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**“The Heighe Worthynesse of Love”:
Visions of Perception, Convention, and Contradiction in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde***

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at
Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Ad parentibus optimis

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Abstract

“THE HEIGHE WORTHYNESSE OF LOVE”: VISIONS OF PERCEPTION, CONVENTION, AND CONTRADICTION IN CHAUCER’S *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*

By Jake Hertz

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Director: Dr. Sachi Shimomura, Associate Professor, Department of English

This thesis examines three images associated with the manuscripts and early printed editions of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* which I have dubbed “Prostrate Troilus,” “Pandarus as Messenger,” and “Criseyde in the Garden.” These images are artifacts of contemporary textual interpretation that “read” Chaucer’s text and the tale of *Troilus*. They each illustrate the way in which Troilus, Pandarus, and Criseyde “read” images, gestures, symbols, and speeches within the narrative, and they show how these characters are constrained and influenced by their individual primary modes of perception. Troilus reads but does not analyze. Pandarus actively reads his own meanings into messages. Criseyde’s reading is reflective. Ultimately, the different interpretive strategies that Chaucer explores in *Troilus* mirror those of Chaucer’s readers.

Introduction

Sometime in the first quarter of the 15th century, a deluxe English manuscript of unrivaled quality began to be composed. Had it been completed, many scholars agree that it would have been considered one of the finest manuscripts ever produced in Britain.¹ As it exists today, the Corpus Christi College MS 61 contains the full text of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, with minimal rubrication and a few rough outlines of unfinished historiated initials. The crown jewel of the manuscript is its stunning frontispiece, which is thought to depict Chaucer himself reading his poem before a courtly audience (fig. 1). The frontispiece is the only completed illustration in the manuscript's 300 pages, but it is quite clear from carefully placed gaps in the text that the original composers planned on executing 94 more illustrations, some of them full-page. These empty spaces are especially disappointing for Chaucerian scholars because they echo the sad lack of extant manuscript images depicting scenes from Chaucer's poems. In fact, there is only one known image depicting a narrative action from Chaucer's poetry: an historiated initial in the Bodleian MS Arch. Selden. B. 24 (fol. 1r), which shows the God of Love peeking down from the heavens and pointing his arrow at Troilus (fig. 2). The only other near contemporary images we have that accompany Chaucer's poetry are the pilgrim portraits in *The Ellesmere Chaucer* (Huntington Library, MS EL. C.9), which do not illustrate narrative action.

In modern popular culture, book illustration may have accrued an air of triviality; it is easy to write it off as mere decoration or even as a distraction from the more meaningful text. But in the 14th century, book illustration was an essential component of the reading process,

¹ Salter and Pearsall in "The Role of the Frontispiece" describe the Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 61 as "one of the most splendid examples of fifteenth century English book-painting" (108).

perhaps most obviously in religious texts, but certainly also in vernacular romances like *Troilus and Criseyde*. Chaucer himself demonstrated the symbiotic relationship between text and image in the 14th century through a famous ekphrastic passage from one of his earliest poems, *The Book of the Duchess*. In this dream vision poem, the speaker awakes (within his dream) in a bedroom “wel depeynted” with stained glass windows and walls decorated with stories. The windows depict “hooly al the story of Troye” and the walls show both the “text and glose, / Of al the Romaunce of the Rose” (326, 333-4).² The stained-glass windows are an allusion to a moment in the *Aeneid* where Aeneas, after having fled to Carthage, finds the story of the Trojan war depicted on the walls of the Temple of Juno (1.453-493). The reliefs move Aeneas to tears not because they are overwhelmingly beautiful, but because he is able to read them like a text and identify his own tragic story in carvings.³ When the dreamer of *The Book of the Duchess* describes the room as having both the “text and glose, / of al Romaunce of the Rose” painted on its walls, this can be understood as either describing walls that are literally covered with the glossed text of the entire poem, or (in perhaps a more visually coherent interpretation) as representing illustrations from the *Roman de la Rose* (text) coupled with explanatory captions (gloss)—a form that mirrors the illustration conventions of late medieval manuscripts.

The general functions of a medieval text’s gloss are manifold and complex. Manuscript glosses not only emphasize, elucidate, and define, they also interpret and analyze the texts that they accompany. Indeed, acts of biblical exegetic *glossing* arguably account for our earliest examples of textual criticism, and form a direct antecedent of our own practice today. That Chaucer, therefore, would rhetorically equate manuscript glosses with manuscript illuminations

² All quotations from Chaucer’s works are cited from *The Riverside Chaucer* (1987).

³ Interestingly, Charles R. Stone in “And Sodeynly He Wax Therwith Astoned” sees this Virgilian scene reflected in Troilus’s “stupefied viewing” of Criseyde in the Palladium (575).

signifies his understanding of the critical value of book illustrations: he sees them as functioning like glosses to the texts that they illuminate. Thus, in *The Book of the Duchess*'s description of these two "texts" (the stained-glass history of Troy and the wall-painted *Roman de la Rose*), we see a blurring of the modern distinctions between images and language. It is precisely passages like these that have convinced scholars like John V. Fleming that in the Middle Ages "there is an intimate relationship between the painted picture and the written text," and that book illustrations "form an important part of [a] poem's critical apparatus" (12, 8).

This approach to studying medieval texts, especially those of Chaucer, in tandem with the contemporary visual art and iconography of the era, owes much to V. A. Kolve and his influential, two volume work, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*. Just as with the visual/verbal relationship found in *The Book of the Duchess*, Kolve looks to another of Chaucer's earlier poems, *The House of Fame*, to show how "the verbal, the visual, and the memorial were linked in Chaucer's mind" (41). More than half of *The House of Fame* is dominated by a passage in which the speaker recounts the story of the *Aeneid* as he "reads" it from text and images engraved on the walls of Venus's temple. The speaker both "reads" the story of the *Aeneid* from the wall and "sees" it; at times, it is even described as being "heard" by the speaker (Kolve 41-2). Likewise, the text/images on the wall are sometimes "graven" or "peynted," and other times they seem to be "heard, read, or remembered" (42). The ambiguous language the speaker uses to describe his experience exposes the lack of clear boundaries between visual art and text in Chaucer's poetry. What Kolve's analysis shows is not that text and images are functionally interchangeable, but that the way they function is inexorably linked.

According to Kolve, the basic critical relationship between book illustration and written text in the late Middle Ages is one of reader response. He argues that "for us the illuminator is as

close as we can get to a member of a medieval audience in the act of imaging a story” (66).

Therefore, analyzing *Troilus and Criseyde* in tandem with medieval illustrations (as scholars have done with Chretien de Troyes’ romances, Gottfried von Strausburg’s *Tristan*, and especially Guillaume de Lorris’s *Roman de la Rose*) would allow us to witness an act of contemporary or near contemporary “reading” of the poem—an experience that is actually possible when we contextualize the poem within its history as a text and as a story.

Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* is only one part of a greater “Troilus tradition.” The tale of Troilus was first envisioned at length by Benoît de Sainte-Maure in *Le roman de Troie* (c. 1155) which was later developed into a full romance by Giovanni Boccaccio in *Il Filostrato* (1337). *Il Filostrato*, in turn, was translated into various other vernacular languages, including French and, of course, Chaucer’s own English reworking, *Troilus and Criseyde* (1385). After Chaucer, the Troilus story marches on into the Renaissance with Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* (1609). Thus, Troilus and his story exist beyond the scope of Chaucer’s own redaction. Boccaccio’s original Italian poem, and the French translation, benefit from their existence within continental cultures that illustrated their vernacular romances much more prolifically than the English did. It is for this reason that we have multiple, surviving illustrated manuscripts of Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato* and the French translation, *Le Roman de Troïle* by Pierre de Beauveau. Thus, the Troilus stories contemporary to Chaucer’s own are our best sources for images that can enrich our reading of the poem. Furthermore, Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* was itself eventually illustrated. The first two printed editions of Chaucer’s *Troilus* (Wynken de Worde’s in 1517 and Richard Pynson’s in 1526) each contain five woodcut illustrations. Together, the images from the *Filostrato* manuscripts and the early printed editions of Chaucer’s *Troilus* begin to provide an adequately rich bank of images for reading alongside Chaucer’s text. In fact, due to

the unwieldy number of illustrations to choose from, I have chosen to emphasize two image tropes that appear and reappear regularly throughout the manuscripts of *Le Roman de Troïle* and the two first printed editions of Chaucer's *Troilus*, which I have entitled "Prostrate Troilus" and "Pandarus as Messenger." The "Prostrate Troilus" illustration appears in the Bodleian MS Douce 331 fol. 8r, the Bibliothèque nationale de France MSS Français 25528 fol. 21v, the STC 5095 fol. 97r, and the STC 5096 fol. 37v (figs. 3-6). "Pandarus as Messenger" appears in MS Douce 331 fol. 19v, the BnF MSS Français 25528 fol. 49v, the STC 5096 fol. 16r (figs. 10-12). Additionally, I will examine the perplexing frontispiece to Wynken de Worde's 1517 edition of Chaucer's *Troilus* (fig. 13).

The seeming ubiquity of the "Prostrate Troilus" and "Pandarus as Messenger" images is certainly less attributable to coincidence than it is to convention. Likewise, the Wynken de Worde frontispiece to *Troilus* is composed of very standard romance iconography; in fact, the image is obviously designed to be applicable to multiple works. This may initially seem to negate any valuable analysis of such images, but to take this viewpoint, one would also have to negate the value of Chaucer's own very conventional text. The reality is, of course, that in the novel *composition* and *arrangement* of convention (in both illustration and romance), an author or artist can potentially create something wholly new and *unconventional*—as Chaucer clearly does in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Thus, as Kolve suggests, the unique composition of standard imagery in manuscript illustration (and I would extend this in terms of woodcut prints to the mere assignation of a stock image to a specific text) "show us an artist adapting a traditional image...to the details of the specific text before him, working from a store of conventional imagery to specific textual detail, refining what he knew of the tradition into an individual reader's response" (66-7).

When analyzed as “readings” of the *Troilus* tale, the reoccurring images of “Prostrate Troilus” and “Pandarus as Messenger” and the puzzling yet conventional symbolism of the de Worde frontispiece reflect, emphasize, and insinuate the contradictions and incompatibilities inherent to the imagistic, gestural, and behavioral conventions and tropes of courtly love in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Each of these selected images focalizes one character in particular, and together, they convey how Troilus, Criseyde, and Pandarus experience courtly love in a way unique to their individual abilities of perception and discrimination—essentially reflecting their unique “readings” of visual signs, spoken words, and texts, as well as their own perception of and comfort with the ambivalence of these signs. All of this meaning is realized through Chaucer’s subtle manipulations of conventional romance topoi at pivotal moments in the poem.

The romance genre (by which *Troilus and Criseyde* can be classified, if only imperfectly) operates, in part, by acknowledging its incompatibility with “real” life. Andreas Capellanus (Andreas the Chaplain), the author of the first treatise on the art of courtly love, *De arte honeste amandi*, or as it is commonly known in English, *The Art of Courtly Love* (c. 1185), finishes his tract with a book entitled *reprobatione amoris*, in which he suggests to his reader that everything prior to this final book was presented as merely an example of precisely how *not* to live one’s life. In a similar spirit, Chaucer ends *Troilus and Criseyde* with a plea to negate the importance of all the amorous “trifles” that precede Troilus’s ultimate spiritual atonement—essentially the entire poem. How seriously we are to take either author’s retraction is a matter of debate; however, they both expose a recognition of the ill-defined space between literary artifice and cultural reality. In particular, through the distancing veil of *Troilus*’s classical setting, Chaucer isolates courtly love in an exclusive and far-away realm of literary art, all while piercing this façade with the irreconcilable darts of Chaucer’s own cultural reality. In truth, Chaucer does not

wait until the final lines of *Troilus* to “retract” his artistic indulgences in romance by exposing the contradictions of courtly love; indeed, the entire poem is perforated with fiercely critical admonitions against the dangers of viewing the world so narrowly through the ideology of *fin’amor*.

When Chaucer composed *Troilus and Criseyde* (c. 1380-1385), the tradition of courtly love had already been a part of English culture for nearly 200 years. The poem employs the tropes of courtly love found in other vernacular romances, and yet it also criticizes, satirizes, and plays with these same notions. Scholars have argued that the poem’s critical subversion of the literary conventions has made it difficult to categorize *Troilus and Criseyde* as a romance, and yet I would argue that, to some degree, competent medieval romances always have some aspect of meta-fictional commentary. Because overt references to other romances is a “hallmark” of the genre (Fewster 2-3), romance is always aware of its own textuality. This is exemplified best in *Troilus and Criseyde* when, at the close of the poem, Criseyde worries about her reputation in other books: “Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende, / Shall neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge / No good word, for thise bookes wol me shende” (5.1058-60). What is unique and provocative in Chaucer’s poem, however, is the extent to which it comments upon the tensions and problems of courtly love, and the methods by which it does so. Through the subtle and witty manipulation of romance conventions, Chaucer shows how each of his main characters (Troilus, Criseyde, and Pandarus) perceives, understands, and reconciles the inherent contradictions of courtly love in different and illuminating ways. Ultimately, these varied outlooks come together to form a multifaceted and thorough examination and critique of courtly love and its function in medieval society.

First, however, it is important to note that courtly love in medieval romance literature relies on a complex system of specialized images, tropes, and rules. These appear in romance narratives like linked clusters. For example, in a romance's "love at first sight" scene, one would expect to find a description of a love-arrow piercing the lover through the eye and into his heart; rhetorical *descriptio* that characterizes figures in romance; and the romance "rule" of a lady's initial feminine disdain for the lover. (Notably, no individual topos of courtly love is necessarily unique to the tradition; these tropes can be found in Ovid and other classical poets. It is the particular arrangement and interlocking concatenation of these conventional tropes which makes the system of courtly love an identifiable literary phenomenon.) Thus, when Chaucer attributes certain *conventional* behaviors to characters in unexpected ways or when he uses *traditional* symbols in unusual places, he alters and repurposes courtly love into a new system with new meaning by merely rearranging old parts. His arrangement of courtly love topoi into a self-critiquing system of intentional and pointed emphasis, tension, and dysfunction allows the poem to depict scenes of great conventionality (on the surface) that are yet laced with subtle, often witty undercurrents of satire and irony.

It is primarily for this reason that although Chaucer uses many of the stock images, tropes, and rules of courtly love in *Troilus and Criseyde*, the poem nevertheless resists the label of a "standard" romance. Further undermining any reverence for genre's conventions is the fact that Chaucer's characters in *Troilus* indeed express sincere moments of deep pathos—all while being undercut by the narrator with implicit humor, irony, and even disdain through his manipulation of double-speaking romance topoi. Perhaps this is what fascinates us most about Chaucer's longest complete work: how it both deftly constructs the glittering edifice of courtly

love while simultaneously repurposing its components to expose the structural illusions just behind its gilded façade.

