for Diomedes than the Prioress did for mice, but when he was hurt and bled, her heart went out to him. Criseyde's difficulty was that her heart was so tender it could go out to two men at the same time." She had taken pity on Troilus because he was about to die of love; she took pity on Diomedes because he was wounded; but both instances are motivated by the same quality: tenderheartedness.⁹ Kittredge finds her "fatally impressionable and yielding. Her strength of will is no match for her inconstant heart."¹⁰ The practical-minded nature of Criseyde, which has been noted time and again, is especially emphasized by Dodd, who feels her betrayal was caused by "circumstances."¹¹

⁶ Richard A. Lanham, "Game, Play, and High Seriousness in Chaucer's Poetry," English Studies, 48 (1967), 22.

⁷ Meech, pp. 112, 401.

⁸ John S. P. Tatlock, "The People in Chaucer's Troilus," PMLA, 56 (1941), 98.

⁹ Fred Manning Smith, "Chaucer's Prioress and Criseyde," West Va. Univ. Phil. Papers, 6 (1949), 8-10.

¹⁰ George L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1915), p. 135.

¹¹ Dodd, pp. 166, 177.

Kirby cites the absence of a confidante as one reason for Criseyde's betrayal, but he believes that, in the main, "Criseyde does exactly what any other person of her type would do in similar circumstances." Although he makes a big point of the fact that he considers her to be an opportunist, he also recognizes the complexity of her character, as do many other critics.¹² One of Criseyde's problems is seen as an enormous capacity for self-deception, which is pointed out by Gordon¹³ and by Lewis, who says Criseyde shows a lack of understanding of herself in thinking she can manage to return in ten days alone.¹⁴ Donaldson finds in Criseyde "a broad range of the undefined but recognizable potentialities inherent in human nature." He names such qualities as passivity, opportunism, fearfulness, indecisiveness, practicality, unpredictability, and instability.¹⁵ As Sharrock sees it, Criseyde's betrayal is not the result of a specific character weakness but is due to the universal problem of human weakness.¹⁶

I find myself in closest agreement with Constance Saintonge and Christopher Gillie, at least in the areas where

¹² Kirby, pp. 225, 235.

¹³ Ida L. Gordon, The Double Sorrow of Troilus (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 107.

¹⁴ Lewis, p. 187.

¹⁵ E. T. Donaldson, ed., "Commentary on Troilus and Criseyde," Chaucer's Poetry, an Anthology for the Modern Reader (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1958), pp. 969-72.

¹⁶ Roger Sharrock, "Second Thoughts: C. S. Lewis on Chaucer's Troilus," EIC, 8 (1955), 130.

they view Criseyde as a product of her society. To Gillie, "She is all that the civilisation which produced her intended her to be--to the refinement and ennoblement of both herself and her lover. Once cast loose amongst the Greeks, without her love and with even less status, she is merely a victim." I think the term victim is a bit extreme, but I agree that "Criseyde's subtly conditioned nature is the most dangerous of the factors against her."¹⁷ Saintonge sums up the problem of Criseyde's infidelity as follows:

. . . the infidelity, apparently, has blotted out for her critics all that has gone before. It is, it appears, our moral duty to shut our eyes to her allurements, since in the end she is so weak. "Criseyde is charming but she is unfaithful"--the but rushes in too soon. Surely Chaucer intended his readers to take more pleasure in her charm. Pleasure and perhaps something more: another perception of Chaucer's feeling about the difficulties of human life; for if one forswears or at least postpones condemnation, one is struck by the notion that the same qualities which made her desirable brought about her fall from grace.¹⁸

Saintonge sees poise as the most outstanding characteristic of a woman who is constantly aware of the correct forms demanded by society. She sees her as a woman who desires harmony at all costs and shows "the control that life in society has taught."¹⁹ I am fully in agreement with this critic when

¹⁷ Christopher Gillie, "Women by Chaucer: The Wife of Bath, Criseyde," Character in English Literature (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1965), pp. 52, 53.

¹⁸ Constance Saintonge, "In Defense of Criseyde," MLQ, 15 (1954), 313.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 315, 317.

she points out that Criseyde could not have flaunted the mores of her society to ride off with Troilus because "she cannot contemplate the individual at odds with society." Reputation is more than merely desirable when "character becomes identified with it."²⁰

Gratefully acknowledging my indebtedness to Saintonge and Gillie for this insight into the effect of society on Criseyde as an individual, I wish to use this point as a springboard for deeper examination of how these forces work upon Criseyde throughout the poem. I hope to show that Criseyde is not to be condemned for betraying Troilus because, as a product of the society in which she lived, her behavior is understandable (although hardly praiseworthy) under the circumstances.

As I see it, the key to understanding Criseyde's unfortunate behavior lies in understanding that single dominating force which colors all her thoughts and actions: she sees herself as a social entity, and she is obsessed with the need to fulfill her role in society. If her actions and reactions are reviewed with this idea in mind, a great deal of confusion drops away, and her actions seem less inconsistent because there is an internal consistency--her need to maintain the self-image of a courtly lady who is bound by social convention to behave according to prescribed patterns.

One may only guess at what emotional trauma Criseyde must have undergone when her father, Calchas, defected to the

²⁰ Saintonge, p. 318.

Greeks, leaving her "allone/Of any frend to whom she dorste hir mone" (I. 97-100). Undoubtedly she was "Wel neigh out of hir wit for sorwe and fere" (I. 108) when she begged Hector for mercy. It seems very likely that this incident triggered her obsession with circumspect behavior although she probably had always been a perfect lady in every way. Now, however, we are told with emphasis that

. . . in hire hous she abood with swich meyne
 As til hire honour nede was to holde;
 And whil she was dwellynge in that cite,
 Kepte hir estat, and both of younge and olde
 Ful wel biloved, and wel men of hir tolde.(I.127-31)

In these last lines a basic idea is initiated which echoes throughout the poem like the chorus to a song--people talk about people, and it matters to an extraordinary degree what they say. As Saintonge points out, "Character becomes identified with [reputation]," so that what one is can best be expressed by what others say one is.²¹ Herein lies the explanation for the all-essential secrecy of a courtly-love affair. Apparently, when love outside of marriage becomes public knowledge, it completely loses grace and degenerates into mere lust or vulgar comedy. There seems to be a fine line which separates that love which has the power to ennoble from that love which only has the power to degrade; and the name of the fine dividing line is secrecy (assuming that all other factors are appropriate to the code). Otherwise, why would Troilus and Pandarus go to such extremes to protect

²¹ Saintonge, p. 318.

