The True Characters of Criseyde and of Diomede in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: A Restoration of the Reputations of Two Misunderstood Characters Unjustly Maligned in Literary Criticism

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ABSTRACT

The True Characters of Criseyde and of Diomede in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: A Restoration of the Reputations of Two Misunderstood Characters Unjustly Maligned in Literary Criticism

Lawrence Capelovitch, B.A., B.C.L.

Criseyde and Diomede have been consistently misunderstood and vilified in literary criticism due to a failure in proper analysis of the text and an uncritical acceptance of influences irrelevant to its interpretation.

Criseyde, considered the ultimate female betrayer in literature, was in fact a victim of the betrayals of the four males who touched her life. She was a survivor in time of war who faced her perils with intelligence and dignity while having to make unwelcome choices and decisions under hostile circumstances beyond her control.

Diomede is vilified as an amoral seducer when the text does not support such determination. He is a plain spoken military man, sincere, practical, intelligent, and worthy of Criseyde's attention, and, ultimately, her love.

This thesis examines Criseyde's sexuality, one of several leading motivators of her decisions and actions, a subject not generally analyzed in depth, but necessary for a true understanding of the plot and Criseyde's character.

By focusing microscopically on the text, Chaucer's brilliance as poet, psychologist, and literary craftsman will become even more apparent than heretofore, and his masterpiece will be appreciated as a tale of ongoing relevance embodying mores no different than as at the present time.

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The True Characters of Criseyde and of Diomede in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: A Restoration of the Reputations of Two Misunderstood Characters Unjustly Maligned in Literary Criticism

Chapter One: Introduction and Overview

This is a defence of the characters of Criseyde and of Diomede based, *inter alia,* on a close textual analysis. Criseyde, who was betrayed by the four living males who touched her life before she met Diomede, will be seen not to have been a betrayer (of Troilus), notwithstanding her own words and those of the Narrator.

Diomede will be seen to have been a worthy successor to Troilus. Criseyde's choice of Diomede under the circumstances was logical, legitimate, and did not in any way reflect adversely on her character. The words of the text do not justify the opprobrium that has been accorded Diomede.

What follows is intended to lead to a revision of some widely held erroneous opinions and a deeper understanding of Chaucer's brilliant delineation of character and the subtlety with which he utilized the plot to reveal what will be seen to be his true intentions.

An analysis and evaluation of the decisions and actions of a character in literature must, to be meaningful, presume that the character is and/or was a living human being with free choice under the circumstances in which the character has been placed. Criseyde's decisions are freely taken based on her imperfect knowledge and understanding of her evolving situation, and the motivations common to humanity, then as now. Diomede acts with specific goals in mind, never doubting his capacity to effect events. Troilus may flirt intellectually with determinism, but he is continually rationalizing his passivity and inactivity.

Aristole, in his *Poetics*, chapter 15, wrote:

> Well, one cannot interfere with the traditional stories, cannot, for instance, say that Clytaemestra (sic) was not killed by Orestes or Eriphyle by Alcmaeon; what one should do is invent for oneself and use the traditional material well.[1]

Chaucer, in *Troilus and Criseyde,* used the traditional material of a known literary plot and invented so well that in doing so he recharacterized

[1] *A New Aristotle Reader;* J.L. Ackrill, ed; *Poetics*, 552 et. seq. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, U.S.A., Hubbard, M.E.trans., 1987

Criseyde, who became in fact not a betrayer, but a victim of the betrayals of others.

Notwithstanding her own utterances and feelings of guilt or sorrow, and the Narrator's comments, in Chaucer's rendering of Criseyde, she is a blameless survivor who adapted to a dangerous and unwelcome situation with common sense and as much dignity as possible under circumstances into which she was involuntarily thrust through no fault of her own.

Between the bookend references I, 54-56:[2]

> In which ye may the double sorwes here
> Of Troilus in lovynge of Criseyde,
> And how that she forsook hym er she deyde

And V, 1774-1775:

> That al be that Criseyde was untrewe,
> That for that gilt…

Chaucer, while at times seeming to adhere to the traditional tale, knowingly created in Criseyde a new, multi-faceted, human character and embedded it

[2] All references to and from *Troilus and Criseyde,* unless otherwise noted, are from *The Riverside Chaucer,* L.D. Benson, ed., Houghton Mifflin, Boston, Mass., U.S.A., 1987, 471-585

within the thus altered traditional tale, creating a character different from that of the given tale, fascinating readers and scholars ever since.

There is a quicksilver aspect to Criseyde's nature and personality. This is revealed in her reactions to life's situations, including the occasional inconsistency, untruth and unwise decision later regretted. She is drawn in detail, a sketch at the beginning, with numerous accretions, giving the reader a rounded intellectual and physical portrait by the end of the book.

The portrait that emerges does not include consistency as there is no straight line character development, but much fluctuation and vacillation, from unwillingness to dance to the liason with Troilus, from rebuking Pandarus' suggestions to accepting an affair that was unnecessarily clandestine, (as will be seen). There is no key to Criseyde's character any more than to that of Hamlet or the nature of Moby Dick. However, there are identifiable components and these I intend to explore.

Literary criticism thinks ill of Criseyde for acting in a manner required to preserve her life, and for allying herself with and obtaining the protection of Diomede who, both from Criseyde's point of view, and in fact, is in every way equal to or better than Troilus, and is a more desirable protective "partner". The analyses I have consulted, in my firm opinion,

were misled by emphasis on the inherited interpretations of aspects of the text, neglecting the actual character delineation, and were infected and perverted by consideration of the reputation of the Criseyde and Diomede characters (however spelled) based on preceding versions of the story, Henryson's subsequent *Testament of Cresseid*, and the views of earlier and contemporary critics. However, Chaucer's Criseyde and Diomede are unique creations to be judged by the appropriate sections of the text, and the text alone.

Chaucer carefully states that "the storie telleth us" (V, 1051), that Criseyde bewailed at great length the alleged fact that she "falsed Troilus" (V, 1053), causing the loss of her reputation (V, 1052-1068). However, the facts must be examined to see if this loss of honour is deserved without reference to Criseyde's words affirming the loss, however much they are part of and/or reflect the inherited story.

Kaufman, a legal scholar, later Mr. Justice Kaufman, writing in the standard Canadian text *The Admissibility of Confessions in Criminal Matters*, demonstrates clearly that false, unwarranted confessions exist and have long existed, and the fact that someone "confesses" is not necessarily proof of the facts confessed. This must be borne in mind in analyzing

Criseyde: the confessions must not be automatically taken as the truth without close analysis to verify if justified by the facts. (Please see Schedule A.)

The work may now bear the title *Troilus and Criseyde* (though not in every manuscript and early reference),[3] but it tells of the double sorrow of Troilus, and it is his tragedy. My analysis is strictly from Criseyde's point of view. I find her to be a victim of circumstances, not a brilliant intellect, but a decent woman struggling under the weight of male duplicity and betrayal, first by her father, then uncle Pandarus, and later by Hector and by Troilus' intellectual paralysis when effective action by him was both required and possible. The morality of Criseyde's deeds is not to be judged by Troilus' suffering and sorrow, but only by the choices open to her at the times when her decisions were made, and the rationality and motivation of her choices at such times.

[3] Barney, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1020, indicates that manuscripts naming the poem are approximately equally divided between *Troilus* and *Troilus and Criseyde* under various spellings. However, in Chaucer's *Retraction* it is *The Book of Troilus* (*The Riverside Chaucer*, 328), and *Troylus* in his poem to Adam, his *scriveyn (The Riverside Chaucer, 650).*

Chapter Two: The Question of Marriage

When Troilus made his courtly pitch to Criseyde, and when Pandarus urged her "that ye han on hym routhe" (III,122), Criseyde replied "I wolde hym preye to telle me the fyn of his entente" (III,124-125), that is, what are his intentions, and marriage is not mentioned by Troilus or Pandarus, leaving a sexual relationship as Troilus' unstated but unmistakeable intent. It is no answer that there would not have been a tragedy had they married because marriage to Troilus was possible.

John of Gaunt, Prince and patron to Chaucer[4] "shortly after his first wife's death…took Katherine Swynford…as his mistress, and made no secret of it; she remained so after his marriage to Princess Constanza of Castile" (Howard, 93). "In 1372, the year after Gaunt's marriage to Constanza, Katherine bore Gaunt an illegitimate son…and there were other acknowledged children" (Howard, 93-94). "In 1396, twenty four years later and after Constanza died, Gaunt married Katherine" (Howard, 94). Howard continues, "all these circumstances are well known, and since the affair went

[4] Chaucer served in John of Gaunt's campaign in France in 1369 C.E. Chaucer's wife, Philippa, entered service in the household of John of Gaunt in 1372 C.E., and Chaucer was granted an annuity of £10 by John of Gaunt in 1374 C.E. (Mills, x; *The Riverside Chaucer*, xix). "There is…evidence, both external and internal, that Chaucer wrote *The Book of the Dutchess* to commemorate the death of Blanche, Dutchess of Lancaster and wife of John of Gaunt." (*The Riverside Chaucer*, 329.)

on for over twenty years, it must have been taken in stride at court out of habit if nothing else" (Howard, 94).

One must accept Criseyde's concern for her honour as sincere, although Swynford's honour apparently remained intact. Moreover Helen was fully integrated in the Trojan court as the wife of Paris when she was already married to a Greek (I, 677-678). Being the openly acknowledged mistress must not have stigmatized either. Chaucer was therefore most unlikely to write something critical of or embarrassing to his Prince and patron John of Gaunt. It leads one to suspect that Criseyde's preoccupation with her honour was excessive and would be recognized as such by at least some of the audience.

The marriage of a Prince to a "commoner" was neither impossible nor unheard of. One may assume at least some of Chaucer's audience would have been well aware of Katherine Swynford's situation, apparently without loss of honour, and considered it in evaluating Troilus' inaction with respect to marriage, and his contentment with secret liasons, perhaps with particular sympathy for Criseyde.

The above analysis is confirmed in the study of *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (*The Norton Shakespeare,* 1659 et seq.) in

which Polonius, on learning of Hamlet's interest, reports to Claudius and Gertrude Hamlet's words to Ophelia and his advice to her:

> Lord Hamlet is a Prince out of thy star.
>
> This must not be (2.2.141-142)

However, at Ophelia's graveside, Gertrude addresses the corpse:

> I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife.
>
> I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid. (5.1. 227-228)

Marriage of a Prince to a commoner was thinkable and possible.

Criseyde refuses Troilus' later suggestion, "lat us stele away bitwixe us tweye" (IV, 1503, conceptually repeated at IV, 1507), obliquely and subtley referring to the concept of "weddynge" (IV, 1536) without which she would deem her honour lost (IV, 1576-1582), "If *in this forme* I sholde with you wende" (emphasis added) (IV, 1579). *Forme* may be glossed several ways, but the concept is clear: it here means *unmarried*.[5] Marriage was on her mind; she declares not even a wedding opportunity will induce her to be false to Troilus (IV, 1536).