Essential to my analysis of the illustrations' interactions with the poem is an understanding of one of the inherent contradictions embedded within the courtly love tradition, from which stem all subsequent tensions in the passages and images of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Written sometime near the close of the 12th century, Andreas Capellanus's love manual, *De arte honeste amandi*, outlines the meaning of and methods for attaining *fin'amor* in courtly French society. Although we can know neither Andreas's intentions in writing this tract, nor whether or to what degree it was a work of serious instruction or satire (or, as is most likely, some combination of these both), what is clear is that the rules and defining notions about love in this work appear in the earlier lyric poetry of the troubadours all the way down to the later vernacular romances such as *Troilus and Criseyde*. Thus, Andreas's book provides an organized and succinct codification of these rules representative enough to expose the contradictions inherent to the courtly love tradition as it functions in romance literature.

Andreas begins his treatise with a definition of what love is: "amor est passio quaedam innata procedens ex visione et immoderata cogitatione formae alterius sexus" [love is a certain innate suffering proceeding from the sight of and immoderate meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex] (I.i.1).⁴ In this first line, Andreas has already established two notions essential to our understanding of courtly love: that it is a sort of suffering,⁵ and that it is entirely predicated

⁴ All quotes from *De arte honeste amandi* are cited from P. G. Walsh's 1987 edition (the translations are mine).

⁵ Although *passio* may refer to any "strong emotion," it is contextually clear that Andreas is emphasizing the more dolorous connotations of the word in his definition of love, and so I believe "suffering" is a more faithful translation [cf. "quod amor sit passio facile est videre..." (I.i.2)].

on visual stimuli. The understanding of love as a force that is primarily generated by vision is reinforced by Andreas throughout his book—he even goes so far as to say that a blind man cannot fall in love: “caecitas impedit amorem, quia caecus videre non potest unde suus possit animus immoderatam suscipere cogitationem” [blindness impedes love, for a blind man cannot see that which may beget immoderate thought in his mind] (I.v.6). And yet, shortly after declaring that the sightless have no ability to love, Andreas writes that love predicated upon recognition of a beautiful figure alone is really only for “simple” people: “simplex enim amans nil credit aliud in amante quaerendum nisi formam faciemque venustam et corporis cultum” [the simple lover believes there is nothing worth seeking in a lover besides a beautiful face and an elegant body] (I.vi.3). On the other hand, Andreas notes that a *real* courtly lover (i.e. a noble and sophisticated one) falls in love with his lady for her character above all else, because “sola ergo probitas amoris est digna corona” [character alone is the crown of love] (I.vi.15). And so, there is a seemingly irreconcilable contradiction even in Andreas’s wholly idealized definition of love: love is both a *passio innata*, a “natural passion” born of visual fixation, and a measured, social response to cultural values. If, as Andreas states, noble character and a “copiosa sermonis facundia” [great eloquence of speech] (I.vi.1), are indeed the truest, purest, and most sophisticated gateways to love, then a blind man should certainly not be “barred” from love.

But these two conflicting notions of love as both inborn and imposed are necessary cohabitants of the courtly love tradition. For the literature of romance to be as emotionally compelling as it is, it must acknowledge these baser *passions* rooted in visual eroticism. At the same time, courtly love must be, above all, *courtly*—it must reflect the principles of its noble and wealthy readership which values intellectual sophistication and social refinement. This contradiction forms the underlying germ of tension in *Troilus and Criseyde* which spreads

through the narrative influencing the thoughts, behaviors, and actions of its characters. The understanding of love as inherently artificial provokes the public/social/and outwardly gestural performances of courtly love, while the understanding of love as an inborn passion spawns the private/individual/ and inwardly emotional realizations of courtly love behavior. This oppositional tension is the crux of *Troilus and Criseyde* and the key to reading the poem in tandem with the illustrations.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, I will examine a recurring image which I have dubbed “Prostrate Troilus,” that appears throughout the Troilus tradition with curious regularity. This chapter will show how the image reflects Troilus’s limited understanding of love, an understanding which is visually informed by the surface-level meaning of the tradition’s conventional symbols and rituals. The greatest fault in Troilus’s primarily vision-based conception of love is that it leaves no space in his understanding for semantic difference. Because of this, Troilus fatally misinterprets of the symbolic gestures and conventions of the courtly love tradition as true love itself.

I will show in Chapter 2 how Pandarus not only embraces the ambiguity of the courtly love tradition in its “natural artifice,” but celebrates it. Here, I analyze another recurring image, “Pandarus as Messenger.” For Pandarus, love is an artful game, intended to be constructed and dismantled at will. His characterization as an “architect” of love early in the poem effectively dominates Pandarus’s role in the narrative and his perceptive understanding of love: indeed, the glittering edifice of courtly love erected briefly in *Troilus and Criseyde* is the handiwork of Pandarus alone. Furthermore, as a go-between to the lovers, Pandarus moves among the delineated cultural spheres of class, gender, and private/public life. And as a messenger, Pandarus dominates, manipulates, and directs the reception and interpretation of his missives—

effectively coloring, altering, and even rewriting their contents to suit his own ambiguous motives.

Finally, in Chapter 3 I will “read” Wynken de Worde’s woodcut frontispiece to *Troilus and Criseyde* as an iconographic key to understanding Criseyde’s complex comprehension of love’s outward signs. The frontispiece gathers an array of romance motifs from the poem together into a collage-like arrangement. Courtly love is a social and political tool forced upon Criseyde that she must decide how she will wield. I explore how Criseyde grapples with the contradictions of courtly love as both ennobling and illicit as she navigates the forces of public reputation and private love—forces that turn out to be not so distinct as they first appear.

The complex network of text, image, allusion, and convention that is Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* embodies multiple levels of interpretation. Within the narrative, Troilus, Pandarus, and Criseyde “read” images, gestures, symbols, and speeches. Chaucer’s text and the tale of *Troilus* are in turn “read” by certain images that become associated with the poem in its representations in manuscript and print. And lastly, we, as readers, must synthesize these interpretive layers as we form our own (ideally) comprehensive reading of the poem.

Chapter 1. Troilus, Vision, and The Lover's Malady

A certain image haunts the character of Troilus. It is rendered in the illuminations, silverpoint drawings, and woodblock prints found throughout his story's many iterations in both manuscript and print. The scene centers on Troilus, bedridden by the agony of unrequited love and attended by Pandarus (figures 3-6). The manuscript illustrations from MS Douce 331 and MS Français 25528 depict a remarkably similar scene. Both present a perspective that is more or less eye-level to the figures of Troilus and Pandarus, as though we the viewers are standing there in the room witnessing the event unfold. Both manuscript illustrations show Troilus in bed lying on his side as Pandarus outstretches his hand (or hands) in a gesture that at once signifies an imperative tone and an offering of support. Troilus gestures back by wringing his hands (as in fig. 3) or by pointing to himself (as in fig. 4). While wringing one's hands is a conventional gesture in English and French romance literature denoting emotional distress (Burrow 39), when paired with his prostrate posture the image also evokes the mannerisms of religious supplication.⁶ In this way, the image reflects the poem's constant references to the romance motif of the "religion of love." In the MS Français 25528, Troilus is shown pointing to himself; besides being a somewhat rude gesture⁷, his pointing also comically highlights the solipsism that comes to define his character. Notably, both also depict a dog or dogs in Troilus's bedroom, which in late medieval art generally signified faith and loyalty (Gardner 402)—perhaps a nod to what may be Troilus's most redeeming quality: his unwavering love for Criseyde.