Criseyde's name, and why would Criseyde be so obsessed with her reputation? When Pandarus first learns that it is Criseyde whom Troilus loves, he immediately says:

"And forthi se that thow in special,
 Requere naught that is ayeys hyre name;
 For vertu streccheth naught hymself to shame."(I.901-3)

However, since he then proceeds to do all he can to bring about their assignation, one is left to assume that virtue does not mean chastity--but only a reputation which is chaste. The various comments made by Pandarus reminding Troilus of his former contempt for lovers further underlines the depth of vulgarity which love made public may reach. One may, in fact, measure the magnitude of Troilus' sincerity by the number of stanzas required for Pandarus to persuade him to reveal the name of his beloved.

In the "Prologue to Book Two" Chaucer presents clearly the case for our accepting ideas which may seem strange to us about love between men and women back in the time and place of which he writes. He seems to be asking us to suspend disbelief in what we are calling courtly love and to be willing to accept the premise that

Ek for to wynnyn love in sondry ages,
 In sondry londes, sondry ben usages.

And forthi if it happe in any wyse,
 That here be any love in this place
 That herkneth, as the storie wol devise,
 How Troilus com to his lady grace,
 And thenketh, "so nold I nat love purchace,"
 Or wondreth on his speche or his doynge,
 I noot; but it is me no wonderynge.

For every wight which that to Rome went
 Halt nat o path, or alwey o manere;

Ek in som lond were al the game shent,
 If that they ferde in love as men don here,
 As thus, in opyn doying or in chere,
 In visityng, in forme, or seyde hire sawes;
 Forthi men seyn, ecch contree hath his lawes.(II.27-42)

Troilus is well aware that the "lawes" about his love for Criseyde require that he keep his feelings for her secret. He feels he must "borwe/Of other siknesse, lest men of hym wende/That the hote fir of Love hym brende" (I.488-90). And this is before he has even told anyone whom he loves.

The exchanges between Criseyde and her Uncle Pandarus further emphasize the social forces acting on Criseyde. Almost as soon as Pandarus enters his niece's home, he enjoins her to

"Do wey youre barbe, and shewe youre face bare;
 Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce,
 And lat us don to May som observaunce." (II.110-12)

Criseyde's intense emotional reaction--

"I? God forbede!" quod she, "be ye mad?
 Is that a widewes lif, so God yow save?
 By God, ye maken me ryght soore adrad!
 Ye ben so wylde, it semeth as ye rave.
 It sate me wel bet ay in a cave
 To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves;
 Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves."(II.113-19)

results from the fact that his suggestion is to abandon a suitable pattern of behavior which she feels is expected of her for one which does not fit her situation as a serious-minded widow. What will people say? Not that Pandarus expects her to throw off her present habits immediately, but he carefully plants the seed so that she will begin to consider a new life role.

Her uncle teases her; he knows a secret. She is on fire with curiosity: "For nevere sith the tyme that she was born,/ To knowe thyng desired she so faste" (II. 143-5), but as Saintonge points out, Criseyde shows a self control "that life in society has taught."²² She will not push him too hard; it would be improper (II. 146-7).

When the conversation turns to the valiant deeds of Hector and Troilus, the great importance of being spoken of in glowing terms is again seen. The heroes are void of vices; their mightiness is widely known; and men tell great deeds of Troilus (II. 170-200).

There is social significance too in the ruse that Criseyde uses to keep Pandarus a bit longer and to gain a moment's privacy from ever-present attendants. She asks his advice. The fact that women apparently were not expected to function independently of men fits well with subsequent events: her need to get the help of Hector, Deiphebus, and Troilus (at the instigation of Pandarus), and her inability to function independently after leaving Troy.

It is significant that before telling Criseyde his secret, Pandarus again makes a bid for her to "cast youre widewes habit to mischaunce" (II. 222). He recognizes the importance of the role each person plays, and he knows that before she will consent to the role he has in mind, she first must shed the old role.

²² Saintonge, p. 317.

Pandarus, in calling upon every conceivable persuasion to further Troilus' cause, repeatedly hammers on the theme of public opinion. To prove his sincerity, he suggests that Criseyde, Troilus, and he should hang where everyone could see their shame rather than that he should act as "his [Troilus] baude" (II. 352-4). According to Pandarus, the worst that could happen would be that people might notice Troilus' coming and going and speculate as to the reason. 'It is interesting that the worst thing Pandarus can imagine is that people might talk. Finally, if she were responsible by her cruelty and indifference for their deaths (Pandarus has threatened to cut his throat), what would people say? The evidence again indicates that character is apparently defined by what people say about a person.

After Pandarus tells her about Troilus' affection, Criseyde has an hysterical outburst so short-lived that one gets the impression that she is reacting according to an expected pattern of behavior (courtly-love behavior) which requires elusiveness. She is role-playing, but this does not necessarily suggest insincerity or shallowness on her part.²³ After all, her self-image is being attacked. Pandarus is asking Criseyde to risk her priceless reputation. Considered in this light, it is not surprising that courtly ladies yield

²³ Lanham, p. 23, points out, "For the medieval, human character was first and foremost typical and social. A character would behave as the situation called for. Identity was to a large extent determined by the game one played. . . . 'Chaucer's characters' work very hard, as we do, at being the types society demands that they be."

unwillingly to love. In doing so, they risk exposure to idle, vulgar talk. What could be worse than to be regarded cheaply?

Of course, role playing, as I am discussing it, is not on the conscious level but consists of constant awareness of appropriate responses to any given situation. It is a part of the "poise" which Saintonge ascribes to Criseyde.²⁴ Thus, it does not seem unnatural for her to react violently to a proposal which would affect her whole way of life. Pandarus knows his niece better than anyone. He expects her to erect defenses; and, what is more, he knows just which plans of attack are most likely to succeed. Most important, he knows better than to take "no" for an answer. He offers her the face-saving alternatives which are the equivalent of choosing between the devil and the deep blue sea. Criseyde views these alternatives with all due seriousness:

"A! Lord! What me is tid a sory chaunce!
For myn estat lith now in jupartie,
And ek myn emes lif is in balaunce;
But natheles, with Goddes governaunce,
I shal so doon, myn honour shal I kepe,
And ek his lif," --and stynte for to wepe.

"Of harmes two, the lesse is for to chese . . ."
(II.464-70)

Yet, in spite of tears and protestations of retaining honor, the idea comes across vividly that the uncle and his niece are acting out a kind of game. Criseyde tearfully demands to know, "Ye seyn, ye nothyng elles me requere?" (II.473). And then she continues to persuade herself that no great harm

²⁴ Saintonge, pp. 317, 320.

has been done because she cannot love a man against her will and Pandarus had better not push her any farther (II.477-89). But, after a while, Pandarus' enthusiasm overcomes his good judgment, and he reveals the naked truth:

"Ther were nevere two so wel ymet,
Whan ye ben his al hool, as he is youre:
Ther myghty God yet graunte us see that
houre!" (II. 586-88).