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[5] Her name would be lost and "with what filthe it spotted sholde be" (IV, 1578): it would be "synne" (IV, 1582). Criseyde considers it a *synne* if known. The affair did last for three years, but secrecy kept sufficient of her honour as only Pandarus knew of her *synne*.

Troilus has only himself to blame for his unhappiness, caused by his silence and inaction at all critical times, however motivated.

Chapter Three: Courtly Love

Courtly love, a phrase connoting and implying high social status, nobility and purity was a literary fiction in vogue at the time of the poem's creation. While Troilus is the stereotypical courtly lover, exhibiting all its superficial symptoms, Criseyde hovers between a beneficiary and recipient of courtly love and a non-courtly pragmatist. Once the conventions are peeled away she acts like a normal woman of the 14th and 21st centuries. Diomede is a military man, perhaps not apparently courtly, but he utilizes all the phraseology of the courtly lover in his wooing of Criseyde. Criseyde may command him: he will honour and serve her as a knight, and pleads for mercy (V, 112-173). The plea for mercy is not to spare the petitioner's life, but to receive sexual favours, doled out at the discretion of the lady.

Georges Duby, in his chapter *The Courtly Model*, in *A History of Women,* Vol. II, describes the essence of courtly love; after love's arrow enters the heart, and the lady accepts services, "the rules of courtly love obliged the chosen lady to reward loyal service, ultimately by full surrender" (251). The seeking of sex has always been clothed with euphemism.

The Catholic church insisted on priestly celibacy in the late 11th century, a reform instituted by Pope Gregory VII, a difficult undertaking

then as now. Andreas Capellanus, a cleric, writing circa 1170 C.E. (McLaren, 120) codified courtly love as a system of limited flirtation and not complete fulfillment, facing reality with something suitable for women whose husbands were away at war while numerous young males might be about. Courtship rules devised by a cleric would always be suspect by the laity they were designed to control.

However, Duby somewhat inconsistently reproduces Capellanus' outline. The lady was (usually) married (250). Duby's description of the steps along the way, however, culminate in desire itself and not in sexual intercourse. "Thus courtly love was a fantasy" (252). Criseyde, an unremarried widow, goes beyond the guidelines which were intended for married women and presumably not for widows. Duby writes, "in the vocabulary of the time, 'love' in the proper sense referred to carnal appetite" (251). At the mention of the word "mercy", all ladies, including Criseyde, immediately knew what the suitor had in mind. Criseyde's love affair was physically and emotionally fulfilling.

Chapter Four: Sexual Relations and Criseyde

Criseyde's sexuality must be considered as a motivating factor in evaluating her character and actions.

When considering a "relationship" with Troilus, Criseyde, a widow, emphatically declares, "What, pardieux! I am naught religious" (II, 759), by which Chaucer's audience and readers, early in the story, are clued in to her affirmation that she is not a member of a religious order: she is not a nun and she has not taken a vow of abstinence. Her physicality informs and motivates certain of her decisions and actions and makes them more understandable and legitimate.

Chaucer declares his Criseyde is "lusty, fre" (V, 823), words which, while ambiguous, have definite overtones of a sexual nature. The words first appear in Pandarus' instructions to Troilus, (I, 958), where they are surprisingly glossed as *cheerful* and *generous*, (*Riverside*, 468). The words follow, in Pandarus' lesson, "but thow were esed" (I, 943) and "she…may thy comfort be also" (I, 944-945)[6], definite sexual references with respect to his niece. *Riverside* does not gloss the words at V, 823.

[6] One recalls that prior to and during World War II, the Japanese referred to sexually enslaved Manchurian, Korean and other women as "comfort women", the unchallenged translation.

Windeatt in his edition glosses “lusty” as “full of vigour” (143). Root, in 1926, did not gloss the words, apparently believing their meanings were clear. At V, 823, Root’s edition reads “lusty, and fre”. Maldwyn Mills’ edition at V, 823, reads “lusty and fre” without the comma, thus linking the liberality more strongly to the lustiness. Barney, in the Norton Critical Edition, glosses “lusty” at I, 958 as “cheerful, vigourous”, (59) and at V, 823 as “lively”, and “fre” as “noble” (355).

One may wonder if Victorian and Edwardian scholars were timid in glossing, which tendency continues. There is no precision or agreement in glossing “lusty” or “lust” (*Riverside*, 1267), leading one to suspect that the several present glosses are bowdlerizations of Chaucer’s intent. In *Troilus and Criseyde* “lusty” as often as not had sexual meaning, distinct from “desire” in an abstract or material sense.

The word appears approximately 20 times in the poem and carries one or the other meaning each time, but the overwhelming meaning is sexual.

Consider “Al feyneth he in lust that he sojorneth” (I, 326) which follows a line stating Troilus was pierced (by cupid’s arrow) as a result of Criseyde’s appearance. *Riverside* here glosses “lust” as “pleasure”, when the meaning is clearly “sexual desire”: desire is the gloss for lust at I, 407,

"and if that at myn owen lust I brenne", which gloss was there necessary as one does not burn for pleasure.

Criseyde's words at II, 1133-1134, indicate her full understanding of Troilus' purpose: "To myn estat have more reward, I preye, / Than to his lust."

For Troilus, in lines III, 1546-1547, when "lust to brede / Gan more than erst…" the sexual nature of desire is unmistakable.

Criseyde's desire is clearly revealed when, notwithstanding Pandarus mealy-mouthed words concerning her future relationship with Troilus, she sets forth her conditions, and in particular, that her honour and good reputation be preserved.

> And shortly, deere herte and al my knyght,
> Beth glad, and draweth yow to lustinesse,
> And I shal trewely, with all my myght,
> Youre bittre tornen al into swetenesse.
> If I be she that may yow do gladnesse,
> For every wo ye shal recovere a blisse
> And hym in armes took, and gan hym kisse (III, 176-182),

Criseyde thus initiating physical sexual contact.

After the consummation, she is aggressive. Just prior to Troilus' departure, she "hym in armes tok, and ofte keste" (III, 1519). At their ultimate private meeting, while Troilus writhes in mental agony, it is Criseyde who focuses on the physical: "…lat us rise, and streght to bedde go." (IV, 1243).

Criseyde was always aware that Troilus' interest in her was primarily physical and sexual although love did develop. The word "love" is often a euphemism and a rationalization, then as now, of an emotion that may coexist with sexual desire and gratification, but often does not.

Troilus' first view of Criseyde awakens lust, as he knows nothing of her as a person: "…his herte gan to sprede and rise", (I, 278), and "in him ther gan to quyken / So gret desir…" (I, 295-296).

Criseyde's response is in part physical. While considering Troilus' proposition, Antigone's words sum up the issue, "They wenen all be love, if oon be hoot" (II, 892), which is a signal to the audience as to Criseyde, leading to her rebuke to Pandarus, "To myn estat have more reward…than to his lust" (II, 1133-1134).

Criseyde and Troilus enter their relationship. Chaucer was aware a tale of extramarital sex would not please all his audience in a Catholic society: hence the line, "To whom this tale sucre be or soot," (III, 1194) – white and sweet or black and dirty – and open to differing interpretations.

Sexually experienced, with a partner with whom she has, after due deliberation, agreed to have an affair, one wonders why, prior to consummation, "Right as an aspes leef she gan to quake" (III, 1200). For one so intent on preserving her honour, there she was unprepared for the encounter. Then as now pregnancy often results from unprotected, unexpected sexual intercourse, which would or could be a problem causing loss of honour. We do not know what Chaucer's audience would have thought, but we may here speculate. They would have considered life in Troy analogous to that in England, as neither Chaucer nor his audience were scholars of life and mores in ancient Troy. Knowledge of contraception was widespread in Chaucer's England. Criseyde and the audience would 'know' this. Criseyde could rely on abortifacients to preserve her honour as it was too late for contraceptives. Criseyde ceased quaking and went on with the experience. (Please see Schedule B.)

At the time of their first coupling, Criseyde, obviously overjoyed at the resumption of sexual activity,

> And as aboute a tree, with many a twiste,
> Bytrent and writh the swote wodebynde,
> Gan ech of hem in armes other wynde (III, 1230-1232).

Inasmuch as their *armes* wound around each other and not their legs, their coupling position is not yet known, but Troilus' words, "…I, on which the faireste and the beste / That evere I say deyneth hire herte reste," (III, 1280-1281), would indicate, as she is resting her heart on his, that she is in the superior position, the position considered less likely to lead to conception (McLaren, 119). Sexual satisfaction is acknowledged by Criseyde's words, "my ground of ese…" (III, 1304).

Love develops, evolves, and increases under the catalyst of sex, but the calculating that determined Criseyde's decision to enter the relationship suggests a lack of depth notwithstanding her repeated affirmations of love (IV, 784; V, 1420), and intended abstinence while in the Greek camp, which declarations were sincere when made.

Chaucer, and his audience no doubt, had knowledge of existing literary traditions and genres – the fabliaux and the work of the troubadours, which co-existed with courtly love traditions.

> Medieval ideas were far from the Victorian notion that nice women did not enjoy sex. Physiologically, men and women were considered sexual equals – in fact, as in William IX's verses[7], women were commonly credited with stronger sexual feelings than men. In the fabliaux and in the satiric writings of medieval moralists women were constantly portrayed as lusty and even insatiable. The author of the thirteenth-century *Lamentations of Matthew* complained that his wife claimed her conjugal rights with energy, and "if I don't give them to her because I don't have my old vigor, she pulls my hair" (Gies & Gies, *Daily Life in Medieval Times,* 48).

Chaucer was the poet who gestated and gave the world the Wife of Bath and authored *"*many a song and many a leccherous lay*" (Riverside*, 328), now lost, alas. The present exposition is not inconsistent with Chaucer's thinking as revealed in his writing.

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[7] William IX was the grandfather of the celebrated Eleanor of Aquitaine and 'the earliest troubadour whose work has survived' (Gies & Gies. *Daily Life*, 46)

Barney, in his introduction to *The Norton Critical Edition* of *Troilus and Criseyde*, avers "…Chaucer's Criseyde is erotically motivated…" (XV). He contrasts Chaucer's delineation of Criseyde with Boccaccio and concludes that in Chaucer "…her passions are rendered more delicately and indirectly" (XV).

Sexual pleasure was one of the significant elements that cemented Criseyde's joyous relationship with Troilus. Its absence, without likelihood of rekindling, notwithstanding Criseyde's early hopes, was a major factor in causing the lien to split under the pressure of separation, resulting in the knotless slippage of Troy and Troilus from and through her heart.

Chapter Five: The Question of Eyebrows

Chaucer notes of Criseyde that "hire browes joyneden yfeere" (V, 813), not a truly significant fact in any way essential to the tale, particularly at this point, unless it had a meaning for his audience that he wished to infer and not state baldly.

Chaucer frequently foreshadowed aspects of the given text as plot surprises were unlikely, but he also cast shadows backward, for reflection and consideration.

