

TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

GEOFFREY CHAUCER



EDITED BY STEPHEN A. BARNEY

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

Geoffrey Chaucer
TROILUS AND CRISEYDE
with facing-page IL FILOSTRATO



AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS
THE TESTAMENT OF CRESSEID
by Robert Henryson
CRITICISM

Edited by
STEPHEN A. BARNEY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

W. W. Norton & Company has been independent since its founding in 1923, when William Warder Norton and Mary D. Herter Norton first published lectures delivered at the People's Institute, the adult education division of New York City's Cooper Union. The Nortons soon expanded their program beyond the Institute, publishing books by celebrated academics from America and abroad. By midcentury, the two major pillars of Norton's publishing program—trade books and college texts—were firmly established. In the 1950s, the Norton family transferred control of the company to its employees, and today—with a staff of four hundred and a comparable number of trade, college, and professional titles published each year—W. W. Norton & Company stands as the largest and oldest publishing house owned wholly by its employees.

Copyright © 2006 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

First Edition.

Every effort has been made to contact the copyright holders of each of the selections. Rights holders of any selections not credited should contact W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. for a correction to be made in the next printing of our work.

The text of this book is composed in Fairfield Medium
with the display set in Bernhard Modern.

Composition by Binghamton Valley Composition.

Manufacturing by the Courier Companies—Westford Division.

Production manager: Benjamin Reynolds.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chaucer, Geoffrey, d. 1400.

Troilus and Criseyde, facing page Filostrato : context, criticism / Geoffrey Chaucer ;
edited by Stephen A. Barney.
p. cm.

Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde compared on facing pages to Boccaccio's Filostrato.
Includes bibliographical references

ISBN 0-393-92755-5 (pbk.)

1. Troilus (Legendary character)—Poetry. 2. Chaucer, Geoffrey, d. 1400. Troilus and Criseyde. 3. Troilus (Legendary character) in literature. 4. Cressida (Fictitious character)—Poetry. 5. Trojan War—Literature and the war. 6. Cressida (Fictitious character) 7. Troy (Extinct city)—Poetry. 8. Trojan War—Poetry. I. Barney, Stephen A. II. Boccaccio, Giovanni, 1313–1375. Filostrato. English. III. Title.

PR1895.B37 2005

821'.1—dc22

2005053928

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110-0017
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QT

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Introduction

Troilus and Criseyde is the most important English writing between the eras of *Beowulf*, perhaps of the tenth century, and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, begun in the 1580s. Before *Paradise Lost* (1667) it is the most accomplished English narrative in design, ambition, and poetic craft.

The Background of Troilus and Criseyde

Chaucer finished writing *Troilus and Criseyde* in the early-to-middle 1380s, when he was about forty years old.¹ It is a good guess that by then he had written a number of other works, among them his poetic translation of the immensely popular French allegory about courtship, the *Romance of the Rose*, his prose translation of Boethius's Latin *Consolation of Philosophy*, and his adaptation, which became the Knight's Tale of the *Canterbury Tales*, of Boccaccio's Italian poem, *Il Teseida delle nozze d'Emelia* (*The Story of Theseus concerning the Nuptials of Emily*). Along with these he had probably composed at least two, perhaps all three, of his longer "minor poems": *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, and *The Parliament of Fowls*. He had completed his apprenticeship as a poet.

Troilus and Criseyde itself is a very free adaptation of Boccaccio's *Filostrato* (literally, "The One Made Prostrate by Love," i.e., "The Love-Stricken"). The *Filostrato* was written around 1335, and the *Teseida* around 1340. Comparison of Chaucer's poem with the *Filostrato*, its main source, is the first and essential step toward a criticism of Chaucer's art. Hence in this Norton Critical Edition of *Troilus and Criseyde* a translation of Boccaccio's poem is provided on facing pages.² It is

1. For the date of *Troilus and Criseyde*, and for most matters of fact about the poem, see Windeatt 1992 and Barney 1987. The only solid evidence for dating *Troilus and Criseyde* is the date of the death of Thomas Usk, executed on March 4, 1388. Usk refers to *Troilus and Criseyde* in his *Testament of Love*. It is generally thought that Usk composed the *Testament* while a political prisoner between December 1384 and June 1385. See Ramona Bressie, "The Date of Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love*," *Modern Philology* 26 (1928): 17–29; Virginia B. Jellech, *Dissertation Abstracts International* 31 (1971): 6060–61A; and John F. Leyerle's conclusions as reported in Gary W. Shawver, ed., *The Testament of Love* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2002). Some think that Usk's narrator's stance as a prisoner is conventional and prefer the dates 1385–86 for the composition of the *Testament*. See Lucy Lewis, "The Identity of Margaret in Usk's *Testament of Love*," *Medium Aevum* 68 (1999): 63–72 and Joanna Summers, "Gower's *Vox Clamantis* and Usk's *Testament of Love*," *Medium Aevum* 68 (1999): 55–62. See also *Troilus and Criseyde* 3.624–25.
2. A fine edition of *Troilus and Criseyde* that includes the Italian text of the *Filostrato* along with a running commentary about Chaucer's adaptation of it is Windeatt 1984. C. S. Lewis's famous study of Chaucer's adaptation is included below. For editions and translations of the *Filostrato* see the Selected Bibliography.

Although Boccaccio's poem is clearly Chaucer's main source, he may have used a French translation of it as an aid—as he used a French translation of Boethius's Latin. Like all members of his class, Chaucer was absolutely bilingual in English and French. See Robert A. Pratt, "Chaucer and the *Roman de Troyle et de Criseida*," *Studies in Philology* 53 (1956): 509–39, and Hanly 1990.

obvious that Chaucer deeply transformed the story as he recast Boccaccio's work—in fact, more than 5500 of the 8239 lines of *Troilus and Criseyde* are Chaucer's independent work.