Can there be any question but that Criseyde fully understands all that is implied? Her response indicates not only that she understands his meaning but that she is disturbed by his implication:

"Nay, therof spak I nought, ha, ha!" quod she,
As helpe me God, ye shenden every deel!" (II.589-90)

She certainly intends to reserve judgment and does not want Pandarus to assume that she intends to be wholly Troilus'. On the other hand, she could not be overly upset because she quickly accepts Pandarus' assurance that he meant no harm.

All this is not to suggest that Criseyde has made up her mind that she will return Troilus' love. She definitely has not committed herself to a love affair, but the possibility of such an affair developing full blown sometime in the future is certainly in her mind.²⁵ Professor Kittredge puts the case

²⁵ Some critics, like Bayley, p. 108, and Lewis, p. 182, believe that we are not intended to expect that Criseyde knew all along what Pandarus intended. Others, like John Hagopian, "Chaucer As Psychologist in Troilus and Criseyde," Literature and Psychology, 5 (1955), 7, 8, find her calculating and shrewd. Root, p. 108, considers her self-control an indication of cool calculation. To Dodd, pp. 156-166, 167, she is practical-minded and cool-headed in the way she approaches a decision, not sentimental, and neither designing nor calculating. As Kittredge, p. 133, puts it,

succinctly:

She is not easily won, but her surrender is conscious and voluntary; for she is neither ignorant nor unsophisticated. The dialect of chivalric love is as familiar to her as it is to Pandarus, and she is never cajoled by her uncle's high-flying phrases. To regard her as an innocent girl, basely tricked by a perfidious go-between, is to misconceive both the situation and the dramatis personae. Pandarus uses plain language more than once, and even his wiles are transparent enough to one who understands the courtly doctrines.²⁶

Indeed, the courtly lady of her society had much to risk, and Criseyde, true to her role, examines these risks with minute attention. It is significant that, as she considers the drawbacks, the worst thing that she can imagine is that "Men myghten demen that he loveth me" (II.730). Or, in other words, people might talk! Then, she decides that if they did say he loved her, their opinion would not necessarily imply that she returned his love or that she encouraged it, or even was aware of it. Her deepest fears are revealed when she says:

"Also thise wikked tonges ben so prest
To speke us harm, ek men ben so untrewes,
That, right anon as cessed is hire lest,
So cesseth love, and forth to love a newe." (II.785-9)

Again, she reveals her pervasive fear of losing her good name:

"The allegation that she encourages Troilus because he is a prince, and with a view to securing his protection,--in a word, from selfish regard to her personal interests--rests upon a strange misunderstanding. When she turns her mind to these considerations of his rank and her own precarious position as the daughter of a traitor, she is merely seeking to justify to her reason the interest she is beginning to feel in her gallant lover,--for she knows full well that it may ripen into love."

²⁶ Kittredge, pp. 131, 132.

"How bisy, if I love, ek most I be
 To plesen hem that jangle of love, and dremen,
 And coye hem, that they seye noon harm of me!
 For though ther be no cause, yet hem semen
 Al be for harm that folk hire frendes quemen;
 And who may stoppen every wikked tonge,
 Or sown of belles whil that thei ben ronge?"(II.799-805)

There is perhaps no sequence of events which more clearly indicates Criseyde's state of vacillation than the one during which Pandarus brings Troilus' first love letter. Could she really be as shocked as she pretends when Pandarus first shows her the letter? If we could read her mind, she may have been thinking, "I really must not take it, but how I wish I could!" Her response is, of course, appropriate to the occasion:

" . . . Scrit ne bille,
 For love of God, that toucheth swich matere,
 Ne brynge me noon; and also, uncle deere,
 To myn estat have more reward, I preye,
 Than to his lust! What sholde I more seye?"(II.1130-4)

Pandarus, however, reads between the lines. He knows that underneath the demeanor of this perfect courtly lady there beats the amorous, curious heart of a none-too-strong-willed woman. Adroitly he thrusts the missive down her dress and dares her to remove it. This face-saving device is far easier than decision-making; Criseyde's response is an enigmatical smile. She assures him that she will not answer it; he knows better than to take "no" for an answer.

Chaucer does not let the reader see into Criseyde's heart as she sits down to write the answer that she had said she would not write, but the atmosphere is charged with excitement as she carefully promises Troilus nothing more than

a "sisterly" relationship. When Pandarus has her letter in his hand, he actually praises her performance as a hard-hearted, elusive courtly lady, but urges her not to overact the part:

" . . . and nece myn, Criseyde,
That ye to hym of hard now ben ywonne
Oughte he be glad, by God and yonder sonne;
For-whi men seith, 'impressiounes lighte
Ful lightly ben ay redy to the flighte.'

"But ye han played the tirant neigh to longe,
And hard was it youre herte for to grave.
Now stynte, that ye no lenger on it honge,
Al wolde ye the forme of daunger save,
But hasteth yow to doon hym joye have;
For trusteth wel, to longe ydoon hardnesse
Causeth despit ful often for destresse."(II.1235-46)

Criseyde is at this point, I believe, toying with the idea of a lover. I do not feel she has admitted to herself the ultimate direction in which she is heading in her relationship to her ardent admirer. It has been pointed out that she has a great capacity for self-deception, and, in this instance, I think she is deceiving herself as to her ability to keep control of the situation.²⁷ Just as a child might venture closer and closer to the edge of a precipice, certain that he can pull back before it is too late, Criseyde drifts closer and closer into the intimacy of a courtly-love affair, thinking all the while that she can pull back before becoming too involved.²⁸ She has said earlier when engaged in her great

²⁷ Lewis, p. 187; Gordon, p. 107.

²⁸ Root, p. 109, believes that Criseyde never makes any definite decision to love Troilus, but shows in its place a "genial drifting with circumstance."

internal debate:

"Ne als I nyl hym nevere so cherice
That he may make avaunt, by juste cause;
He shal me nevere bynde in swich a clause."(II.726-8)

And we are told that

. . . pleyedly hire entente, as seyde she,
Was for to love hym unwist, if she myghte,
And guerdon hym with nothing but with sighte.(II.1293-5)

Pandarus leads and Criseyde follows, with her eyes open, as

Root points out, but clouded over with self-deception.²⁹

²⁹ Root, p. 108.