Robinson, in the first precursor of *The Riverside Chaucer*, in an explanatory note for V, 813, (947), writes, "Criseyde's joined brows are mentioned by Dares, Joseph (of Exeter), Benoit (de Sainte-Maure), and Guido (della Colonne), but only the last two regarded the trait (sic) as a *lak.* In Ancient Greece it was held to be a mark of beauty, and sometimes as a sign of a passionate nature". This note is repeated in essence by Robinson in the second edition, 1957, at page 834.

The Riverside Chaucer (3rd Edition) expands the explanation (1053), citing Curry, who "shows…that in Ancient Greece joined brows were signs of beauty and passion." Curry continues that other sources hold such brows

"signify sadness,…sagacity, vanity, cruelty envy, etc.", a potpourri of significations that I believe may be safely ignored.

As Chaucer avers (V, 814) that the joined eyebrows were a "lak", and thus not a sign of beauty, he is here subtly reminding his audience that Criseyde's nature was passionate, something the literate audience members would understand, and confirming an indirectly specified additional motivation for uniting with Diomede.

Chapter Six: On Criseyde's Intelligence when Faced with a False Claim

Pandarus raises the alleged existence of the fictitious (monetary) claim of Polyphete with the words, "Be ye naught war…" (II, 1467) to which Criseyde replied, "I, no!" (II, 1470). The news of this non-existent claim "changed al hire hewe" (II, 1470) – frightened her. Criseyde's reaction is startling and revealing, as she tells Pandarus, "lat hym han al yfeere, / Withouten that I have ynough for us" (II, 1477-1478), without inquiring into the nature and amount of the claim. One can confidently assert that in the history of litigation no recipient of a claim ever suggested that the claimant be given all being claimed without first verifying the amount of the claim and the cause of action. Criseyde's reaction reveals a naiveté and lack of practical intelligence commingling with her other, real, qualities and characteristics, to be remembered when she fails to foresee the problems of escaping from the Greek camp notwithstanding her assurances to Troilus.

Chapter Seven: Criseyde and her Character

Criseyde, a widow, is a literate woman apparently in her mid-twenties, with *estaat* who enjoys physical life, and is personally vulnerable in a patriarchal society, whether Troy, the Greek camp (or England circa 1385 C.E.), with no means except private arms to guard the life, property and integrity of an unprotected, beautiful, vulnerable and propertied woman.

We meet Criseyde after her father's desertion, a widow, alone, terrified and vulnerable as the daughter of a traitor (I, 90-91), beautiful, angelic, and wise enough to seek and obtain Hector's protection. She is of between small and average height (I, 281; V, 806), graceful, and conveys the impression of "Honour, estat, and wommanly noblesse" (I, 287). At the commencement of her physical relationship with Troilus, we learn she has a straight back, long sides, is fleshly, smooth and her breasts are round (III, 1247-1250). We are later informed Criseyde was golden blond; her wavy hair "sonnyssh was of hewe" (IV, 736). Her voice was melodious (V, 577) and she sang well (V, 578). A last description is in V, 807-808:

> Thereto of shap, of face, and ek of cheere
> There myghte ben no fairer creature.

Pandarus assures Troilus that Criseyde is “of good name and wisdom and manere” (I, 880), possesses “gentilesse” (I, 881), and is “vertuous” (I, 898). Although he frequently lies, this can be taken to be true.

Criseyde had every reason to fear for her life in Troy as the daughter of a traitor, a widow and alone without a reliable friend to confide in or consult (I, 97-98), indicating from the very beginning that uncle Pandarus was useless and not a relative Criseyde could rely on, (other than concerning monetary matters).

Criseyde’s supplication to Hector (not Priam!) is successful, apparently in part because “she was so fair a creature” (I, 115). Hector’s promise is that Criseyde may “Dwelleth with us, whil yow good lyst, in Troye” (I, 119), and she shall be safe; “youre body shal men save”, (I, 122), being the first indication and confirmation that a woman without male protection was physically vulnerable, something Criseyde never forgets.

Troilus, on first viewing Criseyde, is smitten with both “so gret desir and such affeccion…” (I, 296), which is lust, as love cannot exist and grow without personal interaction, and so does not exist as yet, notwithstanding the word’s appearance three times from lines I, 303 to I, 308, nor Chaucer’s

use of the word “love” in I, 353 as the entrapping emotion; “lust” is the more non-euphemistic term, as in I, 443.

It is uncertain to what extent Pandarus’ instruction that the affair be kept secret, and his insistence that unless Criseyde love and cherish Troilus, he would consider Criseyde’s refusal a vice represents Court etiquette and standards in Chaucer’s day.

Criseyde, a widow, sought a stable life with honour. We know nothing of her first marriage but are entitled to assume it constituted her sexual awakening, and that her status of widow and the (temporary) cessation of sexual relations her character imposes on her did not obliterate her memory.

When Troilus commenced his pursuit, (through Pandarus), seeking “routhe” (III, 122), a polite word for a future sexual relationship, Criseyde immediately asked, “I wolde hym preye / To telle me the fyn of his entente” (III, 124-125), that is, does he intend marriage. Troilus’ intentions, notwithstanding his professed love, were primarily sexual, and remained sexual, exactly the false accusation made against Diomede. In both cases her love developed, but that took time.

Surprisingly, the concept of marriage is raised, but by Diomede, when he questions Criseyde as to "…whi hire fader tarieth so longe / To wedden hire unto som worthy wight" (V, 862-863). Troilus never considers public acknowledgement and marriage, notwithstanding Paris' example of action when lust impelled him.

We next meet Criseyde in her residence, described as a "palays" (II, 76), with her subordinates in a paved parlour, a sign of wealth, hearing a recitation of the siege of Thebes, betokening culture, intellect and historical and literary interest, always to be admired. She is reserved, dressed modestly as a widow, with a "barbe" (II, 110) and is reluctant to dance, an activity for the unmarried and young wives (II, 111-119). Appearances are important to Criseyde.

The reader learns "I am of Grekes so fered that I deye" (II, 124), a fear often reiterated both with respect to Greeks and otherwise. Her conversation with Pandarus is witty, human, decent, and rounds the introduction.

Troilus is highly praised to Criseyde, particularly for martial prowess:

For nevere yet so thikke a swarm of been
Ne fleigh, as Grekes for hym gonne fleen (II, 193-194).

The hyperbole must be accepted by the audience and Criseyde as true; it is often repeated in various forms. It must be recalled when Troilus seeks to kill Diomede and is unable to do so, indicating that Diomede's martial skills are equal to those of Troilus.

When Pandarus tells Criseyde of Troilus' love for her, and that it is a matter of life or death to him whether he find favour with her, Criseyde must be taken to believe it; to her it is not hyperbolic nonsense. Pandarus, thus acting *in loco parentis* is Criseyde's only source of advice, and both his uselessness and her lack of confidence in him have been noted from Book I.

Pandarus' pressure is relentless, but Criseyde does not accept his counsel without sober reflection and consideration of her point of view, situation and interest, as the meaning of Pandarus' word, "routhe" (II, 349) was well known to her (and to the audience), notwithstanding his disclaimer in II, 352-353 that he is no baud, softened by "ye make hym bettre chiere" (II, 360). Criseyde thinks, and decides, "I shal felen what he meneth, ywis" (II, 387).

When Pandarus advises "that ye hym love ayeyn for his lovynge…" (II, 391), Criseyde is in tears (II, 408). She rebukes him for encouraging her to love, with its presumed sexual consequences, something she avers she

would expect him to oppose (II, 413). Criseyde's rebuke is fierce (II, 414-427), and Pandarus leaves, not before reminding Criseyde that Troilus' and his lives depend on her decision; which she takes seriously as a possibility (II, 459, 466).

The reader is reminded,

> Criseyde, which that wel neigh starf for feere
> So as she was the ferfulleste wight
> That myghte be… (II, 449-451)

began to "rewe" (II, 455) (a combination of feeling sorry and leaning to "mercy"), because as Pandarus presented Troilus' wishes, "and in his preier… (she) saugh noon unright" (II, 453).

Criseyde weights her options "ful sleighly" (II, 462), and concludes that "maken (Troilus) good chere" (II, 471) is the lesser of two evils – not yet a positive good – and obtains from Pandarus confirmation "ye nothyng elles me requere?" (II, 473). Her words, "I wol doon my peyne" (II, 475), confirm her reluctance; physical love is far from her mind at this time, and will only develop later under the catalyst of physical contact. Her honour must be protected and she sets limits to her involvement lest Pandarus

"depper go" (II, 485). Although Criseyde firmly informed Pandarus that whatever dire consequences may result, "ne shal I nevere of hym han other routhe" (II, 489), her curiosity aroused, Criseyde asks of Troilus' eloquence in matters of love. Pandarus smiles (II, 505), recognizing this as a prologue to what is to come "whan ye ben his al hool as he is youre" (II, 587), to which Criseyde answers, "nay, therof spak I nought, ha! ha!" (II, 589). Criseyde knows where the path may lead.

In her private chambers, Criseyde considered her situation and affirmed she was not obliged to love Troilus against her will, when by coincidence Troilus, fresh from successful battle rode by. His physical presence she found intoxicating (II, 651), and she carefully considered her options, weighing at great length the pros and cons of going "depper" (II, 659-812).

Chaucer takes care at the beginning of Criseyde's deliberation to deny this was "a sodeyn love" (II, 667) and declares it was not a love at first sight (II, 669), by Criseyde:

> For I sey nought that she so sodeynly
> Yaf hym hire love, but that she gan enclyne
> To like hym first…

And after that, his manhod and his pyne

Made love withinne hire for to myne

For which by proces and by good servyse

He gat hire love, and in no sodeyn wyse (II, 673-679).

In Troilus' favour was his *estat* (social position and/or wealth), his renown, his wit and gentillesse, (which at this time she can only know by reputation), and that he was smitten by her – "if that he mente trouthe" (II, 665), Criseyde indicating a sophisticated knowledge of (some) men's propensity to hyperbolic lies in courting.

Criseyde's reasoning confirms Chaucer's warning that love came slowly, as she thought "Al were it nought to doone / To graunte hym love, yet for his worthynesse, / It were honour *with pley* and with gladnesse" (emphasis added), (II, 703-705). This is cold calculation; granting love implies a physical aspect, as love is not engendered by reason, but by emotion. She continues – his health is a factor, but her position in Troy is (remained) tenuous and Troilus is a Prince with the power to do her harm if she refuses social contact, which would not therefore be wise. Moreover, he is not a boaster. If people believe Troilus loves her, "what dishonour were it unto me?" (II, 731) – raising questions previously considered with respect to

marriage, clandestinity, and the question of honour under the circumstances. However, Criseyde is fascinated by the fact that excepting only Hector, Troilus "is the worthiest" (II, 739) and could have had others "to ben his love" (II, 738), implying by *love* to be his social and sexual companion.

Criseyde is genteel and often pragmatic though short-sighted. During her vascillating reflections she noted that she is not a member of a religious order, under a vow of abstinence (II, 759).