⁶Davidson in *Gesture in Medieval Drama and Art* (84).

⁷ Burrow writes that "pointing was a form of *gesticulatio* quite widely condemned, then as now" (60).

The first two printed editions of *Troilus and Criseyde* also provide illustrations of this scene (figs. 5, 6). In opposition to the manuscript illustrations, the woodcut prints seem to emphasize Troilus's illness more than his emotional condition. In the woodcuts, Troilus is tucked into the bed and wearing underclothes; he has the appearance of having been in bed for a long time (as opposed to the manuscript illustrations, which show him lying on top of the bed covers in full costume). Together, these four images not only illustrate a moment in the poem, but also betray different characterizations of Troilus and his lovesickness. One illustrator interprets Troilus as comically self-obsessed, another as a fervent disciple to the God of Love, and another still as very literally sickened by his love.

That illustrators and typesetters chose to depict a variation of this image so regularly in their books is perhaps not very surprising. For many readers of *Troilus and Criseyde*, this image precisely summarizes their impression of Troilus. Despite the brief moments of activity in the middle of the poem, for much of Chaucer's narrative Troilus is either in bed suffering from a chronic case of lovesickness, or else he is in bed feigning that illness. The image reads as a rather pathetic one to a modern audience, but for fourteenth-century readers, Troilus's behavior would have been recognized as belonging to a strong tradition of legendary romance lovers—a status codified in his depiction alongside the most well-renowned literary lovers of the Middle Ages (Achilles, Tristram, Lancelot, Samson, and Paris) in the “Triumph of Venus” [c.1400] panel located in the Musée du Louvre (fig. 7). Employing Pentecostal imagery, this panel portrays (from left to right) Achilles, Tristan, Lancelot, Samson, and Troilus, all kneeling in worship of Venus. Troilus's inclusion in this panel among such famous literary lovers as Tristan and

Lancelot demonstrate the Troilus character's popular reputation as a noble lover.⁸ But readers ought to be skeptical of Troilus's veneer of nobility in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and skeptical of Chaucer's apparent adherence to any cherished literary tradition in general. For although Troilus's conventional lovesickness does not itself undermine the stature and presence expected of a medieval romance hero, Chaucer has manipulated the symbolic meaning of lovesickness in *Troilus and Criseyde* to expose the inherent contradictions of, and dangers inherent in, that convention—particularly for the protagonist. Chaucer uses the lovesickness trope inherited from the poem's source text, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, to unmask Troilus's over-reliance on the visual modes of perception, which inform his naïve analysis of love and its social repercussions.

However, Troilus's naiveté aside, his dependence on vision-based modes of perception is not necessarily due to a failure of rational reasoning; in fact, his failure to discern the distinction between outward behavior and inner emotion is underpinned by a simple but sensible system of logic. In "*She, This in Black: Vision, Truth, and Will in Geoffrey Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*," T. E. Hill describes Troilus's perceptive faculty as representing a logical, theoretical relationship between cognition and perception "in which the proper connection between *res* and *verbum* is assumed to be substantial, certain, and causally determined" (3). What Troilus experiences, therefore, is essentially life as unambiguous meaning—or, to borrow the colloquialism, Troilus interprets reality as "what you see is what you get" and fails to understand that what he sees is not necessarily identical to another's perception.

It is fitting, therefore, that the *image* of Troilus in bed became associated with his vision-

⁸Clearly mimicking medieval convention for depicting the Pentecost, the disciples of Venus appear to receive gilded rays from her pudenda instead of from the holy ghost. This pseudo-religious panel was painted on a "desco da parto" or "birth salver," a symbolic gift that celebrated a successful birth. These objects help to illustrate the ubiquity of the "religion of love" topoi in everyday late medieval culture.

induced lovesickness, because medieval illustrators (and especially early wood-block cutters) were constrained to an aesthetic of exaggerated gestures which conveyed the inner emotion of its figures. Within these conventions, subtlety in emotional expression in early book illustration is often lost to hulking, gestural symbols. Troilus's perceptive faculties imitate this reduction of the unseen into symbol; his understanding of his own story is remarkably shallow, as if he only viewed the illustrations of his romance without reading its words. It is, therefore, Troilus's unwise dependence on vision-informed modes of perception which precipitates his failure to correctly infer the social reality of his situation throughout the poem. His misreading of social reality then provokes his earnest emulation of the medieval romance trope, *amor hereos*.

Amor hereos has a complicated history in Chaucerian criticism. It enters the scholarship through Chaucer's only overt reference to the phenomenon in *The Knight's Tale* when Arcite, much like Troilus, succumbs to lovesickness:

...In his geere for al the world he ferde
Nat oonly lik the loveres maladye
Of Hereos, but rather lyk manye
Engendred of humour malencolik
Biforen, in his celle fantastik. (1372-76)

Here, Chaucer describes the *geere* "behavior" of Arcite as resembling the behavior expressed by lovesick heroes of literature. And yet, he also compares Arcite's *geere* to a *many* "mania" caused by a melancholic humor and an overstimulated *celle fantastik*, an area of the brain believed by medieval physicians to house the cognitive faculties of *imagination*.⁹ The word

⁹ "The brayne is...distingued and departed in thre celles or dennes...In the formeste celle and womb imagination is conformed and made, in the midle, reason, in the hyndermeste, recordation and minde" (Bartholomaeus Anglicus 5.3, tr. Trevisa)

imaginatio is derived from the word *imago*, which in Latin refers to both mental and physical images (Oxford Latin Dictionary). Thus, the idea that images (imagined or witnessed) cause *amor hereos* is at the forefront of Chaucer's understanding of the condition. From this we can see how Chaucer's notion of lovesickness is grounded not only in emotional suffering, but *engendred* by real, biological conditions of illness. Lowes, in "The Loveres Maladye of Hereos" (1914), was the first to note that Arcite's symptoms correspond very closely with those listed in medieval medical treatises on lovesickness. Before Lowes, *hereos* was thought to be an orthographic variation of either "eros" or "heroes," but his article proved that the word is descended from a blend of the Greek "eros," the Latin "herus," and the Arabic "al-'isq," and that it was specifically used to refer to lovesickness as a medical illness. Although we think of lovesickness today more so as a figurative expression, medical treatises of Chaucer's age categorized lovesickness as a potentially mortal disease that, although grounded in the faculties of fantasy, expressed very real and dangerous bodily symptoms. Therefore, the constant threat of death attached to Troilus's lovesickness in *Troilus and Criseyde* would not, as may be interpreted by a modern reader, necessarily be hyperbolic for a medieval audience for whom it is a commonly held belief that it was indeed a real, and sometimes fatal, disorder.

The medical context of *amor hereos*, however, is only one element in the meaning of Troilus's affliction, and it would be simple to interpret the poem's treatment of lovesickness as wholly sincere. The antique *gravitas* that hangs around Troilus's lovesickness is challenged by the narrator's own playful method of depicting it; because, while it would be misguided to deny the sincere compassion (if not pity) of the narrator for Troilus, we must temper this view by acknowledging the tone, which often vacillates somewhere between empathy and satire. The courtesy that we as modern readers sometimes show to older works in our provisional adoption

of presumed models of historical affectation is a flawed approach for understanding a work in its cultural context. Imaging how a fourteenth-century reader would interpret scenes of emotional expression in poetry relies on our blinding assumptions of an imagined emotional medieval history. If we were to read Troilus's faints and exclamations as enacted sincerely in the spirit of the *fin'amor* conventions, we would be overlooking the relatively removed perspective that Chaucer and his contemporary audience would have had from this literary custom. The literary conventions of courtly love were formed as early as 1100 in France—by Chaucer's age, the conventions of romance would have been well known, recognizable, and perhaps even a little old fashioned.