CHAPTER III

In the first two books of Troilus the groundwork is laid for the initiation of the love affair between the ardent knight and the still-coy young widow, but it is not until the third book that these two, who have been so preoccupied with thoughts of love, see each other face to face. It is noteworthy that the significance of utter secrecy is nowhere made more striking than in the devious arrangements so carefully plotted by Pandarus to arrange this first private meeting. Chaucer gives us no hint that Criseyde was other than "al innocent of Pandarus entente" (II.1723) when he took her to see the ostensibly sick prince who supposedly was in the company of Helen and Hector at the time.¹ The first moment that they are out of earshot of the others, however, Pandarus hastens to set her straight as to the situation she is about to encounter. It is during this brief moment of privacy that Pandarus once again speaks the truth in language so plain no sophisticated, mature young woman could misunderstand his meaning:

"Thynk al swich taried tyde, but lost it nys.
That wol ye bothe seyn, whan ye ben oon." (II.1739-40)

His appeal is the same everytime--people will talk if she is

¹ Kirby, p. 203, interprets the line as referring to what immediately precedes "al innocent . . ." because he believes she would not be in such full command of herself had she been truly surprised at the private meeting with Troilus.

not careful. If she delays, the gossipers will become suspicious. Any precious minutes wasted will be regretted later (II.1741-50).

Criseyde's reaction to her uncle's advice may only be surmised by her subsequent actions. Certainly she has now been forewarned as to what to expect when they enter Troilus' chamber; therefore, one should not expect her to show surprise. To so quick-witted and poised a person, a moment's forewarning is sufficient. I do not think Criseyde knew in advance how she would react upon meeting Troilus in person, but it is during this meeting that Criseyde falls clean over the precipice toward which she had been gradually drifting. Her "pitee" aroused, she melts at the sight of his abject suffering on her account. This is the complete Criseyde, completely in harmony with life, fulfilling the role for which she had been preparing since girlhood. Her tenderness, her affectionate and warm nature conspire to end her vacillating attitude toward love. As Bayley sees it, when Criseyde agrees to accept Troilus' service, she assumes an imperial position fitting to that of the courtly-love heroine. Now she can kiss him without feeling it is out of place or unfitting; she has assumed a new role.²

I agree with Root that the bedside scene at Deiphebus' house is the "decisive moment of the story; for Criseyde, although unable to make a decision, accepts completely a decision

² Bayley, p. 103.

which has been made for her by the logic of events, or by the scheming of her uncle This is complete surrender."³ But what exactly is Criseyde surrendering? What commitment has she made to Troilus? To some critics, like Kirby, Criseyde's kissing Troilus and promising to turn his misery "al into swetenesse" (III.179) is evidence "that the person who seduces Criseyde is Criseyde herself."⁴ In other words receiving Troilus into her service (III.161) seems to suggest a full commitment to eventual sexual satisfaction. Is this what Troilus is after? It seems clear from all evidence that it is. One should not be misled by the high-toned language used by Troilus as he begs her to accept his devotion "Withouten braunche of vice on any wise" (III.132). He is not implying that he expects to love her on a purely chaste level. He hopes that the nobility of his love will merit "comfort,/ Under yowre yerde, egal to myn offence,/As deth, if that I breke youre defence . . ."(III.136-8).

Furthermore, following these declarations of love, which culminate in a kiss to seal the bargain, the atmosphere is charged with exultation on the part of Pandarus, who falls to his knees and thanks Cupid and Venus for this miracle (III. 183-9). It certainly appears that Criseyde "acquiesces by her silence in Pandarus' promise that he will shortly devise a secret meeting of the lovers at his own house, where they shall have full leisure "to speke of love aright'" (III.199).⁵

³ Root, p. 110.

⁴ Kirby, pp. 206-7.

⁵ Root, p. 110.

On the other hand, at least one dissenting critic, apRoberts, disagrees with those who think Criseyde anticipates her final surrender at this point. Even though she knows that Pandarus is planning another meeting after the one at Deiphebus' house, in his opinion, she is not committed to a surrender.⁶ Perhaps the truth lies somewhere between these divergent views.

I think Criseyde is quite capable of fooling herself again. It is inconsistent with her character and her subsequent behavior to expect that she ever admits to herself exactly where this affair is headed. She is obviously worldly enough to know where love leads, but the fact that Pandarus continues to trick her all the way to the moment when the lovers are locked together in love's embrace is proof positive that she would not be led straight to bed. Self-deception is essential for her to rationalize her actions successfully. Pandarus knows her better than anyone--certainly better than she knows herself. We have proof from one end of the story to the other that she does not know herself.

Lanham points out that Criseyde is "pliable." He makes a good case for our examining her as a creature who has "a multiple self," who adapts to each situation according to the way she identifies with that situation.⁷ In Deiphebus' home Criseyde clearly identifies with the role of courtly love

⁶ Robert P. apRoberts, "The Central Episode in Chaucer's Troilus," PMLA, 78 (1962), 376.

⁷ Lanham, p. 22.

heroine. She is thrilled by the sight of the love-sick prince, so admired by everyone, yet so completely in her power. She would say or do nothing to destroy that self-image. When Troilus stammers and literally goes to pieces, she is understanding "For she was wis" (III.86). Dodd is quite right in asserting that this line implies no craftiness or calculating attitude but shows her sensitivity to his feelings.⁸ She is solicitous and tender with her knight; yet her role is clearly in mind when she hastens to warn him:

"A kynges sone although ye be, ywys,
 Ye shal namore han sovereignete
 Of me in love, than right in that cas is"
 (III.170-2)

The question that demands an answer at this point seems to be how, if Criseyde clearly regards herself as a courtly-love heroine and if courtly love is sensual, she can fail to anticipate that their love will be consummated? We must acknowledge that our premises regarding courtly love rest on shaky evidence. There is a great deal at which we guess with no assurance of being correct. The whole question of sensuality in courtly love rests on circular reasoning as do many other aspects of the code. In literary documents we find sensual love accompanied by various signs of a conventional code of love, and from this "evidence" we assume the convention always includes sensual love. But we cannot know anything for certain. Maybe there existed on occasion a pure love of man for woman which was not necessarily sensual. Criseyde's

⁸ Dodd, p. 168.

behavior in Deiphebus' home and Pandarus' continued intrigue to bring about a private meeting unknown to Criseyde suggest the possibility that she really thinks that she can keep Troilus' love for her on a spiritual level; but, of course, we know she has a marvelous talent for self-deception.