The negatives are then considered. Criseyde, a widow, with wealth and social position, is her "owene woman" (II, 750) without a husband to thwart her wishes and be her master. She wavers;

> What shal I doon? To what fyn lyve I thus?
> Shal I nat love, in cas if that me leste ? (II, 757-758),

then declaring she is not "religious" (II, 759) and may retain her honour and reputation if she sets her heart on Troilus, then vascillates, leaning in the opposite direction:

> …Alas, syn I am free
> Sholde I now love and put in jupartie
> My sikernesse, and thrallen libertee? (II, 771-773)

One wonders what the audience thought in hearing Criseyde's rumination continue: love is the most stormy life, always with lack of trust, weeping in woe, victims of rumours, unfaithful men who abandon to "love" another.

How ofte tyme hath it yknowen be
The tresoun that to wommen hath ben do! (II, 792-793)

Yet if she loves, she must be busy to please "hem", pacifying and cajoling. Many in the audience must have winced at this catalogue of negatives, but it fits in well with Chaucer's declaration at the end of Book V that he wrote most for women.

Criseyde at this point has come to no conclusion, "now hoot, now cold" (II, 811); although recognizing that "He which that nothing undertaketh, / Nothing n'acheveth" (II, 807-808), words which will be echoed in time by Diomede (V, 784).

On hearing Antigone's song of joyful mutual love, with its argument that love is neither thralldom nor vice, ending:

Aldredde I first to love hym to bigynne

Now woot I wel, there is no peril inne (II, 874-875)

Criseyde is informed that "every wrecche" does not know love's perfect bliss, but "…wenen al / Be love, if oon be hoot" (II, 890, 892) whereas nobility and similar worthies are elevated by true love.

Criseyde, under the influence of the words of Antigone's song,

My deere herte and al myn owen knight
In which myn herte growen is so faste
And his in me, that it shal evere laste (emphasis added), (II, 871-873)

dreamed that night a white feathered eagle painlessly exchanged his heart for hers. Whether this be prophecy or the dreamer's wish cannot be concluded, but the white – purity – eagle – raptor or warrior of highest rank – betokens Troilus and prepares the audience for what is to come, and Criseyde's slow acquiescence.

However, when Pandarus next seeks to deliver a letter from Troilus, upon the transmogrification from reverie to something tangible, Criseyde demurs, rebuking Pandarus:

To myn estat have more reward, I preye,

Than to his lust (II, 1133-1134),

words confirming her fears Troilus is lust-driven, and Pandarus favours him over her. When Pandarus thrusts the letter into her bosom, she laughs, decompressing. Criseyde goes off to read it alone, and admires the letter's craftsmanship. (She must have had a basis for comparison).

Pandarus pried a letter in reply out of Criseyde, who has not yet met Troilus. Her letter understandably is cold: she will not bind herself in love but as a sister will please him (II, 1222-1224).

The pendulum swings when Troilus rides by and his personal and martial appearance again have an effect on Criseyde's feelings, reflected in her response to Pandarus, who asks if causing his death by her lack of *routhe* "were it wel doon?" (II, 1280-1281). Criseyde's answer, "nay, by my trouthe" (II, 1281), is the beginning moment of her yielding – consenting is perhaps a more appropriate word. Pandarus importunes Criseyde to meet and speak to Troilus, but she is reticent; "it were ek to soone / To graunten hym so gret a libertee…" (II, 1291-1292) for at this point in time she would love him "unwist" and reward him only with sight (II, 1294-1295). Courtship and mating rituals exist in all societies. Moreover Criseyde still values her freedom from the constraints of love: marriage was never Troilus'

intent. Criseyde's consideration of the negatives of marriage merely reveals that it is on her mind at all times.

A blizzard of letters follow (II, 1142-1143), leading to the gathering at Deiphebus at which Pandarus pressures Criseyde, encourages Troilus, and brings about their first meeting.

The slow path leads from being Troilus "suster" (II, 1224) to bedmate, the route being from the first meeting at Deiphebus' residence to a climactic III, 175-182, when Criseyde begins kissing Troilus. The reader is informed that Troilus "so ful stood in his lady grace" (II, 472) and is thus prepared for the physical consummation of their affair.

Pandarus arranges Troilus and Criseyde's first meeting ostensibly so that Criseyde may ask for Troilus' continued support re an alleged claim about the nature of which she knows nothing.

Criseyde is not shy: during this their first meeting she "gan bothe hire hondes softe upon hym leye" (III, 72). Troilus is tongue-tied but Criseyde "…was wis, and loved hym nevere the lasse / Al nere he malapert…" (III, 86-87). The *love* of III, 86 is ambiguous, and probably includes emotional and physical components.

Troilus, physically motivated, twice utters the word "mercy" (III, 98), and in his peroration addresses Criseyde as "wommanliche wyf" (III, 106). *The Riverside Chaucer* edition glosses "wyf" here as "woman" and the phrase as "womanly woman", (p. 515), which is somewhat inelegant, but elsewhere "wyf" is wife! (p. 1306). For Criseyde and for the audience the word has eerie overtones, for when Criseyde asks that Troilus tell her "the fyn of his entente" (III, 125) – it is not to make Criseyde a "wyf", however "wommanlyche" she may be. He will serve her diligently, but in "secret" (III, 142). Criseyde accepts Troilus as long as her honour is safe (III, 159), declaring she will receive him *fully* (my emphasis) into her service "in swich forme as (Troilus) gan now devyse" (III, 160). The form of mercy is clear to all. Speaking to Pandarus, in Troilus' presence, Criseyde states:

> Bysechyng hym, for Goddes love, that he
> Wolde, in honour of trouthe and gentilesse
> As I wel mene, ek menen wel to me,
> And myn honour with wit and bisynesse
> Ay kepe; *and if I may don hym gladnesse,*
> *From hennesforth, iwys, I nyl nought feyne.*

and, directly to Troilus,

> Now beth al hool; no lenger ye ne pleyne (emphasis added)
>
> (III, 162-168).

There is an unspoken commitment clearly implied that full mercy will be granted: Criseyde will "don hym gladnesse" in time: she has consented and yielded. Troilus, however will not have absolute sovereignty and will be subject to rebuke if he does wrong in Criseyde's opinion.

The clarity and meaning of lines III, 176-182 leave no doubt that a future physical relationship is intended, promised.

> And shortly, deere herte and al my knyght,
>
> Beth glad, and *draweth yow to lustinesse,*
>
> And I shal trewely, *with al my myght,*
>
> Youre bittre tornen al into swetenesse
>
> *If I be she that may yow do gladnesse*
>
> For every wo ye shal recovere a blisse –
>
> *And hym in armes took,* and gan hym kisse (emphases added).

There could be no turning back now by Criseyde, nor false modesty. Due to Troilus' lack of imagination and initiative, for some time they only have brief, furtive conversations (III, 450-459), which *status quo*, pleased Criseyde (III, 474), though they infrequently met (III, 509).

When Pandarus asks Criseyde to sup at his residence she is wise and wary enough to ask if Troilus will be there (III, 569), which Pandarus denies, but questions what if he were, if secret. Chaucer coyly states he is not aware of what his "auctour" thought Criseyde thought, or if she believed Pandarus: she cautioned Pandarus, "loke al be wel" (III, 588), indicating her continuing uncertainty as to whether Troilus would be there or not.

Criseyde reacts indignantly to the rumour of her alleged dealings with the fictitious Horaste. Chaucer, while creating characters who differ from the inherited delineations, sometimes teasingly retains the elements thereof: Pandarus admonishes Criseyde, "ye nolde / Hym nevere falsen while ye lyven sholde," (III, 783,-784). Criseyde "…nevere *yet* agylte hym…" (III, 840), and, again, "…untrewe to Troylus was *nevere yet* Criseyde (III, 1053-1054) (emphases added); thus Chaucer whetted the interest of his audience. However, in the then present circumstances, while offering that Troilus

receive a blue ring, she knows "… For ther is nothing myghte hym bettre plese / Save I myself…" (III, 886-887).

Assured by Pandarus, "harm may ther be non, ne synne" (III, 913), and the Narrator observes that Pandarus' reassurance of Criseyde is "so like a sooth at prime face", (III, 919), the still hesitating Criseyde, at her wit's end (III, 931), consents to Troilus' visit by shifting responsibility, "doth herof as yow list" (III, 939), insisting on "so discret a wise / That I honour may have, and he plesaunce" (III, 943-944). There can be no doubt that Criseyde knows at this moment that sexual intercourse will occur. Pandarus' words are crude: "But liggeth stille and taketh hym right here…and ech of yow ese otheres sorwes smerte…" (III, 948, 950).

Criseyde blushes, no doubt at Troilus' sudden entry and Pandarus' continued presence, but she kissed Troilus and apparently not he her (III, 972). Criseyde embarks on a long speech to Troilus on his qualities that brought her to consent, and promises to "ben to yow trewe and hool with al myn herte" (III, 1001). She cautions Troilus against jealousy for six stanzas, (III, 1009-1050) a bow to the received tale, and a warning, mitigated for the audience and foreshadowing by "som manere jalousie / Is excusable more than som, iwys, / As whanne cause is…" (III, 1030-1032).

When Criseyde sheds tears, Troilus, as ever inept, faints. Criseyde "ofte hym kiste" (III, 1117) performing her own brand of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and, on Troilus' revival, she continued the therapy (III, 1129). The consummation scene, discussed previously, takes place. The couple sleeps little through the night and at dawn Criseyde tells Troilus to get up and leave the premises or her honour and reputation will be lost.

In the exchange of lengthy, operatic, farewells, Troilus' preoccupation is with when they shall meet again (planning is beyond him) (III, 1526), as "desir right now so brenneth me" (III, 1482), whereas Criseyde pledges love and fidelity, but is concerned, reminding Troilus "Beth to me trewe" (III, 1511) and informs Troilus she is as eager as he for future encounters:

> And 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 (III, 1515-1517)

and she takes Troilus in her arms and "ofte keste" (III, 1519), thus assuring the reader that her return to sexual activity was pleasing and welcome.

However, Pandarus, on the morrow, teases Criseyde, which causes her to blush, she being obviously modest, and embarrassed at his knowledge and lack of tact. The most startling lines of the poem follow:

With that his arm al sodeynly he thriste
Under hire nekke, and at the laste hire kyste
I passe al that which chargeth nought to seye (III, 1574-1576).

What else did Pandarus do "that chargeth nought to seye"? It must have been something sexual or at least physical left to the imagination of the reader and audience. Criseyde is said to forgive it, whatever it was, (III, 1577-1578), but it must be remembered as a reason Criseyde felt alone even with Pandarus about, and an additional reason for Criseyde to be fearful, as the words clearly imply she was subject to abuse. This also lends additional meaning to the line "And Pandarus hath fully his entente" (III, 1582).