Thus, keeping in mind the relative distance that separates Chaucer's cultural age from the real height of the romance genre, it is fair to read certain aspects of *Troilus and Criseyde* as implicitly and satirically *démodé*. In this regard, the late medieval audience and readers of *Troilus* would have had a perspective remarkably similar to our own reading of the romance genre; that is, relatively removed from our own cultural realities. We understand the intended meaning of medieval literary conventional behavior, but are also very clearly able to discern the comedy of the spectacle. Just as the great bellowing faints of the 19th century operatic consumptives seem comedic to the average contemporary theater-goer, it is not unreasonable to imagine Chaucer's audience snickering at the outmoded romantic antics of the love-struck Troilus. The comedy of Troilus's lovesickness scenes, however, is understated in Chaucer's verse. Much of the irony of Troilus's affliction can be easily overlooked by the modern reader, for truly, Troilus's suffering is affecting and tragic at times. But the attentive reader will also realize that Troilus himself is the cause of so much of his woe, and that ultimately, the failure of Troilus is precisely this—*his* failure. And so, even Troilus's most sincere outbursts of emotional

suffering are always subtextually balanced by the comedy that he is enacting this torture upon himself. After all, the fact that Troilus is “earnestly” lovesick in one book, and then pretending to be actually sick in the next, highlights the irony in the artifice of his emotional expressions.

The more explicit comedy of Troilus’s lovesick behavior reaches its apex when he swoons during the private meeting in Criseyde’s chamber. His faint occurs shortly after Criseyde realizes she’s been tricked into a clandestine meeting with him, to which Troilus impetuously exclaims, “God woot that of this game, / Whan al is wist, than am I nought to blame,” just before performing his grand swoon:

Therwith the sorwe so his herte shette
That from his eyen fil there nought a tere,
And every spirit his vigour in knette,
So they astoned or oppressed were.
The felyng of his sorwe, or of his fere,
Or of aught elles, fled was out of towne;
And down he fel al sodeynly a-swowne. (III.1086-1092)

Notably, the comedy of this scene does not lie merely in the act of his fainting as the modern reader may suspect. Although feminized later (especially in Victorian culture), fainting wasn’t necessarily an “unmanly” deed in medieval literature. The swoon was simply one of the respectable symptoms of lovesickness. In fact, according to the writers of medieval medical treatises and romances, *amor hereos* (and its various symptoms, including fainting) was almost exclusively masculine, and although occasionally affecting women, the disease overwhelmingly belonged to men of nobility (Wack 150). This was due, largely, to the classification of *amor hereos* as a disease of the brain (and not the heart or genitals) by medieval physicians (150). The

only class of people that medieval physicians could imagine as having both the critical faculty (men) and stimulating lifestyle (nobility) able to provoke this disease was that of noblemen. And although the “masculine swoon” is a well-established trope of romantic literature that is not necessarily emasculating or comedic, it quite often does operate as a symbol of humor and humility. Troilus’s faint alone in this moment is, therefore, truly both pathetic and funny at the same time, and the comedy of this scene does not arise from the mere action of fainting itself, but from its situational context.

Just before fainting, however, Troilus implies that his courtship of Criseyde up to this point has been nothing but an amorous “game.” In Middle English, “game” primarily means “pleasure” or “joy” but it is also sometimes glossed as *iocus* or *ludus* (MED)—therefore, Troilus’s classification of his courtship as a “game” is at least shaded with an implication of its triviality. He also refuses to take any “blame” for his part in the farce (III.1084-5). That he is “nought to blame” is, in fact, the last thing Troilus utters before swooning. There is embedded in this statement a pathetic realization for the reader that Troilus is unable to acknowledge his very active participation in the love-scenario—a scenario in which he went to great lengths to conceal himself in a closet for an entire evening for a chance to meet Criseyde alone in her bedroom. He makes no logical connection between his inner feelings for Criseyde and the actions they have generated in real life; these he attributes to the mysterious and inconceivable forces of fate and love.

Thus, Troilus swoons just as his plan to seduce Criseyde seems to be failing. Cornering Criseyde in her bed and accusing her of loving a certain Horaste has driven her to tears. Troilus’s swoon in this context is a manipulative, last-ditch effort to save face by enacting what he believes will convey his profound emotional suffering and move Criseyde to mercy. It is logical,

therefore, that when the overwhelming prospect of failure in love appears before Troilus, he expresses his helplessness in a visually observable and physical way through the literal failure of his somatic facilities. His swoon becomes more emblematic of how he *perceives* his own emotions and wishes to display them than of the emotions themselves. At this moment, the symptoms of *amor hereos* have supposedly rendered him unconscious, but as with his all of his amorous behavior, Troilus's swoon seems to be more affectation than affliction, especially if we consider that it gives Pandarus an excuse to move him into Criseyde's bed and undress him.

In the description of Troilus's faint, which should presumably be in a high, conventional romance style, we face instead a jarring vernacularism when Chaucer writes that Troilus's "felyng of his sorwe... fled was out of towne" (III.1090-1). Elsewhere in *Troilus*, the word "towne" is used to denote Troy (IV.209, IV.588); here, it seems to be a generalized idiomatic expression, a metaphor for Troilus's consciousness, and perhaps also a nod to Troilus's name (literally, "little Troy"). By echoing the psychosomatic process of Troilus's faint through the metonymic metaphor of "a flight from Troy"—which is, notably, the incipient action of the entire poem (committed by Criseyde's father, Calkas)—Chaucer implicitly aligns Troilus's internal, emotional experience with a very external, public connotation. This subtle tonal maneuver imitates Troilus's own comprehension of emotions; Troilus perceives a direct equivalency between internal feelings (oppressive sorrow) and outward emotion (fainting). After Troilus faints, however, and regardless of Troilus's internal feelings, his behavior is interpreted by Pandarus as emasculating when he exclaims, "O thef, is this a mannes herte?" (III.1098). Thus, the reading of Troilus's faint as an ennobling conventional gesture of the romance tradition is challenged and subverted within the poem by its own characters.