At no time, however, have we reason to believe that Pandarus, or Troilus, for that matter, have any illusions as to the sensual nature of their plans. It is true, as ApRoberts points out, that the speech of Pandarus to Troilus following the meeting at Deiphebus' house has many critics convinced that the whole business of the eventual sensual culmination is decided.⁹ It is during this speech that Pandarus admits:

" . . . for shame it is to seye:
For the have I bigonne a gamen pleye,
Which that I nevere do shal eft for other,
Although he were a thousand fold my brother." (III.249-52)

And he reminds Troilus: "Thow woost ek what thi lady graunted the,/And day is set, the chartres up to make" (III.339-40).¹⁰ These lines plainly tell Troilus that he has every reason now to expect fulfillment of his sexual desires, but even though the two men are clear enough in their understanding of future events, we have no right to assume that Criseyde is equally clear in her understanding. If Pandarus thought that Criseyde was anticipating a total sexual involvement, he would not feel

⁹ ApRoberts, p. 376.

¹⁰ ApRoberts, p. 376, says Pandarus is merely anticipating what he thinks will happen; and "day is set" may be another way of saying "your lucky day" rather than referring to the later dinner party.

so obliged to deceive her. He does know that she can be led, and he knows how to manipulate people and circumstances so that clear-cut decisions are not required of his niece.

The one thing that everybody in this poem vividly understands is the necessity of avoiding gossip and the importance of being highly regarded. Chaucer permits us an opportunity to realize this importance by the very brief passage following Criseyde's departure from Deiphebus' house:

And wonder wel speken, in hire absence,
Of hire, in preysing of hire excellence,
Hire governaunce, hire wit; and hire manere
Comendeden, it joie was to here. (III.214-17)

It is this overwhelming concern for what people say that motivates Pandarus' appeal to Troilus for exoneration for his role as "a meene/As maken wommen unto men to comen . . ." (III.254-5). He fears for Criseyde's reputation not only for her sake but for his own because if it were known that she had a lover, his own questionable part of this affair might also become public knowledge, and then what might people say about him? The depth of his anxiety is revealed by the fact that he raves on for fully fifteen stanzas without letting poor Troilus squeeze in a single word. His anxiety must be justifiable, or he could not produce so many instances of gossipers and boasters.

Troilus conducts himself with predictable circumspection in the period between the meeting in Deiphebus' house and the later one after Pandarus' dinner party. Words of praise are heaped on Troilus for his ability to restrain each "unbridled cheere" (III.429) so that nobody "Ne sholde han

wist, by word or by manere,/What that he mente,as touching this matere" (III.431-2). The infrequent times at which the lovers meet during this period are marred by fear "Lest any wight devynen or devyse/ Wolde of hem two, or to it laye an ere . . ." (III.458-9). Yet despite difficulties it is clear that Criseyde's heart is utterly won, and that Troilus has even managed to assuage many of her former fears:

For whi she fond hym so discret in al,
 So secret, and of swich obēisaunce,
 That wel she felte he was to hire a wal
 Of stiel, and sheld from every displeaunce;
 That to ben in his goode governaunce,
 So wis he was, she was namore afered . . . (III.477-82)

Even though Criseyde was "namore afered" that she could not rely completely on the discretion of her devoted knight, we are given no insight into her feelings about a future private meeting which Pandarus had promised to arrange during those furtive moments in the bedchamber at Deiphebus' house. There is a ring of truth to apRobert's comment on the confusion of the critics who try to understand Criseyde's motives when he says that the reader "feels precisely the same inability to determine the workings of her mind that he would feel should he strive to ascertain with precision the workings of a living mind."¹¹

Just as critics debate whether or not Criseyde was truly "al innocent of Pandarus entente," they disagree as to whether or not she suspected that Troilus would be present at her uncle's house. Those who believe that she certainly did expect the private meeting justify their conclusions by Criseyde's

¹¹ ApRoberts, p. 383.

famous response to Troilus' proposal that she yield to him because there is nothing else to do:

"Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere,
Ben yold, ywis, I were now nought heere!"(III.1210-11)¹²

Those who feel that these lines prove nothing about Criseyde's previous state of mind suggest that she is reacting to immediate circumstances.¹³ In other words, Criseyde's saying that she has already yielded is a gracious, charming, tactful, and typical response for Criseyde to make at this late stage of the game (already locked in embrace). She has shown on previous occasions her sensitivity to Troilus' feelings, and her subsequent behavior (when she comforts him on their last night together) provides still another instance of her tenderhearted tact.

Whether or not Criseyde had already yielded in her mind, the question still remains: did she or did she not anticipate a private meeting at Pandarus' house? We certainly can learn nothing from the narrator whose "explanations are even worse than his silences":¹⁴

Nought list myn auctour fully to declare
What that she thoughte whan he seyde so,
That Troilus was out of towne yfare,
As if he seyde therof soth or no;
But that, withowten await, with hym to go,

¹² Dodd, p. 171, believes that if she had not yielded in her own mind, she would not have been at Pandarus' house. ". . . there can be no doubt that she went to Pandarus' house feeling that possibly she might meet Troilus there, and matters would arrange themselves as they did."

¹³ ApRoberts, p. 381.

¹⁴ Donaldson, ed., "Commentary on Troilus," p. 969.

She graunted hym, sith he hire that bisoughte,
And, as his nece, obeyed as hire ought.(III.575-81)

The impression persists that Criseyde has reason to suspect that Troilus would be present--especially when Pandarus makes it a point to reassure her that if Troilus were there, she need not fear, for Pandarus would rather die a thousand times over than have anyone see him. This impression is reinforced by her prudent caution to her uncle:

Although with hym to gon it was no fere,
For to ben war of goosish poeples speche,
That dremen thynges whiche that nevere were,
And wel avyse hym whom he broughte there;
And seyde hym, "Em, syn I most on yow triste,
Loke al be wel, and do now as yow liste."(III.583-8)

ApRoberts, who feels certain that "Chaucer's artistic scheme . . . clearly forbids the notion of a preconceived surrender," suggests that although Criseyde may in the back of her mind think Troilus is going to be present, she is not likely to feel positive.¹⁵ It is probably true that while Criseyde may not be sure that Troilus will be present, she undoubtedly is hoping he will be, or she would not have made a point of asking! The reader, however, is hard put to decide whether Criseyde is now looking forward to the long-promised private meeting which Pandarus had promised to arrange when they were still at Deiphebus' house or whether she thinks this may be another meeting like the others which have taken place during this interim period, when she and Troilus have met in the presence of others on some ruse designed to divert suspicion. The wild

¹⁵ ApRoberts, p. 377.

promise, however, which Pandarus has made that he would die a thousand times rather than let Troilus be seen at his house (presumably while Criseyde is there) throws weight to the possibility that if Criseyde hopes to see Troilus at all at Pandarus' house, she should expect it to be a strictly private meeting.