The first three of these earlier works give a good idea of the direction Chaucer's work was taking. Along with the amatory works of his poetic soulmate, Ovid, the thirteenth-century *Romance of the Rose* lent him the materials for a refined and elegant way of talking about love, for the making of a comedy of manners. Like Chaucer, his immediate French precursors and models—the poets Deschamps, Froissart, and especially Machaut—were deeply influenced by the *Romance*. The distinctive language and style of *Troilus and Criseyde* owes much to this French tradition.³ Second, Boethius's *Consolation* provided a philosophical framework for *Troilus and Criseyde*, especially with regard to the themes of human happiness, fortune, and predestination⁴—and possibly provided the idea of arranging his poem into five books. And third, Boccaccio's *Teseida* opened for Chaucer the possibility of combining classical, epic matter and machinery with a medieval romance plot of chivalric love. Hence the heroic (and satiric) tones of the great Roman poets could be welded to the intricate analyses of lovers' interiors and their courtly worlds characteristic of medieval romance. When to these we add the pervasive influence on *Troilus and Criseyde* of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, we find the makings of a poetic ambition as richly varied and grand as that of the Renaissance masters from Spenser to Milton, worthy to

kis the steppes where as thou seest pace
Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace. (V.1791–92)

The story of *Troilus and Criseyde* is older than Boccaccio's account, and Chaucer seems to have set about in scholarly fashion to examine a number of earlier sources with care: a number of details from them appear in *Troilus and Criseyde*. He takes for granted, in *Troilus and Criseyde* and earlier poems, that his audience knew the story of the Trojan War. The ultimate source is Homer's *Iliad*, the epic that looms tragically behind Chaucer's love story, and contains the names of most of the characters in *Troilus and Criseyde*: Troilus, Pandarus (a Lydian archer, killed by Diomedes), Calchas (a Greek seer), Diomedes, Priam, Hector, Paris, Helen, Deiphebus, Cassandra, Achilles, and others. Missing is the character of Criseyde. A captive woman, Chryseis (accusative: Chryseida), whose name means “daughter of Chryses,” appears in the *Iliad*, and is in fact the initiating cause of the “wrath of Achilles,” but she has nothing to do with Chaucer's Criseyde.

Of course Chaucer did not read Greek, but many versions of the story of Troy were available to him in French and Latin, languages he read easily. Any medieval student who learned Latin would read Vergil and Ovid, who everywhere allude to the Trojan matter. Two works, probably originally in Greek of the first century C.E., were received by the Middle

3. The classic study here is Muscatine 1957. See also James I. Wimsatt, “The French Lyric Element in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 15 (1985):18–32 and the Green 1979 essay printed in this Norton Critical Edition.

4. See especially *Troilus and Criseyde* III.813–33, Criseyde on the fragility of happiness, and IV.953–1085, Troilus on free will and predestination. For a list of parallels between *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Consolation of Philosophy* see Windeatt 1992:99–100.

Ages as what they claimed to be, eyewitness accounts of the Trojan War. These were translated into Latin, the *Journal of the Trojan War* by Dictys of Crete (fourth century C.E.), and the *History of the Destruction of Troy* by Dares the Phrygian (sixth century C.E.). Chaucer refers to Dares in the *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, and *Troilus and Criseyde* (I.146, 1771), and to Dictys in *Troilus and Criseyde* (I.146). He probably had read neither work, but he did read a Latin poem of about 1190 by Joseph of Exeter, the *Iliad of Dares Phrygius*, which was commonly known as “Dares,” and which Chaucer may well have thought was Dares’s actual work.⁵ He translates directly from Joseph’s poem in *Troilus and Criseyde* V.799–840. Yet Dares and Dictys write nothing of the love affair between Troilus and Criseyde.

The basic story of Chaucer’s poem, the love of Troilus for a woman (named Briseida) and her infidelity with Diomedes, was first told by the French poet Benoît de Sainte-Maure, in interwoven episodes in his *Roman de Troie* (late 1150s).⁶ Benoît uses the name Briseida for the woman whom Boccaccio would call Criseida; like the name Criseyde, “Briseida” is the accusative form of Briseis, “daughter of Brises.” In the *Iliad* she is the slave girl whom Agamemnon seized from Achilles, and her Homeric story has nothing to do with Benoît’s invention of her affair with Troilus. Chaucer adopts a number of details directly from Benoît, but he tellingly omits the many generalized antifeminist comments that Benoît makes as he tells of Briseida’s infidelity.

The *Roman de Troie* was adapted into Latin prose by the Sicilian Guido de Colonne’s *History of the Destruction of Troy*, which was completed in 1287. Like Benoît, Guido claims to follow Dares and Dictys as his sources. Because the *History* is in Latin, it, like Dares and Dictys, was taken as a more authoritative source than the French of Benoît. Thus Chaucer names Guido in the *House of Fame*, but never names Benoît—or Boccaccio! Chaucer uses only a few details from Guido, and suppresses Guido’s general view of the love of Troilus and Briseida as emblematic of overheated passion and mutability.