Furthermore, Troilus's subsequent undressing by Pandarus and Criseyde, as well as his being tossed into her bed, surpasses the threshold for any empathetic reading of Troilus's condition. At this point, the reader is more compelled to feel sorry for Criseyde, who has been cruelly deceived by her uncle and lover, than to be moved by Troilus's theatrical faint. Furthermore, in Chaucer's hands, Troilus's swoon becomes emasculating. As Troilus is stripped of his clothes, he is stripped of any sexual agency in his first physical encounter with Criseyde, and his very inability to remain standing up is a suggestion of a generalized impotence in all the duties required of a lover.¹⁰ As Gallagher states, "all these incidents parody extreme knightly humility as a reversal of the male sexual role and thus demonstrate that Troilus cannot continue the foolishness of his utter passivity, no matter how religiously he desires to continue it" (129). Troilus's "knightly humility" is shown to be, without a doubt, ineffectual in this scene and beyond; yet Troilus continues this behavior up to the end of his life. He is unable to recognize the relative power and influence that he actually wields over Criseyde. If Troilus had confidently approached Criseyde by offering his protection, as Diomedes does towards the end of the poem, then it is likely that Criseyde would have readily accepted his love without the need for all of Pandarus's complicated and elaborate schemes. Troilus's swoon is really a gestural synecdoche for his overall behavior as a lover; his overzealous adherence to the rituals of courtly love debase him at every station where it should ennoble him. But these notions are established by the context of Troilus's behaviors, and do not arise from any direct manipulation of romance convention by Chaucer. The romance genre's trope of the male "swoon" as a symbolic and behavioral expression of the hero's inner humility can only be employed effectively when the

¹⁰ Maud McInerney examines more in depth the correlation between Troilus's faint and the suggestion of "detumescence" in her article, "Is this a mannes herte?": Unmanninng Troilus through Ovidian Allusion."

hero has previously been consistently characterized as emotionally steady and strong-willed. Troilus has already been made to seem overwhelmingly vulnerable prior to this scene, and so here, rather than ennobling Troilus, the scene humiliates him. And thus, the conventional swoon becomes, in *Troilus*, a very deliberate satirization of lovesickness.

Furthermore, the satire of Troilus's swoon exposes the underlying problem of lovesickness as it functions within the larger structure of medieval gender hierarchy. In traditional romance, Troilus's fainting should only *appear* to induce a symptomatic inversion of the medieval hierarchy of gender (where the lady holds complete, debilitating power over her lover), but in Chaucer's version of the trope, Troilus earnestly relinquishes his masculine agency to Criseyde, Pandarus, and the powers of fate. This is also where the limitations of Troilus's perceptive abilities are perhaps most evident. Troilus seems to understand the reversal on its most basic level in which, according to the "rules" of courtly love, the male suitor (almost always a nobleman) must condescend himself by offering his unconditional service to the lady. In this gesture, the knight symbolically defers his power to the will of his lady by pledging to become "subject" unto her. It is, then, her choice to reject or accept his service. Regardless of her choice, however, she always *appears* to hold full power over the lover; in rejecting him, she kills him (lovesickness is fatal), and in accepting his service, she becomes his lady and his mistress. Crucial to this symbolic inversion of power, however, is the idea that the lady has accepted her lover's service by her own volition; we know from Andreas Capellanus's *De arte honeste amandi* that "amans nihil sapidum ab amante consequitur nisi ex illius voluntate procedat" [a lover enjoys nothing gained from his partner that was not given of her own will] (I.ii.8). Implicit (and undetected by Troilus) in the gesture of acceptance, though, is the subliminal resignation of the lady's power. By receiving her knight as a servant, and thereby acknowledging her position

as a “merciful” lady, she concedes the silent promise that she will not ask of her servant the one thing that would grant her autonomy from this relationship: for him to leave her be. Likewise, by bestowing the power of mastery over himself to his lady, the lover burdens her with the responsibility that a mistress owes to her servant—he forces her to have mercy. And so, what initially appears to be a system of female dominance is actually only an illusion of power; in becoming her servant, the knight revokes any agency that the lady would have generated for herself in her disdain (*dangier*).

Chaucer’s formulation of this symbolic power inversion in *Troilus and Criseyde*, however, totally muddles the process. Just as he inverts the traditionally ennobling swoon gesture of courtly romance to appear as emasculating behavior in *Troilus*, Chaucer also uses this convention of female agency in romance relationships to expose the male dominance that is actually reinforced by these performances. When this idea of pledging one’s service to a lady appears in *Troilus*, the components of the trope are altered. From the beginning, Criseyde is never allowed to exercise her initial *dangier* against her lover because by the time Troilus offers his service to her, Pandarus has already made multiple violent threats entreating her to be merciful. Clearly, the extreme coercion exerted upon Criseyde alters the entire premise of this tradition. No longer is Criseyde acting “mercifully” by her own will. Likewise, Troilus’s promise of service should be supported by a reputation of valiancy and motivation, and yet, all we have seen of Troilus up to this moment is his total inability to act for himself—let alone for another person. Troilus’s swoon undermines the whole gender hierarchy by exposing his true helplessness in love: a hopelessness which needed to have been only symbolically expressed by our hero. This is, in part, why lovesickness proves to be so problematic for Troilus; there is an ever-present rift between the medieval literary ideal of unrestrained love-suffering and its

expression in real life. It is the line between fainting and picking oneself up again, and fainting and having your lady's uncle hoist you into bed to undress you. This cultural lacuna is the gap that young Troilus slips through in his desperate attempt to thrive in a culture which encourages him to embody both the role of the lovesick romance hero and the role of a powerful member of society.

Thus, the symptoms of *amor hereos* (especially the fainting) are far more dangerous when they are experienced in earnest, as Troilus does. The ritualistic and symbolic inversion of power that courtly love requires is only socially viable when it remains a gestural façade that actually reinforces underlying structures of male dominance and power. The tragedy of Troilus, therefore, is that he is genuinely unable to recognize his social power and agency, and that he actually surrenders his power to the forces of love, rather than merely making the adequately figurative gesture to do so.

This failure of Troilus is best exemplified by Diomedes, who clearly appears as a foil to Troilus in the poem. Diomedes is upright, unwavering, active, persistent, and manly, and in the end, he triumphs where Troilus has so sorely failed: in his love for Criseyde. Above all, Diomedes thematically opposes Troilus's inability to individuate his private persona from the public, for even though *amor hereos* is an affliction traditionally considered to primarily affect noble men, Troilus is unable to reconcile the public constructions of masculinity when whole-heartedly consumed by his feminization as a courtly lover. Proud Diomedes, on the other hand, is able to reconcile these two modes of gender expression by allowing his public persona to dominate both spheres and by perceiving what are experienced as heartfelt emotional truths in Troilus's mind for what they really are: cultural symbolic gestures of love. Consider our introduction to Diomedes in Book V as Troilus hands off Criseyde to the Greeks:

With that his [Troilus's] courser turned he about
With face pale, and unto Diomedé
No word he spak, ne non of al his route;
Of which the sone of Tideus took hede,
As he that koude more than the crede
In swich craft, and by the reyne hire hente;
And Troilus to Troie homward he wente. (V.85-91)

When Troilus does not meet Diomedé's eyes in the exchange Diomedé immediately interprets Troilus's inner feelings; Diomedé knows that Troilus is in love with Criseyde because he "koude more than the crede in swich craft;" that is, he understands more than just the fundamentals when it comes to love. Troilus's ineptitude in love is emphasized by Diomedé's effortless mastery. Upon meeting Criseyde, Diomedé immediately and literally takes her reins as Troilus meanders home. And within the next 4 stanzas, he offers Criseyde his protection—something that took Troilus more than 3,000 lines of verse and Pandarus's incessant encouragement to accomplish. Clearly, Troilus was never able to grasp more than just the fundamentals of love, because he fails not only to read the emotions of the people around him, but also to see, as Diomedé is able to, that fin'amor, or the appearance of love, requires action.