This possibility raises another related question. If, indeed, Criseyde does anticipate a private meeting with Troilus at Pandarus' house, what does she think will happen during that meeting? Or, what did she infer from Pandarus' earlier promise to provide a meeting where the two lovers would have a chance "to speke of love aright" (III.199)? And this consideration brings us back to an earlier question: has she already surrendered in her own mind?

I do not think her surrender speech (III.1210-11) proves a preconceived surrender because this would require a conscious decision which is not in character. No, the evidence seems to point not in the direction of conscious decision but toward a more characteristic passive drifting with circumstance. She is not going to go to Pandarus' house at all because it is raining; he persuades her to come anyway. After dinner she is ready to go home; he persuades her to stay. We can not know her mind simply because she does not know it herself. She does not know in advance how she will react--except for one sure thing: her reaction will be appropriate for her society and for the code of behavior in which she is so well-schooled. The way in which Criseyde reacts to Pandarus'

hoax concerning Troilus' unhappy jealousy, for instance, is an appropriate reaction for a courtly-love heroine: she is overcome with pity for his suffering. The importance of pity in the courtly love code was pointed out at the very beginning of the poem when Pandarus advised Troilus:

"That sith thy lady vertuous is al,
So foloweth it that there is som pitee
Amonges alle thise other in general . . ."(I.898-900)

While we can never be sure of what was really going on in Criseyde's mind before her complete submission to love in the bedroom at Pandarus' house that stormy night, we have ample evidence of her state of mind afterwards. Nowhere in the poem is there the slightest indication of any regret or guilt or feeling of sin on the part of the heroine. The love between Troilus and Criseyde transcends lust, blending spiritual and sensual values with an ethereal touch. It is noteworthy that this final culmination to which intrigue, deception, persuasion, tears, and threats have been leading for thousands of lines is accepted by the participants and the narrator as a nearly innocent adventure! It is likewise noteworthy that this attitude of acceptance is comprehensible only in the context of the courtly love code. Criseyde is once again (as in Deiphebus' house) the complete woman, at peace with herself and her conscience. She has fulfilled to the highest degree the role for which consciously or unconsciously she has always been prepared. It is probably due to this totally accepting attitude on the part of narrator and participants

that the vast majority of critics have never considered sinful the love-making of Troilus and Criseyde even though illegal fornication was definitely considered sinful by the Christian Church at the time Chaucer was writing. Some critics, like Lewis, are careful to recall the courtly love code and assure us that Criseyde's 'sin' is no sin in her society.¹⁶

If the culmination of love's desire is not regarded as regrettable or sinful by the lovers, the discovery of their night's adventure is a matter of entirely different proportions. As the day begins to break, Criseyde says that if Troilus does not leave immediately, she is "lost for evere mo!" (III.1426). But before she lets him go, in another instance of her endlessly graceful tact and warmth, she makes sure he knows that she has no regrets:

" . . . if to yow it were a gret gladnesse
To torne ayeyn soone after that ye go,
As fayn wolde I as ye that it were so,
As wisly God myn herte brynge at reste!" (III.1515-18)

These few lines, which typify the sensitivity which Criseyde shows toward her lover, prove beyond question that this courtly love heroine is at the peak of her glory at this point in the poem, secure and sovereign in her love, and, above all, safe from discovery.

¹⁶ Lewis, p. 183.

CHAPTER IV

I have been trying to show that an internal consistency may be found in Criseyde which helps make her behavior less confusing and contradictory than it might otherwise be. Examination of the critical decisions made by Criseyde in the final two books of Troilus shows that those same social forces are in operation which helped account for her earlier behavior.

That Troilus is also subject to these forces is demonstrated by his initial reaction to the shock of learning that Criseyde is to be exchanged for Antenor. The narrator tells us that Troilus' first thought was "how to save hire honour . . ."(IV.159), and then he began to reason that if he spoke against the exchange without her consent, she might turn against him, saying, " . . . thorough thy medlynge is iblowe/Youre bother love, ther it was erst unknowe" (IV.167-8). No matter how tormented he may be, Troilus does not forget even for a minute the necessity of protecting Criseyde's name from scandal. When Pandarus suggests that if Troilus is unable to forget Criseyde, he should simply carry her away, defying everyone, Troilus is aghast: "It mooste be disclaundre to hire name./And me were levere ded than hire diffame . . ."(IV.564-5). Yet, yielding to Pandarus' arguments a little later, Troilus does try to convince Criseyde that they should "stele away bitwixe us tweye . . ."(IV.1503). Apparently, social forces are not so intertwined in his psyche

as they are in hers. Those critics who find Troilus less than masterful in this matter of defying public opinion may not realize how courageously radical he is being to even suggest such a solution under the courtly love code.¹

It would have been entirely out of character for Criseyde to have agreed to so outlandish a proposal; on the other hand, the arguments she offers for refusing to comply with his ardent desire are entirely in keeping with her constant awareness of appropriate actions and responses. She warns that if they do as he says " . . . afterward, ful soore it wol us rewe" (IV. 1531). Going from the general to the particular, she rationalizes:

"But that ye speke, away thus for to go
And leten alle youre frendes, God forbede,
For any womman, that ye sholden so!
And namely syn Troie hath now swich nede
Of help. And ek of o thyng taketh hede:
If this were wist, my lif lay in balaunce,
And youre honour; God shilde us fro meschaunce!

"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 ayeyn for shame!
And er that ye juparten so youre name,
Beth naught to hastif in this hote fare;
For hastif man ne wanteth nevere care.

"What trowe ye the peple ek al aboute
Wolde of it seye? It is ful light t'arede.
They wolden seye, and swere it, out of doute,
That love ne drof yow naught to don this dede,
But lust voluptuous and coward drede.
Thus were al lost, ywys, myn herte deere,
Your honour, which that now shyneth so clere.

¹ Hagopian, p. 9, calls it a "childish submission to a woman's mother-role"

"And also thynketh on myn honeste,
 That floureth yet, how foule I sholde it shende,
 And with what filthe it spotted sholde be,
 If in this forme I sholde with yow wende.
 Ne though I lyved unto the werldes ende,
 My name sholde I nevere ayeynward wyne.
 Thus were I lost, and that were routhe and
 synne." (IV. 1555-82)

According to Criseyde's way of viewing life, the way of a courtly love heroine, everything beautiful in their relationship would be completely spoiled by following his plan. Furthermore, since it has been demonstrated that she does not recognize her own limitations or understand her own motives, it is highly probable that she really believes that she can carry out her plan to return in ten days.