Troilus and Criseyde had repeated trysts arranged by Pandarus, not by Troilus:

In joie and suerte Pandarus hem two
Abedde brought whan that hem bothe leste
And thus they ben in quyete and in reste (III, 1678-1680)

If the reader were unaware of the basic story outline, Chaucer, in the Prohemium to Book Four, abandons any pretense of surprise in the plot: Diomede will be set up high on Fortune's wheel, and Troilus will be cast aside, a fatalism binding due to the inherited plot. However, Chaucer's primary interest was in the revelation of character as shaped by events.

Chaucer alerts (warns) his readers he must write

> For *how* Criseyde Troilus forsook –
> Or at the leeste, how that she was unkynde – …
> (emphasis added) (IV, 15-16).

The word *how* has many meanings and in this context I would gloss it as *in what manner* and/or *under what circumstances.* Chaucer cautions readers

> Allas, that they sholde evere cause fynde
> To speke hire harm! And if they on hire lye
> Iwis, hemself sholde han the vilanye (IV, 19-21).

The intent is clear: some may criticize Criseyde but, if attentive readers, they should not. If they do, it would be an untruth, the shame for which should rebound upon these lying, criticizing readers who "speke hire harm."

Mills observes in his notes to Book Four, (267), that this stanza is within lines 8-28 of Book Four, all of which have no equivalent in Boccaccio. They are therefore Chaucer's pure invention, to be given great weight in interpretation, particularly as nowhere did an anti-female diatribe find its way into the poem.

When Troilus learns of the requested exchange of Antenor for Criseyde his response is consistent; he "no word to it seyde" (IV, 152) lest his affection become known. He could have stated his intention to marry but convinced himself at this time Criseyde wanted secrecy above all else. We have seen she preferred marriage, which wasn't "the fyn of his entente" (III, 125). Faced with the dilemma of declaring his love and risking Criseyde's anger, and seeing her sent to the Greek camp, as usual Troilus rationalizes himself into inaction, not even speaking in support of Hector's vibrantly stated first position, or suggesting negotiations to substitute other captives for Criseyde in the exchange. One cannot imagine Diomede silently observing while inwardly groaning and bemoaning.

Hector, notwithstanding his promise of safety in Troy "whil yow good list" (I, 119), bowed to parliament and betrayed his assurances and Criseyde. Troilus refuses to follow Pandarus' advice "To take a womman which that

loveth the / And wolde hireselven ben of thyn assent" (V, 534-535). Troilus wants Criseyde's prior consent (IV, 637), a consent not given, a decision Criseyde later comes (for a time?) to regret.

Criseyde affirms her permanent love for Troilus "while that hire lif may laste" (IV, 675-678). She is always aware of the pain to Troilus (e.g., IV, 749, 755, 794, 899, 903) but Troilus is usually bewailing his loss of *consortium.*

Claiming to be afraid of handling "swerd ne darte" (IV, 771), Criseyde declares she will starve herself on leaving Troilus, and live in mourning and "abstinence" (IV, 784) until death. Ironically, Criseyde gives utterance while alone to advice to Troilus to "foryete…me…" (IV, 796-797). Life goes on and has possibilities. These will occur in her favour, not to Troilus, hence irony. Criseyde's sorrow is total at this time: she doesn't have the skills to foresee events.

Pandarus enters; Criseyde is uncertain if she should welcome him, "That alderfirst me broughte unto servyse of love" (IV, 832-833). Interestingly, this contradicts what she will later tell Diomede (V, 974-978), suggesting (a) she didn't love her late husband or (b) she is lying to

Diomede or (c) she is inconsistent, or (d) Pandarus arranged her meeting (and marriage) to her husband, whom she did love. Another puzzle.

Criseyde then asks the famous question, "Endeth than love in wo?" (IV, 834), answering *yes* from the depths of despair. Her outpouring must be recognized as such:- the exchange for Antenor was not inevitable, merely unforeseen, and not effectively combatted.

Pandarus advises Criseyde, about to tryst with Troilus, to plan as "wommen ben wise in short avysement" (IV, 936), a phrase she will echo to Troilus (IV, 1261-1262) but the planning will prove to be unrealistic and ineffectual.

Troilus ponders at length whether or not humanity has free choice or if all is foreordained, but comes to no conclusion. Inasmuch as all characters act, and their choices, whether foreknown by the Diety or not, result in changed facts, Chaucer, if the rumination mirrors his thinking, appears to believe in free choice the choices of which may be foreknown. Criseyde (Chaucer?) appears to accept a position pithily expressed by Jawaharlal Nehru: "Life is like a game of cards. The hand that is dealt you is determinism; the way you play it is free will"[8]

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[8] Quoted in *The Montreal Gazette,* April 25, 2006, 1.

The couple meets: Criseyde speaks first; “Help Troilus” (IV, 1150) and swoons into a deep faint, appearing as if dead. Troilus, under this impression, is about to commit suicide with his sword (IV, 1185), when Criseyde regains consciousness, espies the sword and declares that had Troilus done so,

> …with this selve swerd which that here is,
> Myselve I wolde han slawe… (IV, 1240-1241).

This contradicts her previous statement that she could not touch a sword (IV, 771), indirectly cautioning the audience to take her extreme, often hyperbolic statements with several grains of the proverbial salt. However, *in extremis* Criseyde galvanizes Troilus “streght to bedde” (IV, 1243), *inter alia* to discuss and seek a solution to their problem. Criseyde takes confidence from Pandarus’ words and declares she is “avysed sodeynly” (IV, 1262) as a woman, linking her confidence to gender, a naïve confidence here utterly misplaced. She prefaces her delineation of a suggested plan of action (or inaction) by declaring,

> For in effect what so ye me comaunde
> That wol I don… (IV, 1294-1295).

Troilus doesn't command, but thus becomes responsible for the inaction and failure of Criseyde's declared hopes and plans.

Criseyde then asserts that it is too late to attempt to reverse the decision of Parliament but she will not be gone long. Criseyde avers that she will return during a truce and be back within 10 days – "so as we shal togideres evere dwelle" (IV, 1322). How this squares with her insistence Troilus wait 10 days for her honour (secrecy) (IV, 1329) is difficult to understand, and reveals confused thought, not planning. Criseyde's next arguments are that her father doesn't know how well she is treated while living in Troy; and when he does, he will not oppose her return; there is a likelihood of peace; that during negotiations it will be possible to go from one camp to the other; if there is no peace, she "moste come" (IV, 1361), because she couldn't dwell among the (Greek) men in arms, ever in fear; her father's age and greed will induce him to consent to her return to bring out his (their) remaining valuables; and she will convince her father, the seer, that he misunderstood the gods! The Narrator assures the audience that Criseyde was "of good entente" (IV, 1416); "hire herte trewe was and kynde / Towardes hym" (IV, 1417-1418), "…and was in purpos evere to be trewe" (IV, 1420). Troilus allowed himself to be convinced for the moment, and

they turned joyously to “th’ amorouse daunce” (IV, 1431), foreplay and then play. However Troilus’ doubts resurface, fearing Criseyde might be untrue, or not return at the appointed time, and declares he will kill himself if she delays, and, finally, the senseless, “Dwelle rather here” (IV, 1449), notwithstanding Parliament’s decision and his silence at the crucial time before it was made. Troilus doesn’t believe Criseyde’s plans are capable of realization and fears Calchas will marry her to a Greek (IV, 1472), an arrangement he never proposed for himself. Troilus rather implores “lat us stele awey bitwixe us tweye” (IV, 1503). Criseyde refuses, but again strongly pledges fidelity. She also reminds Troilus he has a duty to perform in defence of Troy and if he failed “What trowe ye that the peple ek al about / Wolde of it seye?” (IV, 1569-1570) thus reminding the audience of her concern for public opinion and honour (IV, 1575-1577), which concern is the reason why “in this forme I sholde with you wende” (IV, 1579) is unacceptable to Criseyde.

Troilus again suggests stealing secretly away (IV, 1601), and a distraught Criseyde accuses Troilus of mistrust, reminding him that she has pledged her word, and asserting that she is intelligent and resourceful enough to manage to return.

In the stanza IV, 1632-38, Criseyde reveals great maturity, telling Troilus to shape up, and again pledges fidelity while cautioning him to remain faithful, cataloguing the many qualities of Troilus that won her love.

On parting from Troy and Troilus Criseyde's sorrow is overwhelming (V, 17-21). Alone with Diomede, she is subject to a most eloquent wooing and ingratiation, finely calibrated and intensified almost line by line, honestly set out as Diomede does not hide the fact that he wishes to pre-empt the competition of other Greek knights.

Criseyde claims to have heard Diomede's conversational pitch "but here and ther, now here a word or two" (V, 179) but knew that life in the Greek camp may be dangerous for a single, propertied, beautiful woman with an unreliable father. From Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, in which women are the spoils of war, through the plights of displaced women in the Two World Wars of the twentieth century, the Rape of Nanking, the male conduct in the wars of the nations of the former Yugoslavia, to the present conflicts in Africa, women have always suffered and endured humiliation and worse. Chaucer, I strongly suggest had a deeper and truer understanding of the pressures on Criseyde than most because he had been a prisoner of war in France. Chaucer knew life in an army camp under conditions of

warfare, first his own, and then the enemy's (Howard, 506). This would be common knowledge to Criseyde and the audience. Criseyde therefore wisely and prudently accepts Diomede's offer of friendship (V, 185-186), and declares she will trust him. Chaucer is careful to note that Criseyde was "with wommen fewe among the Greekis stronge" (V, 688).

Criseyde is distraught: "now is wors than evere yet I wende" (V, 693). Calkas will not permit her to leave the camp, and it will seem, and "my Troilus" (V, 697) will think I am false if I don't return within the stipulated time. If she steals away, she may be held to be a spy, and/or she may fall into the hands of "som wrecche" (V, 705). Criseyde feels forlorn: "I nam but lost, al be myn herte trewe" (V, 706). Her despair is set out at length (V, 712-735). The positive optimistic plans articulated in Troy are now acknowledged to be impossible to carry out without risking rape and/or death when considered from the perspective of presence in the Greek camp.

Criseyde, not the wisest person and with limited foresight, now regrets not going off with Troilus (V, 736-737): "who myghte han sayd that I hadde don amys / To stele awey with swich oon as he ys?" (V, 738-739). Had Troilus been more persuasive, less passive and timid, perhaps she actually would have gone off with him when it was possible to do so.

Criseyde does have, however, a practical approach to her situation, and realizes "To late is now to speke of that matere" (V, 743). Bemoaning her lack of foresight, she momentarily decides to ignore gossip and

> …bityde what bitide
> I shal tomorwe at nyght…
> Out of this oost stele in som manere syde
> And gon with Troylus where as hym lest (V, 750-753),

as if she can now ignore diminished reputation if that is the price of life with Troilus, whom she still loves.

However, two months pass without Criseyde acting on her resolve, being, as the reader has been repeatedly told, the most fearful of people. Therefore, deciding - "wol take a purpose" (V, 770) - to remain in the Greek camp; "bothe Troilus and Troie toun …knotteles thorughout hire herte slyde" (V, 768-769).