The author whom Chaucer’s narrator does claim as his major source, whom he merely translates and sets into rhyme (II.8–18), is a Latin writer whom he names Lollius. We have good evidence that medieval writers, misunderstanding a passage in Horace, actually thought that there was a classical authority on the Trojan War named Lollius.⁷ But no such author existed, and Chaucer is simply being sly. He both claims for himself an authentic ancient source, and, while characterizing his narrator as a plodding and hapless intermediary, manages to defer the question of his actual source, the altogether too modern and vernacular *Filostrato*.

Boccaccio undertook the same reading program that Chaucer did, and

5. Dares and Dictys are translated in Frazer 1966, and Joseph of Exeter in Roberts 1970. Two other Latin histories of the Trojan War were known in the medieval West, but there is no evidence that Chaucer used them: the *Latin Iliad*, perhaps of the first century C.E., and the *Destruction of Troy*, before the ninth century.

6. Relevant passages from Benoît are translated in Havely 1980 and Gordon 1934, with important omissions as signaled by Mieszkowski, “R. K. Gordon and the *Troilus and Criseyde* Story,” *Chaucer Review* 15 (1980): 127–37. A good account of Chaucer’s use of Benoît (and of all the sources) is in Windeatt 1992:37–137.

7. See Robert A. Pratt, “A Note on Chaucer’s Lollius,” *Modern Language Notes* 65 (1950): 183–87.

based his *Filostrato* mainly on Benoît (and a prose redaction of it), along with a number of earlier Italian accounts of the history of Troy.⁸ His changing of the name of Briseida to Criseida is but a small part of his vast elaboration of the lovers' story. As compared with its predecessors, *Filostrato* has much more complicated investigations of his characters' interior lives. Whereas the earlier accounts focused almost entirely on Briseida's departure from Troy and her shifting of affections, Boccaccio invented the whole first part of the story, from the lovers' first sight of one another to the consummation scene. Chaucer augmented still further the earlier part of the action, and hence emphasized the rising comic action. He likewise redistributed the rather disorderly nine Parts of the *Filostrato* into his more studied, and carefully marked, five Books. Boccaccio's introduction of the go-between Pandaro (whose character likewise reflects a tradition of prior go-betweens in love affairs, from Ovid to Dante) enormously enriches the comic possibilities of the story. And though both lovers are more experienced, more overtly sensual, and may seem somewhat cynical as compared with Chaucer's pair, Boccaccio largely suppresses the blatant antifeminism of the sources.⁹ The narrative was ready for Chaucer to work on.

Toward a Criticism of Troilus and Criseyde

The beginnings of a critical approach to the poem might adopt the old-fashioned categories of genre, characterization, style, setting, and theme.

GENRE

Chaucer refers to the five segments of *Troilus and Criseyde* as books (II.10, III.1818, IV.26) and he calls the whole poem *a sorowful tale* (I.14), *a storie* (II.31), several times *a boke*, and most pregnantly *litel myn tragedye* (V.1786). By tragedy Chaucer probably means loosely a story that tells of one *that stood in greet prosperitee*, fell, and *endeth wrecchedly* (Prologue to the Monk's Tale 1975–77), rather than an Aristotelian drama of character or fate.¹

Regardless of Chaucer's own genre terms, critics a century ago liked to speak of *Troilus and Criseyde* as a drama, and analyzed the poem's structure into "scenes." Some found precedent for Chaucer's division of the poem into five parts in Seneca's five-act tragedies, though Chaucer may not have known Senecan drama.² Indeed, we find a progression of different scenes of action in narrative as well as drama (and our most famous ancient play, *Oedipus Rex*, has after all only one scene.) Still, we may justly label as dramatic Chaucer's use of dialogue in the poem,

8. On Boccaccio's sources see Maria Gozzi, "Sulle fonti del *Filostrato*: Le narrazioni di argomento troiano," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 5 (1969): 123–209.

9. Especially on the development of the character of Briseida/Criseyde in the tradition see Mieszkowski 1971 and Donaldson 1979.

1. In his usual contrary way, Ovid says, "Tragedy surpasses every kind of writing in gravity; also it always has as its subject love" (*Tristia* 2.381–82). On medieval conceptions of tragedy see Kelly 1997.

2. Others think Boethius's five books in the *Consolation of Philosophy* may have given Chaucer the idea.

surely the richest dialogue in English before Shakespeare, and his adroit exposition of character and the play of "dramatic irony" made possible by dialogue.³ Reminiscent of Greek tragedy is the sharpest and largest irony of all, the fact that the rather narrow domestic action is set in doomed Troy.

Troilus and Criseyde may have acquired the label "drama" because it is good, and drama is good. In like manner, recent criticism suspects that to speak of it as a "novel"—Kittredge called it "the first novel, in the modern sense, that was ever written in the world, and one of the best"⁴—blends what should be kept distinct, out of a desire to equate a good poem with a favored genre. At least it can be said that, like a novel, the poem resists classification.

If the poems of Chrétien de Troyes and the books to which Don Quixote was addicted define the genre "romance," then Chaucer's and Boccaccio's poems are not romances: their plots are too simple; their settings too classical and, in the medieval view, too historical; their adventures insufficiently marvelous; their main characters too limited in their powers; their milieux too urban, too caught up in intricate social forces; their tones too skeptical, too profoundly critical of aristocratic mores. Yet like a novel *Troilus and Criseyde* seems to contain a romance within it, one constructed by Pandarus and lived by Troilus, and to reflect on the romance conventions of intense private morality: loyalty, honor, truth, the knightly code. Both Troilus and Criseyde are more conscious of, and more troubled by, the chivalric codes of decency in love affairs than their counterparts in the *Filostrato*: they are, in a rich sense, chaste. *Troilus and Criseyde* can usefully be compared with the genre "historical romance," debased in popular fiction since the eighteenth century, but still the vehicle of some of the best fiction from Homer's *Odyssey* to Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*