Harsh criticism has condemned Criseyde on various counts for her words and actions during this last night which the lovers are ever to spend together. She has even been accused of pretending to swoon although there is nothing in the text which even remotely suggests such a deception nor is there any evidence anywhere in the poem up to this point which should lead anyone to expect hypocritical, deceptive behavior of this type.² It is not out of character for a woman to faint under such severe emotional stress, nor is it out of character for this same woman to pull herself together when she realizes what insupportable anguish she has caused her lover by indulging her own grief. After all, Pandarus had previously warned her that Troilus would kill himself if he should see how

² Hagopian, p. 9, claims: "The Criseyde we have known is no swooner"

distraught she was (IV.919). Pandarus had found her "in torment and in rage" (IV.811), her face and breast bathed in tears (IV.814-5), "The myghty tresses of hire sonnysshe heeris,/Unbroiden, hangen al aboute hire eeris" (IV. 816-7). The wily uncle, knowing what reactions to expect from both his niece and his friend, had advised her not to increase Troilus' sorrow but instead to devise a plan to cure it (IV. 928). Criseyde undoubtedly recognizes the truth of her uncle's advice when she recovers from her swoon to find Troilus about to thrust his sword into his heart, for she regains her senses and her composure rapidly, as a woman often can when faced with a need more urgent than her own. Criseyde is able to rise above her own grief solely because Troilus has demonstrated an even greater need. Instinctively, she comforts him both physically and spiritually, and the plan which she invents on the spur of the moment is the one inspired by Pandarus, who had advised:

"I mene thus: whan ich hym hider brynge,
Syn ye ben wise, and bothe of oon assent,
So shapeth how destourbe youre goynge,
Or come ayeyn, soon after ye be went.
Women ben wise in short avysement . . ."(IV.932-6)

Criseyde practically repeats his words concerning some mythical ability of women to come up with a fast solution as she desperately tries to fulfill her expected role:

"I am a womman, as ful wel ye woot,
And as I am avysed sodeynly,
So wol I telle yow, whil it is hoot."(IV.1261-3)

Of course, the solution she proposes is based on Pandarus'

hint that she should either find a way to avoid going or else devise a plan for a quick return.

I strongly disagree with critics like Meech, who interpret Criseyde's pathetically inadequate plans as attempts to justify her actions and convince herself that she is not being selfish.³ Being true to oneself is not the same as being selfish, and Criseyde is being true to her own nature when she refuses to run off with Troilus, an act which would defy the decree of parliament.⁴ That Criseyde instinctively recognizes her need to be in harmony with her surroundings is aptly illustrated by the homely little proverbs which she recalls when she is first confronted with the news that she must leave:

"How sholde a fissh withouten water dure?
What is Criseyde worth, from Troilus?
How sholde a plaunte or lyves creature
Lyve withouten his kynde noriture?" (IV.765-8)

Although I would not go quite so far as Lanham, who believes Criseyde's character "withered as soon as the supporting social context was removed,"⁵ it is clear that once in the Greek camp, Criseyde is like "a fissh withouten water." Through the poet's eyes, we see her floundering, facing insurmountable obstacles without hope of help from any source. It is this feeling of hopelessness which the poet suggests so vividly when he writes:

³ Meech, p. 94.

⁴ Saintonge, p. 320, says, "Open defiance is not for her."

⁵ Lanham, p. 24.

Upon that other syde ek was Criseyde,
 With wommen fewe, among the Grekis stronge;
 For which ful ofte a day "Allas!" she seyde,
 "That I was born! Wel may myn herte longe
 After my deth; for now lyve I to longe.
 Allas! and I ne may it nat amende!
 For now is wors than evere yet I wende." (V.687-93)

She is further tormented by the realization that Troilus will surely believe her false if she cannot return on the appointed day (V.697-8), and a situation which is already bad is made still worse by the fact that "Ther was no wight to whom she dorste hire pleyne" (V.728). Only under the pressure of absolute desperation could Criseyde even contemplate an action so foreign to her nature as a flight through the Greek lines in the dead of night. So great is her capacity for self-deception that for a few brave moments the distraught young woman even thinks she really will steal back to Troilus the very next night and go off with him regardless of wagging tongues (V.750-6). But tomorrow night never comes; Diomedes comes instead.

Why Diomedes? Is it possible to understand Criseyde's acceptance of this Greek lover? Both Lewis and Kirby point out that Criseyde's acceptance of Diomedes should be viewed not as an alternative to Troilus as a lover but as an alternative to attempting to reach Troilus, alone, at night, unaided.⁶ It appears to me that Criseyde is undergoing a kind of identity crisis in the Greek camp. She finally learns to accept the unbearable truth that Troilus is lost to her forever, and it

⁶ Kirby, p. 229; Lewis, pp. 188-9.

is perhaps in an effort to force herself to accept the finality of this truth that she parts with Troilus' brooch. Since she lacks the fighting spirit to rebel against circumstances, she must make a new life for herself among these "Grekis stronge." Nothing in her code of behavior could have prepared her to meet the conditions under which she now must live.

Clever Diomede knows all the correct things to say even though his words ring hollow to our ears. What is more, his timing is so carefully calculated that his words fall like seeds on fertile soil, for Criseyde yearns for the security of a close relationship. It is noteworthy that at one point in her conversation with the Greek, Criseyde unknowingly reveals the profound truth of her own nature to him: "What I shal after don, I kan nat seye;/But trewelich, as yet me list nat pleye" (V.986-7). By these lines she shows recognition of her own indecisiveness. This remark is not just a device to stall for time. She really does not know how she will feel later, as she indicates further by saying:

"Herafter, whan ye wonnen han the town,
Peraunter, thanne so it happen may,
That whan I se that nevere yit I say,
Than wol I werke that I nevere wroughte!" (V.990-3)

Criseyde's reasons for accepting Diomede's suit are both brief and to the point:

His grete estat, and perel of the town,
And that she was allone and hadde nede
Of frendes help . . . (V.1025-7)

The very brevity of this justification for her betrayal contrasts painfully with the very lengthy self-analysis over

which Criseyde agonized when trying to decide whether or not to accept Troilus' suit. Perhaps nothing could emphasize more forcefully the vast changes in circumstances which Criseyde has undergone since those leisurely days in Troy.