This brings me to why Chaucer chose to ascribe this unsophisticated (and at times pathetic) understanding of the social realities of love relationships to Troilus. The source text for *Troilus and Criseyde*, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, sets a strong precedent for Chaucer's decision. Boccaccio's Troiolo behaves much in the same way as Chaucer's Troilus. The key difference, however, is in how each poem's narrator approaches the character of the Trojan prince; Troiolo's narrator is clearly sympathetic to his character, and indeed the proem to *Il Filostrato*, in which an

unrequited Boccaccio addresses his disdainful lady, establishes Troilo as a sort of avatar for the narrator. Chaucer, on the other hand, subtly pokes fun and critiques Troilus's behavior throughout his version of the poem; the narrator of *Troilus* maintains a critical distance from the prince. And so, in this regard, the source material alone does not adequately explain Troilus's characterization by Chaucer. It is, rather, almost certainly Troilus's status as a young nobleman that, for Chaucer, makes him the ideal figure to bear such an underdeveloped interpretation of love—especially if we consider that Troilus isn't the only young romantic man that Chaucer enjoys criticizing in his works. In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer describes a young romantic squire with even more amusement and ridicule than he does with Troilus. In fact, when it is the squire's turn to tell his story, Chaucer has him conjure up a ridiculous, hodge-podge tale of romance—only to be silenced mid-sentence by another pilgrim. The idea of the juvenile romantic seems to have been something that entertained and intrigued Chaucer; after all, it is easy to imagine that Chaucer was himself often a first-hand witness to the humor-inducing behavior of youthful noblemen during his service to the English court.¹¹

Furthermore, Troilus is a character ideally suited to suffer from such a simple understanding of courtly love precisely because he is young, noble, and (most importantly) male. Pandarus, from whose worldly witticism and avuncular relation to Criseyde we can infer a more advanced age than Troilus, clearly doesn't have this same myopic view of love that Troilus does. He seems to have “outgrown” the folly of romantic love, despite apparently being in love himself. Likewise, Criseyde, who, regardless of her age or prior experience in love, would have, as a woman, always been excluded from the androcentric fantasy of courtly love. Although

¹¹ In *Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World*, Donald R. Howard even so goes so far as to speculate upon potential models for Troilus in Chaucer's life including “King Richard himself” (344).

medieval romances were often written for female patrons and enjoyed by female and coed audiences alike, the genre consistently operates within a male-dominated worldview. Romance often privileges the male perspective; the story is driven by the knight's desires, and even when he does wrong, the narrator (and by proxy the audience) remains sympathetic to *his* cause. Chaucer's own *The Wife of Bath's Tale* may be one of the best satirical examples of the masculine-centered fantasy of romance, if only for its premise. The Wife of Bath begins her version of romance with the protagonist knight ravishing a maiden on the side of the road—one of the most ignoble and unchivalrous crimes imaginable. By framing the romance with a rape (which does not appear in any of the source texts to Chaucer's tale), Chaucer, through the Wife of Bath, emphasizes the extent to which romance will contort itself to conform to a worldview empathetic to the masculine condition, regardless of the context (at least on a surface-level reading, of course).

Furthermore, when the older men of romance are often cuckolded (romances are most often about adulterous love), and the women are won and passed around like prizes (cf. Emelye of *The Knight's Tale*), who else but a young nobleman could find the surface-level fantasy of courtly love romance so alluring? Not to mention that the idealization of chivalry and knighthood is essential to the construction of young, noble masculinity, and, therefore, is something that Troilus, for whom this way of life has been so naturalized, would hardly be able to discern from a subjective viewpoint here on earth. Perhaps this why Troilus doesn't see the folly of his behavior until after his death in Book V when he is able to literally look down on humanity from a celestial perspective. Thus, although Hill argues that Troilus's failure to grasp the reality of his situation is due to a "mistrust of the unseen" (4), I would argue that the real impetus for Troilus's failure to comprehend the underlying circumstances of his affair with Criseyde is not so much a

mistrust for the unseen, as it is a socially-aided ineptitude encouraged in most young noblemen of the medieval court.

Troilus's sex and youth, therefore, provide the best reasons for his whole-hearted yet shallow subscription to the male fantasy of courtly romance, and they account for his dependence on the most obvious mode of perception: the visual. Unlike Pandarus and Criseyde, Troilus finds no resistance in his use of visual modes of perception because the system of courtly love has been carefully designed to not only adhere to a youthful masculine fantasy, but to inspire it. And thus, it follows that from the beginning of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Troilus's conception of "falling in love" is entirely founded in visual perception. He describes love not as inner emotion, but as outward perceivable behavior. This is exemplified in Troilus's first lines of direct discourse in the poem where he exclaims aloud his contempt for love. In his soliloquized assault against all lovers, Troilus never once references their emotions as a point of ridicule; he merely slanders the outward, visual expressions of love such as sighs, lingering gazes, and tossing and turning in bed. These, of course, are all symptoms of a psychologically felt longing born of love, but they are not love itself. In this moment, however, it is clear that Troilus cannot distinguish the outwardly observable behavior of lovers from the inner experience of love. In fact, the very way in which he believes he can discern that other men are in love is through the doubly-visual act of witnessing a gaze:

And in his walk ful faste he gan to wayten

If knyght or squyer of his compaignie

Gan for to syke, or lete his eighen baiten

On any womman that he koude espye.

He wolde smyle and holden it folye, (I.190-4)

One would logically interpret the act of a man gazing upon a woman as *indicative* of some deeper love, but Troilus never acknowledges this connection. For Troilus, love isn't something that makes men behave in foolish ways; that foolish behavior *is* love. The Trojan prince is unable to distinguish acts that indicate love from actual love because his perception is primarily formed by visual observances and not by personal, emotional experiences. Troilus's final insult to lovers is perhaps his most telling where he exclaims, "O veray fooles, nyce and blynde be ye!" (I.202). It is fitting that Troilus would describe lovers as foolish and *blind* because Troilus can only formulate reality according to what he sees. According to his perceptive logic, in which outward appearance reflects the most direct and essential truths (even when those truths are presumably inner, emotional ones such as love), those who disagree with his understanding of the world must not be able to see as he sees; they must be blind.

Although used figuratively by Troilus, the idea that lovers are "blind" exposes the primary flaw in his perceptive faculty: in the first passage from this scene, Troilus imagines the act of gazing—the act of sight itself—as not only a symbol of love, but as the prime expression of amorous affection in a man, and yet he now labels these same lovers as "blynde." The comparison here of blind lovers does logically work due to the multivalence of the word "blynde," but it also produces multiple levels of irony, not the least of which being that according to Troilus, lovers are both hypervisual and unseeing. This comparison illustrates how Troilus, in his narrow understanding, is forced to apply clumsily one mode of perception (visual) onto, non-visual circumstances to catastrophic effect. It is specifically Troilus's fatal case of lovesickness which exposes the shortcomings (even dangers) of his unambiguous, "what you see is what you get" interpretation of reality, especially since *amor hereos* is, according to medieval medical treatises, caused by an obsessive, visual presence of the lady in the lover's brain.

Medieval physicians believed that *amor hereos* was primarily caused by “the corruption of the *virtus aestimativa*, the faculty of estimation, located at the top of the middle ventricle of the brain” (Heffernan 296). The faculty of estimation becomes initially “corrupted” by an excessive and unattained desire for a lady, which causes the lover to over-estimate the beauty and value of his love-object. This overestimation effects an “obsessive desire for sexual gratification” which is able to overthrow the order of reason (Heffernan 297). The whole process is interpreted by medieval medical authorities as a literal “inflammation” of the critical faculties, the result of which being that “the pleasing form of the beloved object, even after it may have left, becomes imprinted in memory to the extent that it becomes an obsessive presence” (Heffernan 297). Thus, *amor hereos* is a disease primarily caused by images—images of a lady that are imprinted into the mind of the lover. And so, if as Andreas writes, “*caecitas impedit amorem*,” then someone who has a hyper-visual notion of reality (like Troilus) would be especially susceptible to such an illness.