During this period Diomede is not idle: he relentlessly, intelligently and sincerely woos Criseyde,[9] with vigour and insight into Criseyde's mind and emotions.

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[9] Diomede's pursuit of Criseyde will be analysed more fully in the chapter on *The Character of Diomede.*

On the tenth day, the day Criseyde was to return to Troy, Diomede calls and a poised Criseyde, not apparently distraught, welcomes him with spices and wine, and chatted "of this and that…as frendes don" (V, 853-854). Criseyde is thus confronted by a wise and wily ingratiator who engages in social discourse by asking Criseyde's opinions of the siege, then of the Greeks, and why her father had not married her to a worthy person. Still in love with Troilus (V, 865), "it semed nat she wiste what (Diomede) mente" (V, 868). Diomede launches his pitch in unmistakable terms: she is always in sorrow, "But if for love of som Troian it were" (V, 877) don't waste your tears as Troy is doomed; "Lat Troie and Troian fro youre herte pace" (V, 912). Criseyde hears Diomede: "a moore parfit love *er it be nyght*" (emphasis added) (V, 919) he suggests can be found in the Greek camp, and "I wol ben he to serven yow myselve" (V, 923), thus accelerating the process, risking rebuff. He continues, declaring his social position and family background, and concludes,

> But herte myn, syn that I am youre man
> And ben the first of whom I seche grace (V, 939-940).

He requests

Ye wol me graunte that I may tomorwe

At bettre leyser, telle yow my sorwe (V, 944-945).

Criseyde at this point, keeps her options open, permitting Diomede to call on the morrow, but not to speak of his personal interest. Chaucer declares that "she that hadde hire herte on Troilus / So faste" (V, 953-954), answered "straungely" (V, 955), a word Mills glosses as "distantly" (225), and *The Riverside Chaucer* as "distantly, coldly" (573), but at *Riverside*, 1294, the glossary gives additional meanings to *straungely,* including *strange, surprising* and *reservedly.* Criseyde parried Diomede without rejecting him; praising him (V, 972-973) without commitment. She utilizes widowhood and the love she perhaps falsely but understandingly claims to have borne for her late husband as her only love, and declares that at the present time "love and I ben fer ysonder" (V, 983). Criseyde nevertheless strings Diomede on, asserting "*as yet* me list nat pleye" (emphasis added) (V, 987), giving hope to Diomede. She tells him that when the Greeks have won the war, without stating all that that implies, then she will feel differently, but invites him to come the next day "and whan yow list, ye may come here ayayn" (V, 997), but not to speak of love; yet, paradoxically, she assures Diomede "If that I sholde of any Grek han routhe / It sholde be

youreselven, by my trouthe" (V, 1000-1001). Criseyde continues that she cannot say whether or not she will love Diomede, but sighs and prays to God that she may again see – return to – Troy in peace (V, 1007-1008).

The meaning of *routhe* is clear to Diomede. Criseyde has mixed feelings: her continuing feelings for Troy and Troilus are made clear, while at the identical time her interest in (and the unstated attraction of) Diomede is equally obvious. Criseyde likes to keep her options open.

Diomede, thus encouraged, "gan pressen on" (V, 1011) and prayed for mercy (V, 1011) – sex unmistakably, collecting a glove, a symbolic act, obviously permitted.

Criseyde, exactly as she did before consenting to close friendship and intimacy with Troilus, repeats the process with Diomede, mulling over and cataloguing in his favour "his grete estat and perel of the town (Troy)" (V, 1025), that she was alone, and she needed protection (V, 1023-1029). Thus Criseyde's decision to remain in the Greek camp "bygan to brede" (V, 1027), while Diomede "gan pressen on" (V, 1011), and "So wel *he for hymselven spak and seyde*" (emphasis added) (V, 1033), that the contrast to Troilus must have been palpable. Diomede relieved Criseyde of her anxiety. The text suggests that Criseyde's psychological intention is to see Diomede

in part as a Troilus substitute and thus the broach that Troilus gave her is passed on to Diomede. A horse was a significant gift, but emotionally revealing is the fact that "*she made hym* were a pencel of hire sleve" (emphasis added) (V, 1043). However, Chaucer cautions the reader, "men seyn – I not – that she yaf hym hire herte" (V, 1050). While there can be no turning back from Diomede, at this point in the story, Criseyde does not as yet love Diomede. There is a significant time lapse until the time of line V, 1746, by which time we are told "Criseyde loveth the sone of Tideus."

Criseyde bewails having been false to Troilus, that her reputation is – will be – lost, in books and when spoken of, but ever the pragmatist, she carries on:

> But syn I se ther is no bettre way
> And that to late is now for me to rewe,
> To Diomede algate I wol be trewe (V, 1069-1071)

but weeps on averring Troilus will now have "frendes love" (V, 1080).

As with slowly inclining to Troilus, so with Diomede:

> For though that he bigan to wowe hire soone
> Er he hire wan, yet was ther more to doone (V, 1091-1092).

There is no record of how long it took, and Chaucer declined to invent a timeframe.

Chaucer declares that Criseyde's loss of reputation should suffice as punishment. Trapped in the received tale, he concludes that he doesn't wish to rebuke Criseyde (V, 1093), adding "Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe" (V, 1099).

Here is Criseyde, betrayed by her father who abandoned her in a doomed town for over three years, by Pandarus who used her to satisfy Troilus, if not more, by Hector who did not keep his word to protect Criseyde in Troy, and by Troilus who was silent when he should have spoken and did not marry Criseyde when it was possible to do so. Her plans to return to Troy were fraught with danger and can be described as impossible. It is no wonder that Diomede's suit is ultimately successful. Once in the Greek camp, alone, vulnerable, in danger of wretches, fearful, she needed and therefore did not discourage protection. Criseyde is judged by many critics and readers as if she left Troilus for another while she was still in Troy.

The reader is told that Troilus slipped knotless through Criseyde's heart, but not precisely when. Two months (and some days) after separation,

the reader is informed in summary Criseyde's answer to Troilus' letter, giving him hope that she would return, but didn't know when (V, 1428) and "swereth she loveth hym best" (V, 1430). There is no reason to believe that this is untrue at this time. *Best* may mean more than Diomede (at the moment of writing). Criseyde is as usual keeping her options open: if Troy wins and Diomede is killed she may wish to resume her situation with Troilus. The word "best" is both unfortunate and revealing, but its comparative nature must give Troilus pause.

Troilus wrote frequently, beseeching Criseyde to return. Criseyde replies in a letter Troilus thought strange (V, 1632). Criseyde describes herself as "in torment and in drede" (V, 1592), (which is not untrue), but to cool Troilus, with cause perhaps more obvious to the reader than to Criseyde, she wonders

> Nor other thyng nys in your remembraunce
> As thynketh me but only youre plesaunce (V, 1607-1608)

and adds other charges which to the reader appear knowingly false. There are omissions which Criseyde claims she dare not write as there would be no

guarantee of privacy, but this does not ring true, yet may be so to fearful Criseyde.

Troilus learns all when he sees the broach he gave to Criseyde captured from Diomede, and wallows in self-pity while taking no responsibility for the situation. After the passage of time "Criseyde loveth the sone of Tideus" (V, 1746), presumably *loveth* in its multiple meanings. It may well be that at that moment Criseyde truly loved Troilus best while now loving Diomede, a question for philosophers, polygamists and polyandrists.

Chaucer is loath to accuse Criseyde of forsaking Troilus (IV, 15-16). Although she was "unkynde", she is not to be vilified (IV, 20). Criseyde would have preferred an open, honourable relationship with Troilus, and mused on the pros and cons of marriage, but Troilus pre-empted her choice. Troilus wanted sex and a limited, clandestine companionship (and no more, until too late), though never marriage. His attachment to Criseyde deepened into love, but Troilus bears the moral responsibility for not making certain it would be permanent while the possibility of doing so existed.

Chaucer states the traditional story outline, but by altering so many of the details, including the delineation of Criseyde's character, he distances

himself from it, particularly by his pity, excusing Criseyde, understanding the pressures she was under.

What is *betrayal*? I do not characterize Criseyde's acts as a betrayal of Troilus, quite the reverse. Criseyde is-was a decent woman forced into dangerous circumstances who had every reason to need and seek male protection. Notwithstanding her personal preferences, her decision to accept Diomede as a protector and lover was a rational choice to ensure her survival, her comfort (*estaat*) and with whom to enjoy a quality personal and physical life, she being "lusty, fre" (V, 823). Criseyde is not to be criticized for avoiding death and/or dishonour; martyrdom is not everyone's choice, and love did develop. Therefore it is astonishing to read the self-proclaimed feminist Jill Mann's *Feminizing Chaucer* and see to what extent this respected scholar has missed the degree to which Chaucer altered the heart of the work while leaving the outer shell substantially intact. Mann states:

> So it is necessary to insist again that Criseyde's exchange does not make her betrayal inevitable; any of the possibilities she hypothesizes as likely to bring about her return to Troy could have realized itself (IV, 1345-1414). Her betrayal is due neither to masculine ideology nor to feminine weakness (though these may have a role to play in the

> contingencies that create the conditions for it), but to the human propensity to change with changing circumstances… Elopement may have ensured Criseyde's fidelity or it may simply have led to a different betrayal.[10]

There is absolutely neither cause nor textual justification for this speculative negativity. While masculine ideology had nothing to do with the alleged betrayal, the segment Mann brackets does. Calchas forbade Criseyde's return to Troy (V, 694-695). Mann's analysis is difficult to accept as Criseyde was betrayed and exchanged, notwithstanding Hector's promise of protection. The exchange became an exile. To state that "any of the possibilities she (Criseyde) hypothesizes as likely to bring about her return to Troy could have realized itself (IV, 1345-1414)" reveals Mann to be as naïve as Criseyde. To declare "her (Criseyde's) betrayal is due…to the human propensity to change with changing circumstances…"reveals Mann's analysis to be superficial. The words "change with" are wrong; the words "adapt to" would be a more accurate and appropriate reading. Chaucer's Criseyde did not change, nor did she betray. Had Mann (re)read *The Trojan*

[10] Mann, Jill, *Feminizing Chaucer*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, Great Britain, 2002, 143-144

Women by Euripides, she would have had confirmed that women were the spoils of war, a fear in Criseyde's consciousness.

Criseyde was a pragmatic survivor who achieved relative stability and happiness and is not to be disparaged for her choices in doing so. A person like Criseyde should be instantly recognized and understood at the present moment in the 21st century C.E., a time in which the previous 100 years have seen literally many tens of millions of women displaced, rendered vulnerable, exploited, physically abused and forced to use their wits and wiles, making unpleasant and undesirable choices, to survive under dreadful circumstances. Criseyde fared better than most, and is to be respected and admired, as I strongly believe Chaucer intended.

Chapter Eight: The Character of Diomede

Diomede, an obviously important Greek warrior, sent to supervise the exchange of the prisoner Antenor for Criseyde and King Toas (V, 15), is described later (V, 799-803), but his "sterne vois and myghty lymes square / Hardy, testif, strong…" (V, 801- 802) would have made an immediate physical impression, even on the distracted Criseyde, as they ride. Chaucer adds, "corageous" (V, 800) and "chivalrous of dedes" (V, 802-803), which must be retroactively considered.