Finally, epic. The story has its origins in Homeric epic, and in many ways it resembles the trio of French romanticized epics produced in the middle of the twelfth century, the "romans" of Thebes, of Aeneas, and (by Benoît) of Troy, ultimately derived from Statius, Vergil, and Homer. The division of *Troilus and Criseyde* into books, its occasional flights into the "high style" of ornate poetry appropriate, the medieval rhetoricians taught, to epic matters, and its elaborate invocations of various figures standing for the Muses remind us of these epic forebears. Here Chaucer seems to outdo even the classicizing Boccaccio, introducing more epic devices in his formal prologues, and even inserting a brief retelling of Statius's *Thebaid*, complete with a Latin summary (V.1485–1510).

Chaucer calls the Theban story *gestes olde* (V.1511), just as he calls the matter of the Trojan War *the Troian gestes* of Homer and the later "authorities" on Troy, Dares and Dictys (I.145–46). But a *gest* in this sense or an epic in the tradition of the *Iliad* focuses on military action, whereas Chaucer insistently avoids the scene of the battlefield as *a long digression / Fro my matere* (I.143–44; see also V.1765–71). His arena is the bedroom. At the end of the poem he alludes to the opening lines of

3. Chaucer in smaller scope matches this brilliant dialogue with later work like the Prologue to the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, the Friar's Tale, and the Pardoner's Tale.

4. George Lyman Kittredge, *Chaucer and His Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1915, 1970), p. 109.

the *Aeneid* and the *Iliad* (V.1766, 1800–801) as if to remind us of what he has *not* written. In embracing some of the conventions but eschewing the matter of epic, he makes us think of great epic themes—the destruction of cities, heroic enterprise, divine and fatal destiny, the subordination of private happiness to public demands—while at the same time presenting a world of social comedy and intimate and scrupulous moral probing. Chaucer's poem is funnier and brighter than Boccaccio's, but its allusions to poems of national doom make it also more poignant and grave.

CHARACTERIZATION

Chaucer invites us to respond to the principal characters of the poem as if they were not fictional, and if we avoid asking the wrong questions we may indeed judge them—and we may be wrong. The poet seems to tease us to ask such questions as whether Criseyde had children (I.132–33; Boccaccio says she had none), or whether she knew Troilus was at Pandarus's house (III.575–79), or how old she is (V.826). More important, indeed crucial, are such questions as whether Criseyde succumbs to love too willingly, or shifts her affections too culpably; whether Pandarus is a true friend or a slimy, opportunistic pimp; whether Troilus is a moony boy or a paragon of integrity. More demanding than the *Filostrato*, the poem requires us to raise such questions.

Chaucer focuses our attention on the question of how people decide what to do, the essential moral question. The agent of that focus is Chaucer's most notable addition to Boccaccio's poem, the narrator. *Troilus and Criseyde's* narrator intrudes everywhere, openly manages and comments on the story, and speaks more or less consistently "in character." Like the pilgrim narrator of the *Canterbury Tales* or the narrators of the dream visions, he tempts us to imagine him as a freestanding persona, a character in the poem as subject to our judgment as the others. Broadly, he presents himself, especially at first, as a comic figure, the embodiment of the rhetorical topic of "affected modesty" writ large, helplessly inept at love, something of a pedantic historian doing his best to render his source (the fictitious Lollius) to an audience of adepts in the arts of Cupid; later, as the reluctant purveyor of offensive story matter; and finally, if we take the conclusion of the poem as a continuation of the narrator's voice, as a serious Christian poet who urges the rejection of worldly vanity and the higher love of *that sothfast Crist* (V.1860).

This narrator guides our moral criticism. He protests (too much?) that Criseyde's loving of Troilus was no *sodeyn love* (II.666–86). He excuses Criseyde for pity, and observes that *swich is this world* (V.1099, 1748). He constantly praises Troilus for virtue and honor, *trewe as stiel in ech condicioun* (V.831), and claims that his martial prowess is a product of his love (III.1776–77). He admires the energy, at least, of Pandarus in his machinations (III.484–90, 512–13). Yet this same narrator provides us, willy-nilly, with the materials for a harsh criticism of the principals: Criseyde may be thought *slydyng of corage* (V.825); Troilus and Pandarus are caught up in more than one lie (Troilus's feigned sickness and his feigned jealousy of Horaste); Pandarus worries about his status as a

procurer (III.253–56)—his name after all later became our word “pander.”

In comparison with Boccaccio's characters, Chaucer's extend the range of what we find in the *Filostrato*. By pushing out the extremes, he contrives more pronounced oppositions, clearer dilemmas. Troilus is more idealistic, more driven to universalize his feelings, than Troilo, and yet (or, and hence?) he is a more comic figure, farcically abashed especially when it comes to the rude business of the bedchamber. Chaucer's Criseyde is a much more complicated figure than the Criseida of the *Filostrato*. She is dominated, as C. S. Lewis argued, by fear, and yet she is often confident and assertive (for the ambivalence see, e.g., I.176–82). Boccaccio's Pandaro suggests that, as a widow, Criseyde will be amorous. Likewise Chaucer's Criseyde is erotically motivated, but her passions are rendered more delicately and indirectly. Pandarus is altogether livelier and funnier than Boccaccio's Pandaro. Perhaps because he is the precursor of Shakespeare's officious and ineffectual Polonius, we may well guess that he is a generation older than his niece (in Boccaccio, his cousin), although he is himself an unrequited lover (II.57–63). Yet Pandarus is also a darker figure than his Italian counterpart: he himself raises the moral problem of procuring for friendship (III.239–80), and his suggestion to Troilus, grieving over the decision to send Criseyde to the Greeks, that he simply take another mistress (IV.400–27) seems worse than crude.