Why Diomede? Perhaps, as Sharrock points out, "He is merely what happens to her next, an extreme case of the law which prescribes a proportion of all human experience to be that which is not willed."⁷ Certainly, Criseyde never intended to betray Troilus; yet, this is the unforgivable sin for which her "belle" has been "ronge" throughout the centuries. Should Criseyde be condemned for breaking faith with Troilus? Under the courtly love code, which considers faithfulness a prime requisite, she must be condemned without qualification. Criseyde, however, is more than a stereotyped courtly love heroine. "In giving her faults the poet has made her a decidedly human creature . . . ,"⁸ a human creature living in a highly-ordered society which places a premium upon conformity to expected codes of behavior. Once separated from that society, like a "fissh withouten water," Criseyde flounders, snatching what security she can find, surviving the traumatic change in the only way she knows. If Criseyde, therefore, is to be judged under a human code, which acknowledges causes as well as effects and which considers human limitations and the pressure of social forces, she must be excused for "routhe."

⁷ Sharrock, p. 130.

⁸ Dodd, p. 177.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

LIST OF WORKS CITED

- ApRoberts, Robert P. "The Central Episode in Chaucer's Troilus." PMLA, 78 (1962), 373-385.
- Bayley, John. The Character of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality. London: Constable, 1960.
- Borthwick, Sister Mary C. "Antigone's Song as 'Mirour' in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde." MLQ, 22 (1961), 227-235.
- Brewer, D. S. "Love and Marriage in Chaucer's Poetry." MLR, 49 (1954), 461-464.
- Daly, Saralyn R. "Criseyde's Blasphemous Aube." N & Q, 108 (1963), 442-444.
- Denomy, Alexander J. The Heresy of Courtly Love. New York: D. X. McMullen, 1947.
- Dodd, William G. Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower. Boston: Ginn, 1913.
- Donaldson, E. T., ed. "Commentary on Troilus and Criseyde." Chaucer's Poetry, an Anthology for the Modern Reader. New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1958.
- Donaldson, E. T. "The Myth of Courtly Love." Ventures, 5 (1965), 16-23.
- Everett, Dorothy. "Troilus and Criseyde." Essays on Middle English Literature. Ed. Patricia Kean. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955. Pp. 115-138.
- Gibbs, A. C., ed. "Introduction." Middle English Romances. Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1966.
- Gillie, Christopher. Character in English Literature. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1965.
- Gordon, Ida L. The Double Sorrow of Troilus. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970.

- Green, Marion N. "Christian Implications of Knighthood and Courtly Love in Chaucer's Troilus." Delaware Notes, 30 (1957), 57-92.
- Griffin, Nathaniel E. "Chaucer's Portrait of Criseyde." JEGP, 20 (1921), 39-46.
- Hagopian, John. "Chaucer As Psychologist in Troilus and Criseyde." Literature and Psychology, 5 (1955), 5-11.
- Jackson, W. T. H. "Faith Unfaithful--The German Reaction to Courtly Love." The Meaning of Courtly Love. Ed. F. X. Newman. Albany: State Univ. of N.Y. Press, 1968. Pp.55-76.
- Kirby, Thomas A. Chaucer's Troilus: A Study of Courtly Love. University, La., 1940. Rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959.
- Kittredge, George L. Chaucer and His Poetry. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1915.
- Lanham, Richard A. "Game, Play, and High Seriousness in Chaucer's Poetry." English Studies, 48 (1967), 1-24.
- Lewis, C. S. The Allegory of Love. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936; rpt. Galaxy Books, 1958.
- Meech, Sanford B. Design in Chaucer's Troilus. Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1959.
- Mudrick, Marvin. "Chaucer's Nightingales." The Hudson Review, 10 (1957), 88-95.
- Muscatine, Charles. Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning. Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1957.
- Neilson, William A. The Origins and Sources of the Court of Love. New York: Russell and Russell, 1967.
- Newman, F. X., ed. "Introduction." The Meaning of Courtly Love. Albany: State Univ. of N. Y. Press, 1968.
- Robertson, D. W., Jr. "Chaucerian Tragedy." ELH, 19 (1952), 1-37.
-
- . "The Concept of Courtly Love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts." The Meaning of Courtly Love. Ed. F. X. Newman. Albany: State Univ. of N. Y. Press, 1968. Pp. 1-18.
-
- . "The Subject of the De Amore of Andreas Capellanus." Modern Philology, 50 (1952-53), 145-161.

- Robinson, F. N., ed. The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer.
Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1933.
- Root, R. K. The Poetry of Chaucer. 2nd ed., 1922; rpt.
Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1957.
- Saintonge, Constance. "In Defense of Criseyde." MLQ, 15
(1954), 312-320.
- Sharrock, Roger. "Second Thoughts: C. S. Lewis on Chaucer's
Troilus." EIC, 8 (1955), 123-137.
- Silverstein, Theodore. "Guenevere, or the Uses of Courtly
Love." The Meaning of Courtly Love. Ed. F. X. Newman.
Albany: State Univ. of N.Y. Press, 1968. Pp. 77-90.
- Singleton, Charles S. "Dante: Within Courtly Love and Beyond."
The Meaning of Courtly Love. Ed. F. X. Newman. Albany:
State Univ. of N. Y. Press, 1968. Pp. 43-54.
- Slaughter, Eugene E. Virtue According to Love--In Chaucer.
New York: Bookman Associates, 1957.
- Smith, Fred Manning. "Chaucer's Prioress and Criseyde." West
Virginia Univ. Philological Papers, 6 (1949) 1-11.
- Tatlock, John S. P. "The People in Chaucer's Troilus." PMLA,
56 (1941), 85-104.
- Utley, Francis L. The Crooked Rib. Columbus: The Ohio State
Univ. Press, 1944.
- Young, Karl. "Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde as Romance."
PMLA, 53 (1938), 38-63.

VITA

"Better late than never" probably is my motto. When I graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School in 1950 (as Betty Ann Weiner), I had no plans to attend college, much less pursue a master's degree. Instead I attended The Pan American School for several months and prepared myself for a secretarial career at which I worked off and on for a number of years both before and after my marriage to Robert Jaffee in September 1951. When my husband's period of enlistment in the Air Force was completed, we returned to Richmond and proceeded to raise a family. After three children (Debra, Elaine, and Charles) and ten years of marriage, I decided to attend Richmond Professional Institute (now V.C.U.). I obtained a Bachelor of Science in Social Science with High Honors in 1964, after which I began a new career as an elementary school teacher at Tuckahoe Elementary School in Henrico County. Five years later I decided to specialize in English. So in 1969 I took a leave of absence to attend University of Richmond Graduate School full time. With class work completed but my thesis still hanging fire, I began teaching English in 1970 at Brookland Junior High. Then in 1971 I transferred to Douglas S. Freeman High School where I am currently teaching sophomore English. I worked three summers and half of this school year to get to the point where I can finally say it is done--better late than never.

Betty Ann Jaffee