Inasmuch as the tale is of Troilus' double sorrows, the interaction of Criseyde and Diomede is foreshortened. There is no hint of their lives after the book's end nor is the physical consummation of their affair described. Chaucer was free to write an unlimited number of additional stanzas had he desired to add further details, but he did not. Character analysis beyond and not grounded on the text is neither scholarly nor acceptable.

Tatlock, in his essay, *The People in Chaucer's Troilus*, 1959, wisely insisted "…that we must read nothing into an invented characterization which the author's text does not fully justify" (335). It is impossible to quarrel with this principle of methodology, but many critics, including Tatlock, found it difficult to follow.

Calling Chaucer's Diomede "a skilled seducer…a man of obvious experience with (women)", having "a cool technique as a seducer" (337), Tatlock states Diomede "gives Criseyde to understand that he is hers for life" (338).

However, abandoning his methodological principles, Tatlock opines that the delineation of Diomede in Henryson and in "the *inevitable* (emphasis added) course of events in his tiring of (Criseyde) and abandoning her" (338) somehow retroacts to Chaucer's characterization. There is nothing *in Chaucer's text* to justify the opinion that Diomede's conduct in Henryson, the abandonment of Criseyde, was inevitable or is in any way relevant to an analysis of Chaucer's characterization of Diomede. Nevertheless, this shallow and unwarranted critical evaluation is endemic.

Mann, in 1991, in *Feminizing Chaucer* (reprinted in 2002) asserts, "Chaucer's Diomede…is a calculating seducer who seems simply to want another female scalp for his collection – and will even, it is suggested, boast about it afterwards, "som men seyn he was of tonge large" (V, 804) (Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 25).

Mann declares in *Feminizing Chaucer* that her interpretation of *Troilus and Criseyde* is "from a feminist standpoint, in the light of modern

feminist writings" (vii). Declaring Chaucer "chooses to tell the classic story of female betrayal" (14), Mann avers

> Criseyde's yielding to Diomede thus ironically repeats and mirrors her yielding to Troilus. The reorientation of the self which is applauded and welcomed when it leads to her ecstatic union with Troilus is bitterly parodied in her supine capitulation to Diomede (24).

The process, Criseyde's acceptance of familiarity and friendship (leading to love) with Diomede is identical to that with Troilus, but is in no way a parody, nor does the text justify the use of "bitterly", "supine", nor "capitulation". The implied future physical union with Diomede is outside the text but nothing suggests it would not have been as ecstatic as that with Troilus. Mann's is a prejudiced reading perpetuating errors in interpretation.

Critics who disparage Diomede fasten on the image of the hook and line to "fisshen hire" (V, 777) into his net, but ignore that Diomede sought Criseyde's "herte" (V, 775), and not her body alone, mistaking sincere and effective courtship for callous seduction. Diomede's intentions are confirmed by V, 782, "hire herte for t'acoye", and "I wol hire herte seche"

(V, 797). The ever active Diomede plans, in contrast to the ever passive Troilus,

> How he may best, with shortest taryinge,
> Into his net Criseydes herte brynge.
> To this entent he koude nevere fyne
> To fisshen hire he leyde out hook and lyne (V, 774-777).

The fishing metaphor is not derogatory. Chaucer frequently utilized it in the poem: "…than have ye fisshed fayre" (II, 328); "that han swich oon ykaught withouten net" (II, 583);

> …they kan nought construe how it may jo
> She loveth hym, or whi he loveth here,
> As whi this fish, and naught that, comth to were (III, 33-35)

and "ye humble nettes of my lady deere" (III, 1355).

The fishing image was used positively and had entered the culture through Biblical references, notably Matthew, chapter 4, verses 18 and 19, (in the King James version), "I will make you fishers of men"; repeated almost verbatim in Mark, chapter 1, verses 16 and 17: "I will make you to

become fishers of men," which words are attributed to one who is surely above criticism. The fishing metaphor used by Chaucer is no less respectable, and is descriptive but morally neutral.

The line, "and som men seyn he was of tonge large," (V, 804) is a fascinating and subtle line, exemplifying the attention Chaucer demands of the intelligent reader. The "men" are not identified, and their number is unknown. Chaucer does not write that Diomede had a loose tongue as a fact. Remembering false rumours from *The House of Fame,* one recalls the later line in *Troilus*, "men seyn – I not – that she yaf hym hire herte" (V, 1050), an unambiguous confirmation that rumours are not to be accepted as truth. Furthermore, if Diomede were boastful, how was Criseyde to know? Moreover, his alleged boastfulness might have been of deeds in battle. One must not fantasize beyond the text. Chaucer here is not being bound by the constraints of the inherited story.

That discretion is a vital quality with respect to love affairs has been firmly iterated at length by Pandarus (III, 288-322) in his lecture to Troilus: "That firste vertu is to kepe tonge" (III, 294), lest he become one of "hem (that) avaunte of wommen" (III, 318). The effect wore off Troilus very quickly; "Tho gan he telle hym of his glade nycht" (III, 1646). Critics

besmirch Diomede, but Troilus is the one who lacked discretion and was *of tonge large.*

C. David Benson, in 1990, was guilty of uncritical, careless reading. He refers to Diomede as "rapacious," (Benson, *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde,* 81), a totally unwarranted characterization containing a torrent of negative overtones re both women and property. Benson speaks re Criseyde of "…her coming victimization by the predatory Diomede" (106) and "the future aggression of Diomede against Criseyde" (127), implying physical violence, which has no justification whatsoever. His characterization of Diomede as "a self-interested pragmatist" (86) is valid, but his insistence that Diomede was a man of "cynical rapacity" (146) is not supported by the text. Diomede would wisely remind Benson, "He is a fool that wol foryete hymselve" (V, 98).

Diomede's protestations of never having had paramours or loved women (V, 155-161) may or may not be true, and if untrue are no more to be held against him than Criseyde's false declaration that her late husband was her only love (V, 974-978) is to be held against her. These denials are pro forma and are not blots on their moral escutcheons. One should never be expected to reveal one's past to an actual or potential new *amour*.

Bias in interpretation and character evaluation is continued by Fumo, one of the most recent scholars to echo Tatlock, Benson, Mann and others. Fumo describes Diomede as "…a sexual entrepreneur and megalomaniac who is, for all intents and purposes, incapable of love as it has been defined and valued throughout the poem" (Fumo, 69). This statement is ex cathedra, without textual citation in support. Her prejudice against Diomede is again visible in her declaration:

> When Criseyde swings back into optimism two stanzas later, she reprises her formulation pragmatically: "He which that nothing undertaketh, / Nothyng n'acheveth' (2.807-8). But even if this proverb were not later discoloured by our knowledge of Diomede's use of it in resolving to seduce Criseyde (5.784)… (Fumo, 80)

Fumo can't accept that Chaucer's giving similar thoughts to Criseyde and Diomede is one of the methods he uses to indicate that Diomede's mind is not dissimilar to that of Criseyde. She continues in reference to Criseyde, "…in the tortured language of her submission to Diomede: 'I say nat therfore that I wol you love / N'y say nat nay' (V, 1002-3)" (Fumo, 82). Fumo fails to understand that this is not where Criseyde "submits." Love,

whether decided on as an equal or in submission, depending on interpretation, develops significantly later, and Chaucer explicitly says "loveth" (V, 1746). There was a process over time in Diomede's courtship and Criseyde's responses. The language is far from tortured, however tortured Criseyde's feelings may have been at that precise point in the text.

The first words describing Chaucer's Diomede are, "ful redy" (V, 15), words most refreshing after the ineptness and passivity of Troilus.

Criseyde is repeatedly referred to as beautiful. The awakening of lust, desire and love in Troilus is conveyed in the words, "and of hire look in him ther gan to quyken / So gret desir and such affeceioun…" (I, 295-296), which is universally acknowledged as a legitimate male response.

Diomede had as much cause and right to be smitten at first sight by Criseyde as Troilus without aspersions being cast upon his character. He proceeds to court Criseyde, that is, to ingratiate himself to awaken her interest and affection. Diomede, being aware of Criseyde's affection for Troilus, as she wept at their parting, (V, 82), decided not to speak of love immediately, although he does not long delay. He owes Troilus nothing.

We are informed that Diomede "koude more than the crede…" (V, 89), words generally interpreted as implying experience, but perhaps

suggesting only knowledge of human relations. He has nothing to lose; "…at the werste it may yet shorte oure weye" (V, 96). Diomede's thought processes and plans are revealed to the reader, contrasting him with Troilus, who had neither. Thinking and planning are not character flaws. Diomede will act: he "koude his good" (V, 106).

Diomede uses courtly vocabulary; Criseyde may "commaunde" him (V, 112), repeated at V, 133; he will be "as a knight" (V, 113); will honour her (V, 119), will serve her (V, 173), and pleads for mercy (V, 168). Although having suggested (briefly) he will be as a brother (V, 134),[11] Diomede promptly invokes both the God of Love (V, 143) and the love of God (V, 144). Criseyde has no reason to question Diomede's veracity or sincerity either at this point or later, nor have the critics.

Diomede, gentlemanly and capable, – admirable qualities in a male suitor, – is wise enough to know Criseyde would like to hear where he is leading, and he anticipates by telling her

> I wolde of this yow telle al myn entente
> But this enseled til anothir day (V, 150-151)[12]

[11] Criseyde stated she would be « as his suster » to Troilus (II, 1224), apparently a step in courting rituals.
[12] c.f. Criseyde's question to Pandarus re Troilus : « I wolde hym preye / To telle me the fyn of his entente » (III, 124-125)

Being intelligent, Diomede moves quickly, as

Ther ben so worthi knyghtes in this place,

And ye so fayr, that everich of hem alle

Wol peynen hym to stonden in youre grace (V, 169-171).

He also knew that there were few if any unattached females in the Greek camp, so far from Greece (V, 688). Anticipating and pre-empting competition are to be admired, and are not acts justifying vilification.

Diomede has the courage to attempt to woo and win Criseyde while she is mourning separation from Troilus, declaring,

But whoso myghte wynnen swich a flour

From hym for whom she morneth nyght and day

He myghte seyn he were a conquerour (V, 792-794).

At war with the Trojans, Diomede accepts the challenge of winning the affection of Troilus' lady. This in no way diminishes the sincerity of his interest in Criseyde but is rather an added satisfaction. He had nothing to lose if refused "but my speche" (V, 798), and so continued "and right anon, as he that bold was ay," (V, 795), to become a conqueror of Troilus.

Diomede broaches the subject Troilus avoided in asking Criseyde "…whi hire fader tarieth so longe / To wedden hire unto som worthy wight" (V, 862-863). Diomede assesses Criseyde's unspoken thoughts wisely and musters his arguments well.