STYLE

Using the common classical and medieval division of styles into high, middle, and low, we might describe the style of *Troilus and Criseyde* as rarely reaching higher, but often reaching lower, than that of the *Filostrato*. A stylistic maneuver typical of the poem is the utterance of a lofty sentiment, full of such rhetorical adornments as apostrophe, anaphora, extended simile, antithesis, mythological allusion, metaphor, and other figures, only to be deflated by some ridiculous gesture or common-sensical riposte. Chaucer repeats in the poem the old joke about overwrought ornamentation: *The dayes honour, and the hevenes yë, / The nyghtes foo—al this clepe I the sonne . . .* (II.904–905).

To Troilus is given much of the high style of the poem, especially in several lyric set-pieces that Chaucer adds to the *Filostrato*, beginning with his song in the first book, translated from a sonnet by Petrarch (I.400–20). His speech often conforms to the style of medieval lyrics in the tradition of “courtly love”: he is given to superlatives, to absolutes, to self-searching soliloquies, to talk of heaven and hell and death (see Davis Taylor 1976).

Pandarus is something of a shrewd and earthy Mercutio to Troilus's Romeo. We might imagine him with Rosalind saying “men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love” (*As You Like It* IV.i.101). Boccaccio used a few proverbs, but Chaucer adds so many as to make proverbial speech, with its folksy tone of common wisdom, an especially prominent feature of his style, and most of the proverbs are spoken by Pandarus. Naturally Troilus is exasperated by

Pandarus's persistent homely lore: *For thy proverbes may me naught availle* (I.756). The styles of the two men differ as analytical and spiritual intellect differs from unsifted public opinion.

A fascinating quality of the style of *Troilus and Criseyde* is its potential for ambiguity: it is hard to pin down the tone. Early in the poem we read in a description of Criseyde that

*the pure wise of hire mevyng
Shewed wel that men myght in hire gesse
Honour, estat, and wommanly noblesse.* (I.285–87)

How far may we allow *gesse*—which in Middle English can mean “guess, discern, suppose, conclude, imagine, believe”—with its possible intimation of doubt about her character, to color our response, even this early in the poem? Troilus falls in love, and our narrator is moved to apostrophe: *O blynde world, O blynde entencioun!* (I.211). Who reads correctly, those who hear in this passage a moral critique of the vanity of earthly affections that culminates in the final stanzas of the poem, or those who hear a playful parody of pretentious poetizing about a condition—amorous bedazzlement—entirely commonplace and scarcely culpable?

SETTING

Boccaccio certainly saw the implications of setting an essentially private love story amidst the great events of Troy and its public love story, the rape of Helen (see McCall 1962). Troilus's name, “little Troy,” reinforces the point. We hear the words “Troy” and “destroy” echoing through the poem. Early commentators on the Trojan War, both pagans and Christians, tended to ascribe Troy's fall not simply to blind destiny or to the interventions of pagan gods, but rather to the pride and lust of the Trojans. This moral view of the justice of Troy's fall scarcely colors the mood of the poem until the public intrusion into the lovers' affair in the fourth book. Then Pandarus advises Troilus simply to abduct Criseyde, appealing to his manliness, his kinship with Paris. Troilus declines, seeing that the town is at war *For ravysshynge of women* (IV.548)—his counterpart in the *Filostrato* does not advance this argument. In spite of Troilus's effort to avoid *so gret unright* (IV.550), his end finally coincides with that of Troy.

The Greek Diomedes finds it in his interest, while wooing Criseyde, to emphasize the impending destruction of Troy (V.883–910), and the narrator, about to report the death of Hector, says that Fortune *Gan pulle away the fetheres brighte of Troie*, and alludes to the old motif of the translation of empire from nation to nation (V.1541–47). Neither Boccaccio nor Chaucer mentions the final doom of Troy at the end of their poems, but that doom and the question of its meaning looms in the background of the story.

Chaucer's most extended addition to the *Filostrato* is the episode at Deiphobus's house, which brings together for the first time the smaller world of the love affair—perhaps symbolized by Troilus's cramped chamber—and the great world of Trojan public affairs. There we see Helen

of Troy, and we hear of a letter from Hector, but the scene revolves around a business of litigation involving Criseyde and one Poliphete, and of course the focus of the scene is on Troilus' feigning illness and his private meeting with Criseyde. The episode presents court politics, aristocratic graciousness, and amorous scheming, where we in the shadow of Chapman's Homer might have looked for the brilliant glow of the great characters of the *Iliad*. The matter of Troy handed down to Chaucer constrained him to recount the death of Troilus in war, as a piece of epic history. Chaucer in various ways seems to resist this limitation on his narrative freedom, and to do what he can, by concentrating on the bedroom rather than the battlefield, to leave his principal characters free and therefore able to choose and liable to judgment. He strains to make Troy a theater not of war but of love.

THEME

Among the issues presented in *Troilus and Criseyde* are the conflict of public and private good; the differing value systems of courtly chivalry, paganism, and Christianity (in short, the nature of happiness and the meaning of *trouthe*); the interplay of fiction and history, literary allusion and immediate experience; the consequences of gender; the role of time; the significance of the literary structure. Chaucer particularly emphasizes, even in his first stanza, two other themes here briefly considered: fortune and love.

Much more insistently than Boccaccio, and conspicuously under the influence of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, our narrator reverts to the bundle of themes associated with fortune: the reversals of worldly affairs (*aventures . . . Fro wo to wele*, I.4), the destiny of the stars, the fate of vain wishes, the ineluctable fixity of past history, and the limitations of human aspirations in the arena of the mutable goddess Fortune and her fickle wheel. Chaucer adds to Boccaccio the remarkable scene in which Troilus argues in Boethian terms about the classic problem of free will and divine predestination, concluding (as Boethius had not) that *al that comth, comth by necessitee* (IV.958).

But to these grim conclusions we hear Pandarus respond, *Who say (saw) evere a wis man faren so?* (IV.1087). So much of the poem turns on decisions—will Criseyde love Troilus? how will the lovers respond to the exchange of prisoners?—that we would deny much to deny the power of human choice, however fatalist we may be. Chaucer does not solve the problem of fate and free will, but in *Troilus and Criseyde* he explores it in all gravity, as he would later explore it comically in the Nun's Priest's Tale. Boccaccio's poem ends by making it an exemplum of bad female behavior; Chaucer ends appropriately with a request that young lovers direct their love to God.

The topic of love is introduced in the third line of *Troilus and Criseyde*, and recurs in the last line. The poem raises the question, what should a person desire, and poses the terms of the question in various ways. Of Troilus we ask whether his loving is celestial or natural (the terms in I.977–79), a matter of noble ideals or of Bayard the horse, driven from within and without (I.218–20). The bustling of Pandarus raises the

questions of whether love is a matter of relieving an itch, the efficient cause of farce, and whether *friendes love* (III.1591) springs from purity of heart or from a complex combination of voyeurism, careerism, lust for power, and displaced or vicarious desire. Criseyde's conduct must make us ask how love and fidelity are linked, whether a love that can change can be true.

The very center of *Troilus and Criseyde* (the 4120th of its 8239 lines) falls at III.1271, within the three stanzas of a speech by Troilus in worship of love and at the climax of the poem in the consummation scene (III.1254–74). This hymn to love is furthermore bracketed by two other universalizing love-paeans, the Proem to book Three, and the song of Troilus near the same book's end (III.1744–71). The central stanzas repay study; from their first line, *O Love, O Charite*, they collect in compressed form many of the terms designating types of love. Troilus first, surprisingly, evokes charity—religious selflessness, grace, love of God and neighbor: “charity” has never meant “erotic love” in English. Then Venus, as planet (astrological cause of love) and goddess; and the wedding god, Hymen (in a context where a wedding might well be, but is not, in question). Troilus then apostrophizes love as the *holy bond of thynges*, the opposite of Strife in Empedocles's physics, a cosmic force that holds atoms together. Then, love as the enabler of grace (either a lady's favor or God's grace), in a passage significantly drawn from that other great love-poet, Dante. The allusion is to the last canto of the *Divine Comedy* (*Paradise* 33.13–18), St. Bernard's prayer to the Virgin Mary. Troilus's speech refers to a number of features of noble loving: worship and praise itself, benevolence, fidelity, sorrow and joy, honor, succor, diligent service, grace, the devotions of the “religion of love.”

This little anatomy of love is further bracketed by the addresses to lovers at the beginning and end of the poem. In the former our narrator strikingly first presents himself as inept at loving for *myn unliklynnesse*. He seems, like Pandarus (with whom he is often compared as the architect of the affair), to seek his reward in love's religion by merely helping other lovers to recognize their suffering in Troilus's:

*For so hope I my sowle best avaunce,
To prey for hem that Loves servauntz be,
And write hire wo, and hye in charite.* (I.47–49)

This is surely playful, but just as surely plays with very serious matters: charity and the salvation of the soul.

Equally playful and serious is the ending of the poem. Where the narrative proper actually ends, and whether the final stanzas are in our usual narrator's proper voice, and whether the poem's close (a palinode?) contravenes the relatively worldly view of love that the story has presented, are matters of vigorous dispute. But there is no question that Chaucer here, after (playfully?) asserting that his purpose is to warn women against treacherous men (V.1779–85), shows Troilus finally in contempt of the *blynde lust* of this world (1824), and recommends that we love him who for love of us died on the cross (1842–44), and concludes praying that Jesus make us worthy of his mercy *For love of mayde and moder thyn benigne*. *Troilus and Criseyde* displays the many forms

of loving, noble and divine and fleshly, farcical and elegant and violent, comic and tragic.

Life of Chaucer

Like Spenser and Milton, Chaucer was a civil servant, and his public offices ensured that many documents mentioning him, nearly five hundred, have been preserved—though none of the life records refers to his career as a poet.⁵ He served three kings of England: Edward III, Richard II (1377–99), and Henry IV. The Chaucer family were wealthy vintners—wholesale wine dealers—who settled in London in the late thirteenth century. Geoffrey Chaucer was born to Agnes and John Chaucer in the early 1340s. Where he received his early education is not known, but it is obvious that he acquired a good grounding in Latin to accompany the English and French he grew up speaking. Some evidence suggests that he studied law at the Inns of Court.

The first document naming Chaucer records grants to him in 1357 from the Countess of Ulster, daughter-in-law of Edward III. He was probably a page in the noble household, and it seems he was being prepared for government service, not for the family business. He learned young of the courtly manners we find reflected in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and also how to wield arms. Chaucer's whole life was spent during the Hundred Years' War with France, and he was in fact captured on the battlefield near Reims and briefly held for ransom, but set free in early 1360. At some point he assumed the title of esquire (one of his sons, Thomas, was knighted).