Criseyde permits the courtship to continue, knowing full well where it might lead. Diomede "gan pressen on, and faste hire mercy preye," (V, 1011). When Chaucer tells us "So wel he for hymselven spak…" (V, 1033), the contrast to Troilus is stark.

The intensification of Diomede's wooing is finely calibrated, eloquent, and intelligent. It is a fact, though rarely acknowledged in the criticism, that being personable and articulate are qualities, not character flaws. Critics who assess Diomede from information outside Chaucer's text may describe him as a smooth seducer, but this is *totally* unwarranted. It took Diomede time to become Criseyde's "partner," but he persevered, speaking well for himself (V, 1033).

> For though that he bigan to wowe hire soone
> Er he hire wan, yet was ther more to doone (V, 1091-1092).

There is no indication that Diomede only sought Criseyde's body. On the contrary, when he declares in interior monologue, "I wol hire herte seche" (V, 797), there is no reason to doubt Diomede's words. We learn at one point that Diomede "waxen red" (V, 925). No one can blush at will. This confirms Diomede's decency, sincerity and, if not innocence, at least his modesty.

Criseyde's feelings for Diomede intensify from "men seyn – I not – that she yaf hym hire herte" (V, 1050) to "Criseyde loveth the sone of Tideus," (V, 1746). Diomede's persistence was rewarded, and why not? In courting he was "as fressh as braunche in May," (V, 844), and as a warrior in martial times, he was "chivalrous of dedes," (V, 803-804), and Troilus' equal in combat (V, 1757-1764).

The disparaging of Diomede's character is unjustified. There is not one word in Chaucer's text to indicate that Diomede is unworthy or that the relationship with Criseyde will not last. The reader has no reason to question Diomede's sincerity, decency or future fidelity. Chaucer could have said otherwise had he so intended.

Shanley writes that Criseyde "deliberately gives up her intention of returning to Troy because she enjoys Diomede's clever talk, respects his

great estate, fears the perils of Troy, and needs help" (V, 1023-1029) (141). Criseyde, exiled involuntarily, transferred her companionship and, ultimately, her affection to one definitely at least the equal of Troilus and in many respects more worthy. Based on the text, it is as likely as not that Criseyde and Diomede retired to Greece after the war and lived happily ever after.

Chapter Nine: Afterward

An audience and readership familiar with the traditional tale could not be expected to master all the nuances of characterization on one hearing or reading. Reexamination was likely unavailable to the auditors of *Troilus and Criseyde*. They, and perhaps readers, of whom there could be only relatively few, (although vital for Chaucer's future reputation, as he knew), reacted, (as do contemporary critics), as indicated by Chaucer's plea:

> That al be that Criseyde was untrewe,
> That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me (V, 1774-1775).

"She' confirms female criticism. That "gilt" is the guilt of the received story, and is repeatedly acknowledged by Chaucer, but with great reservations. He attempted to answer his (female) critics, and continued:

> N'y sey nat this al oonly for thise men,
> But *moost for wommen that bitraised be*
> *Thorugh false folk* – God yeve hem sorwe, amen! –
> *That with hire grete wit and subtilte*
> *Bytraise yow. And this commeveth me*
> *To speke*, and in effect yow alle I preye,

Beth war of men, and herkneth what I seye!

(Emphases added) (V, 1779-1785)

It was therefore with prescience that Chaucer prays for his work,

And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,

That thow be understonde, God I biseche!

(Emphasis added) (V, 1797-1798)

Nevetheless, Chaucer received negative feedback, some of which apparently emanated from the Queen. Chaucer, a civil servant and Court poet, dependant on patronage and appointments, was in no position to ignore his instructed penance, which he acknowledged with humility.

The poet's defence in *The Legend of Good Women* is the same as in *Troilus and Criseyde;* "olde books" (V, 1481), and "other bokes" (V, 1776).

Chaucer pleads in the *Legend*

Wel ought us thanne honouren and beleve

These bokes, where we han noon other preve

(LGW, Prologue, 27, 28, Text F)

and/or

Wel ought us thanne on olde bokes leve

There as there is non other assay by preve

(LGW, Prologue, 27, 28, Text G).

This defence is combined with Chaucer's perennial tongue-in-cheek demurrer that he is not too bright: "and as for me, though that I konne but lyte" (LGW, Prologue, 29, Text F) and "and as for me, though that my wit be lite," (LGW, Prologue, 29, Text G).[13]

Chaucer's defence does not contradict traditional interpretations, but does not avail: he is deemed a foe of the God of Love. Queen Alceste cuts him off; "lat be thyn arguynge" (LGW, 475, Text F; 465, Text G). Before her, Chaucer is, in effect, guilty as charged.

However, the *Legend* is irrelevant in assessing and interpreting Criseyde's character as it is *ex post facto*, and therefore is evidence only of how Chaucer dealt with his negative critics.

[13] See the linkage between *Sir Thopas* and *The Tale of Melibee* in *The Canterbury Tales*, 919-930, culminating in the Host's judgement "Thy drasty rymyng is not worth a toord."

Schedule A: On Confessions

Kaufman, writing on *The Admissibility of Confessions*, considers false confessions and declares, "Cases show that even a 'free and voluntary' confession may have been false" (Kaufman, 9). He cites the case of *R v Perry* (1660) 14 How. St. Tr. 1312 and summarizes:

> In 1660, one of two brothers confessed that he, his brother and his mother had murdered his master. All three were executed. Two years later the master returned and explained that he had been kidnapped and sold to the Turks. (Kaufman, 10)

Kaufman also quotes from Wigmore, citing *State vs Fanning* (1909), III Chadbourne Rev. 1970 820c

> In the case of *Fanning*, the accused stated repeatedly that he had poisoned a Mrs. Short. Medical and chemical testimony, however, showed this to have been impossible and indicated heart disease as the cause of death.
>
> Indeed, a person may confess falsely for a variety of reasons…

> In *Shellenberger v. State,* it was shown that the accused was innocent, but that he had a mania to confess to heinous crimes. 1914 97 Neb. 498 (U.S.) (Kaufman, 10)

Thus the fact that someone confesses to a crime or moral lapse, or any act, is not necessarily proof that it was in fact committed or, if committed, of its nature. Confessions, including Criseyde's, must be factually examined to determine if the act, here of alleged betrayal and faithlessness, is true, whether or not Criseyde believes it to be true at the times of her utterances.

Schedule B: On the Knowledge of Contraceptives and Abortifacients in England Circa 1385 C.E.

Chaucer's readers and audience were sophisticated and knew and understood that Criseyde could embark on a love affair with limited fear of pregnancy and the accompanying loss of honour because knowledge of contraceptive methods and abortifacients was widespread in Court and educated circles. This knowledge had been in all cultures from time immemorial.

Soranos of Ephesus is the most prominent classical authority whose work has survived. "Soranos…main reliance was upon…rational techniques: an elaborate array of occlusive pessaries of various types, vaginal plugs, using wool as a base, and those impregnated with gummy substances such as sour oil, honey, cedar-gum, opobalsam and galbanum. Astringent solutions (e.g. alum and natron)… (and) The use of native fruit acids is not without interest. Pomegranate pulp or rind is acid… Fig pulp is also mentioned." (Himes, 91).

Riddle analysed Soranos' writings and summarizes:

> Before analyzing the presciptions administered orally, let us look first at the *suppository recipes,* five of which use pomegranate peel or rind

> (*Punica granatum* L.) *Pomegranate is frequently prescribed in classical and medieval medical sources and is recognized as an abortifacient in ancient Indian literature and in modern folk medicine references and, as a contraceptive, in modern science studies*… (Emphases added) (Riddle, 25)

and later:

> Of the ten plants Soranos mentioned in these four (oral) recipes, modern medical science has judged eight as having an effect as contraceptives and abortifacients/ emmenagogues. One of the other two is likely to have an antifertility effect, while the final plant, rocket, has not been studied. *In the case of rue, present Chinese, Latin American, and Indian medical authorities recognize its abortifacient quality,*[36]… (Emphasis added) (Riddle, 29)

Ibn al-Jami, a Jewish Egyptian at one time physician to Sultan Saladin, (1171-1193 C.E.), wrote in his *The Book of Right Conduct*,

> …conception will be prevented if a woman inserts after purification a tampon impregnated with peppermint-juice (*na'na'),* pennyroyal

> (*fütanaj)*, or the seeds of leek (*kurräth);* for this [impregnated tampon] has a particular anti-conceptional effect. Moreover, a woman may insert pessaries (*faräzikh)* made from myrrh (*murr)*, opopanax (*jäwshïkh)*, rue (*sadhäb)* and hellebore (*kharbaq)* kneaded with ox-gall. (Himes, 146)

Himes declares,

> Though this account is brief, the recipes are, judged as a whole, on a high level of rationality and effectiveness; (Himes, 146)

McLaren notes,

> Avicenna's *Canon* was translated by Gerard of Cremona in the mid-twelfth century. This enormously important compendium of ancient medicine referred to a variety of birth-control devices including cedar oil spermicides, mint pessaries, potions of rennet, sweet basil and iron filings, suppositories of cedar oil, pomegranate, alum, willow, pepper and cabbage… (McLaren, 122)

He concludes,

> In the fourteenth century, the flood of translations from Latin into the vernacular made available to a wider audience the classical fertility-regulating recommendations. (McLaren, 125)

Jutte writes that,

> …since the seminal research studies of Norman E. Himes, it has no longer been possible to deny that even in the long distant past, people possessed effective means of birth control and made use of them when necessary, even if the same methods are no longer in widespread use today. (Jutte, 4)

His research allows Jutte to declare,

> A study of the history of medicine has identified a total of 413 remedies handed down to us as part of a body of specialist literature dating from ancient times, all of which have considerable abortive as well as contraceptive effects. (Jutte, 31)

Himes concluded,

> It is abundantly clear, however, that even in the Middle Ages, the era of greatest dominance of the Church, when Europe was culturally unified and dominated by custom almost to the point of stagnation, the Church never succeeded in preventing the application of contraceptive knowledge. (Himes, 168)

That knowledge of contraception and abortion methods was known to Chaucer and his circle(s) is proven by the Sermon in *The Parson's Tale,* referred to by McLaren:

> In *The Parson's Tale*, Chaucer provided an impressively full account. He spoke of a woman taking potions, "drynkynge venenouse herbes thurgh which she may not conceive"; of using pessaries and suppositories, by putting "certeine material thynges in hire secree places to slee the child". (McLaren, 119)

The Parson's Tale (*The Riverside Chaucer*, 757) in part reads: "…whan man destourbeth conception of a child, and maketh a womman outher bareyne by drynkynge venenouse herbes thurgh which she may not conceyve, or sleeth a child by drynkes wilfully, or else putteth certeine material thynges in hire secree places to slee the child" it is "homicide", (576), a capital offence.

Notwithstanding the Church and Chaucer's Parson, it is obvious that the methods of contraception and abortion were quite widely known and practiced. The Medieval Reader would be aware that Criseyde, at least after the first encounter with Troilus, would not likely lose her honour by becoming pregnant.

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