We know nothing of his activities until we next hear of him in 1366, when he received a safe-conduct to travel through Navarre in modern Spain. This is the first of many documents recording Chaucer's travels to the continent, on the king's business. His principal occupation for several years seems to have been as envoy. He also traveled abroad in 1368, in 1369 (with the powerful Duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt, son and father of kings), and in 1370. In 1372–73 he made an extended visit to Italy—Genoa and Florence at least—negotiating trade and perhaps military matters. Conceivably he met both Petrarch and Boccaccio at that time. Possibly Chaucer already knew some of the language from Italian merchants in London before this mission, and was chosen for it partly for that reason. He traveled several times again on the king's business in 1376–77, and again to Italy (Lombardy) in 1378. Here he dealt with the Visconti family, powerful rulers of Milan and patrons of the arts. His last recorded journey abroad was to Calais, in 1387.

Chaucer held a number of other important positions in the government, and the records show that he was amply remunerated by John of Gaunt and the three kings. In 1374 he moved to a rent-free apartment over Aldgate in London, and in the same year he was appointed controller of the customs on wool, leather, and sheepskins in the port of London, a job he held for twelve years. Wool was England's prin-

5. See Crow and Olson 1966 and the section on Chaucer's life in the introduction to Benson 1987 by Crow and Virginia E. Leland. For biographies of Chaucer see the Selected Bibliography.

cial export, and Chaucer's job was in effect to serve as auditor of the immense customs proceeds.

From 1385 to 1389 he served with a number of influential men on a commission of peace for the county of Kent. By then he may have already changed his residence to Kent, perhaps to Greenwich. In 1386 he was elected as one of the two members of the House of Commons from Kent. He was obviously recognized as a substantial citizen. In 1389 he was named clerk of the king's works, responsible for the fabric of royal residences and other buildings, including the Tower of London. He left this work in 1391, and took up the post of deputy forester of a royal forest in Somerset, another job with large responsibilities. In 1399 Chaucer changed residence for the last time, leasing a house in the precincts of Westminster Abbey. He died late in the year 1400.

By 1366 Chaucer had married Philippa, probably the daughter of a knight of Hainault, Gilles de Roet. Philippa's sister Katherine Swynford was John of Gaunt's mistress, whom he finally married in 1396. Philippa died some time in or soon after 1387. In 1380 Chaucer was released by Cecilia Champaigne *de raptu meo*. Whether the *raptus* was a physical rape, or an abduction of some sort, is not clear, nor is it clear that Chaucer was guilty.

Three fellow writers set down comment on Chaucer during his lifetime. In the mid-1380s the French poet Eustache Deschamps, whose work Chaucer sometimes drew from, spoke of him as a "great translator," particularly with reference to his translation of the *Romance of the Rose*. He was also praised by his fellow Londoner Thomas Usk in the *Testament of Love*, and by the Kentish poet John Gower in his *Confessio Amantis*. Whether Chaucer was ever patronized specifically as a poet we don't know, but the 1374 grant to him by John of Gaunt may have been a reward for the *Book of the Duchess*, which in a barely disguised allegory laments the death of the duke's first wife, Blanche, in 1368.

Chaucer's Language

PRONUNCIATION⁶

Words are usually, as in Modern English, stressed on the first syllable unless they have a prefix (*defénce*, *afféccioun*), but borrowings from French often stress the last syllable apart from final *-e* (*benigne*, *honóur*, *servýse*). Endings like *-nésse*, *-énce*, *-áunce*, *-ýnge* in rhyme position take stress. The common ending *-cioun* has two syllables, with the stress on the last. A number of words are variable (like the modern word "diverse"): in *Troilus and Criseyde* I.843 *Fórtune* has stress on the first syllable; in I.849 it is *Fortúne*. Proper names vary, especially two-syllabled *Tróilus*, *Pándar(e)*, *Criséyd(e)*, three-syllabled *Tróílus*, *Pándarüs*, *Criséyde*, and even four-syllabled *Criséyde* (II.1424). (Here and in the text the dieresis mark over a vowel (*ë*) means that it is to be pronounced as a separate syllable.) The best guide is the meter.

The consonants are pronounced as in Modern English (including the

6. See Kökeritz 1978. For inflectional forms see the "Notes on Inflections" in Davis et al. 1979.

ch sound of *chaunce* and the *g* sound of *age*—not the French sounds), with some exceptions. The *g*, *k*, and *w* in combinations like *gnaw*, *knee*, and *wrecche* were fully pronounced, as was the *l* in *folk*, *half*, but the *gn* combination in French words like *signe*, *benigne* was pronounced simply as *n*. Initial *h* in words borrowed from French (*honour*, *habit*) is silent—so the scribes usually spelled Helen and Hector as *Eleyne*, *Ector*—and in short common words like *he*, *him*, *hem*, *hire*, *hit*, *han*, initial *h* is either silent or weakly pronounced. In words like *is* and *was* the *s* was usually unvoiced, so that the words rhymed with *this* and *glas*. Exactly how *r* was pronounced is not known, but especially between vowels it should be trilled or rolled as in the continental European languages or Scots. The sound of *gh* in words like *knight*, *broght* is that of the *ch* in German *ich* and *ach*. The former sound (after *i*, *e*, *y*) is that of a strongly pronounced *h* of the word “hue”; the latter sound (after *a*, *o*, *u*) is the more guttural sound of Scottish *loch*.

Chaucer's vowel sounds differed substantially from ours, and had roughly the values of Latin and modern continental languages like French and German. As in Scots or Irish English, long vowels were truly long, drawn out so as to produce the sounds we hear as lilting. The accompanying table will give an idea of the pronunciation, but listening to a teacher or a good recording of Chaucer will help the most. Unstressed vowels like those in the final syllables *-e*, *-es*, *-ed* have the “uh” (schwa) sound of the last syllable of *sofa* and the first syllable of *control*. Chaucer has no vowel like that of modern “but”; his word *but* rhymes with “put” (with rounded *u*). The spellings *y* and *i* are interchangeable; they have the same value.

Hardest to pronounce at speed are the long vowels of short words: Chaucer's *he* is pronounced like “hay” (but as a pure vowel, not a diphthong), and his *to* sounds like a pure-vowel version of modern “toe.” Also tricky are the long *u* vowels that Chaucer texts spell *ou* or *ow*: Chaucer's *flour* (flower) rhymes with modern “tour,” and *fowl* (bird) with “drool.” The spelling *o* in common words like *love*, *monk*, *sonne* never had an *o* sound, but the rounded *u* sound of “put”: the *o* spelling merely avoided a confusing series of “minim” strokes in writing, such that *munk* would look, in medieval script, like *iiiiiiik* (without the dots on the *i*'s). Variant spellings of words generally reflect actual variants of pronunciation, so that we should pronounce *hye* and *heigh*, both meaning “high,” or *nat* and *noght*, both meaning “not,” in two different ways.

Final *-es* and *-ed* normally had full pronunciation as syllables. The pronunciation of final *-e* depends on complex inflectional rules, but on the whole the spelling in this Norton Critical Edition (which is slightly normalized) in conjunction with the meter will be a reliable guide. Very frequently a final *-e* (or often another final vowel like the *-o* of *to* or *unto*) will precede a word beginning with a vowel or an *h* that is not pronounced or weakly pronounced; in these cases the *-e* is elided or slurred, at least for metrical purposes. Hence, near the beginning of *Troilus and Criseyde*, *parte fro* and *sothe for* are each pronounced as having three syllables, while *sone of* and *clepe I* and *have he* have two syllables; *unto any* has three, *the advérsité* has four (and scribes would often spell such a combination as *thadversite*). Exceptions to these rules include *thise*,

CHAUCER'S SPELLING VOWELS	EXAMPLES	ME PRONUNCIATION	EVOLUTION IN NE
a	<i>after, at</i>	[a], as in NE <i>top</i>	usually becomes [æ], as in NE <i>after, at</i>
aa	<i>take, taas</i>	[a:], as in NE <i>father</i>	becomes [e], as in NE <i>take, case</i>
e	<i>best, hem</i>	[ɛ], as in NE <i>best</i>	no change
e, ee	<i>heath, ese, see</i>	[ɛ:], as in NE <i>bed</i>	becomes [i], spelled <i>ea</i> , as in NE <i>heath, ease, sea</i>
e, ee	<i>swete, be, see</i>	[ɛ:], as in NE <i>take</i>	becomes [i], spelled <i>e</i> or <i>ee</i> , as in NE <i>sweet, be, see</i>
i, y	<i>hit, in</i>	[i], as in NE <i>hit, in</i>	no change
i, y	<i>I, ride</i>	[i:], as in NE <i>seed</i>	becomes [ai], as in NE <i>I, ride</i>
o	<i>of, ox</i>	[ɔ], as in NE <i>long</i>	usually becomes [ə] or [a], as in NE <i>of, ox</i>
o, oo	<i>go, hope, so</i>	[ɔ:], as in NE <i>law</i>	becomes [o], as in NE <i>go, hope, so</i>
o, oo	<i>roote, to, good</i>	[o:], as in NE <i>note</i>	becomes [u] or [ʊ], as in NE <i>root, to, good</i>
u, o'	<i>up, but, come</i>	[ʊ], as in NE <i>put</i>	usually becomes [ə], as in NE <i>up, but, come</i>
ou, ow	<i>hous, town</i>	[u:], as in NE <i>to</i>	becomes [au], as in NE <i>house, town</i>
u, eu, ew	<i>vertu, salewe</i>	[y], as in Fr. <i>tu</i> ²	no NE equivalent
DIPHTHONGS			
ai, ay, ei, ey	<i>day, sayn, they</i>	[æi], somewhere between NE <i>hay</i> and <i>high</i>	becomes [ei], as in NE <i>day, say, they</i>
au, aw	<i>cause, draw</i>	[au], as in NE <i>out</i>	becomes [ɔ], as in NE <i>cause, draw</i>
eu, ew ³	<i>neue, reule</i>	[ʊ], close to NE <i>few</i>	becomes [tu] or [u], as in NE <i>few, rule</i>
oi, oy	<i>joye, point</i>	[ɔi], as in NE <i>joy</i>	no change
ou, ow	<i>thought, boue</i>	[ɔʊ], a glide between the vowels of NE <i>law</i> and <i>to</i>	becomes [ɔ] or [o], as in NE <i>thought, bow</i>

The table is reproduced by permission from the companion Norton Critical Edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, ed. V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), p. xv.

1. A few words with the short [ʊ] sound in ME are spelled with *o* instead of *u*: *some* (NE *son*), *some* (NE *sun*), *come, love, some*. These words were originally spelled with *u* in Old English; the *o* spelling is an orthographic change only.
2. This sound occurs only in a few words recently borrowed from French.
3. A few words—the most familiar are *fewe, lewed, shew, shrewe*—should be pronounced [ɛʊ] instead of [ʊ].