Essential to my analysis of Troilus’s severe lovesickness is an examination of the vision-based moment in which he contracts the illness: the first time he sees Criseyde. Although there is really only one singular moment of “love at first sight” in the story of poem, the speaker of *Troilus* actually narrates the scene twice, giving the reader a doubled perspective on this pivotal event. The first narration of the event is focalized through the celestial perspective of Eros who, like all divine spectators, is able to perceive the folly and vanity of Troilus’s human condition. In this first account of Troilus’s love-affliction, the narrator describes Troilus’s sudden change of fate from a love-disdaining youth to a hopeless lover as merely one minor turn in the larger cycle of Love’s will. When Troilus mocks the faithful subjects of Eros (i.e. lovers) by proclaiming them “veray fooles” (I. 202-3), he provokes the fatal irony of his punishment: that he, too, shall

be made “moost subgit unto love” (I. 231). From this perspective, it is merely Troilus’s comedic impiety that dooms him to his “double sorwe.” His subsequent suffering is trivialized as a careless slight delivered by a petty god. Likewise, the conventional imagery of this moment further minimizes the tragedy of the event: Eros, resentful and eager to prove that “anon his bowe nas naught broken” (I. 208), strikes Troilus “atte fulle” with the gold-tipped dart (I. 209). By condensing this first depiction of the pivotal “love at first sight” scene into a classical metaphor from the *theia mania* (divine madness) tradition, the narrator generalizes Troilus’s condition. His individual sorrow is subsumed into the larger literary history of lovers struck down by Cupid’s dart in the same way.

This divine perspective also establishes Troilus (and his masculine worldview) as the prime *subject* of the narrative and, in the other sense of the word, prime *subject* to the God of Love. The scene is narrated through a wholly androcentric perspective—Criseyde isn’t even mentioned in this first telling. When Troilus falls in love with Criseyde, this moment is first presented as merely an exchange between Troilus and the God of Love, and so Criseyde’s role in this action is displaced by a contest of two masculine entities. When the cause for Troilus’s love for Criseyde is introduced in the poem as a divine retribution, it emphasizes just how little direct influence Criseyde actually has in precipitating Troilus’s affection. It functions to show how Troilus’s subsequent lovesickness really has very little to do with Criseyde at all.

Furthermore, there is an implication in the divine perspective of this scene suggesting that had Troilus been better able to recognize his condition within the larger scope of humanity, he would not have proven such a spectacular failure. If Troilus, instead of being transfixed by his own experience, could recognize and assuage his lovesickness with the knowledge that others have loved before him and survived, then he may have fared better. But this understanding is

suggestive of a mature and balanced view of earthly affairs—one that must take into account the universality of the human condition. Pandarus serves as a sort of foil to Troilus in this regard. When he first finds Troilus in the throes of lovesickness, Pandarus tries to remind Troilus that “Fortune is common to alle” (I.845). But there are problems with Pandarus’s worldview as well; if Troilus can be characterized by an almost juvenile, chronic case of navel-gazing, then Pandarus, in his totalizing proverbial speech and carefree attitude, can be read as too universalizing, too unsympathetic to the individual human experience. Chaucer shows how both of these approaches to love are antipodes on the same spectrum of androcentric desire: Pandarus’s vision is of men’s world, and Troilus’s is that of a single man. Unlike Pandarus, however, Troilus does not recognize the imbalance between the universal and individual experience. What this initial Cupid scene shows is that although Troilus sees himself as distinguished from the other lovers of the court (whose conventional behavior earns Troilus’s scorn), he does not realize when he himself becomes subject to those same conventions.

The second-time Troilus’s “love at first sight” scene is depicted, it is focalized through the omniscient perspective of an earthly witness: the narrator, who is more sensitive to the individual experience of Troilus. As Troilus’s eyes scan the crowd, looking “on this lady, and now that” his gaze finally alights on Criseyde: “His eye percede, and so depe it wente, / Til on Criseyde it smot, and ther it stent” (272-3). The powerful language of Troilus’s penetrative gaze is almost violent (“percede,” “depe,” “smot”), and it is evocative of the earlier image of Eros’s dart. But Criseyde is not affected by the figurative missile of Troilus’s gaze. In fact, the rather ineffectual vision-dart is deflected easily by Criseyde’s feminine disdain: “Hire look a lite aside in swich manere, / Ascaunces, “What, may I nat stonden here?” (291-2). For lack of will, or whatever reason, Troilus is unable to look away from Criseyde and so he continues to stare until:

...hire look in him ther gan quyken
So gret desir and such affeccioun
That in his herte botme gan stiken
Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun. (I.295-8)

Thus, Troilus's emanating gaze towards Criseyde returns back to him as an impression of her image set deep within his heart. The one-sidedness of this encounter emphasizes Troilus's agency in the situation. As long as he allows himself to continue gazing at Criseyde, he enables the conditions necessary for *amor hereos* to take hold. He is an active, enthusiastic participant in contracting his lovesickness. After seeing Criseyde in the temple for this first time, Troilus hurries to his palace where he feels "right with hire look thorough-shoten and thorough-darted" (I.325). Because Troilus continues to gaze on Criseyde, both at the temple, and in his mind's eye after he departs, he is twice (and simultaneously) "shot through" with love by Eros's dart and his own reflected gaze upon Criseyde.

It is easy to read the above figures of Troilus being struck with the dart of love, or Criseyde's penetrative gaze as representing a passive reception of love, or at least of desire, but this figurative image represents more than this. The object of the love-dart metaphor—that which actually pierces Troilus—is merely the *image* of Criseyde, not his love for her. The overwhelming desire he begins to feel for Criseyde is not the dart itself, but a corollary symptom of her image penetrating his soul. This distinction of the dart as not love itself, but the germ of love (her image) establishes one of the main reasons that Troilus suffers so acutely from lovesickness. Doubly wounded, Troilus has allowed the seed of lovesickness, the imprinted memory of Criseyde, to penetrate his soul. Yet the image of Criseyde itself cannot be wholly to blame; after all, not every person who sees Criseyde feels "shot through" to their hearts with her

likeness, it is Troilus's obsessive meditation on this image that inflames his disease. After running back from the temple and locking himself up in his room, Troilus envisions Criseyde in the mirror of his mind: "thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde / in which he saugh al holly hire figure, / and that he wel koude in his herte fynde" (I. 365-7). The image of Troilus's mind-mirror connotes a distortion in his fantasy of Criseyde, whose image is at best inverted and at worst, dimpled and warped in the mirror's imperfect surface. But the image of the mirror also implies his narcissism in that the mirror perhaps reflects his own desires and hopes as much as it does the visual memory of Criseyde. Shortly after we are told that, "By nyght or day, for wisdom or folye, / His herte, which that is his brestez yē, / Was ay on hire" (I.452-4). The metaphor for Troilus's heart as his "brestez yē" further exposes Troilus's affection as wholly visual—and unnatural. Not only is the metaphor of misplaced, grafted organs in strange locations grotesque when actually *visualized*, it (at least obliquely) references similar deformities in manuscript illustrations usually reserved for depicting daemons, devils, and monstrous races (fig. 8, 9). Furthermore, the idea of misplaced organs continues throughout the poem with increasing abstraction. Shortly after this description in Book I, Criseyde dreams that an eagle painlessly replaces her heart with its own. And later, Criseyde gives Troilus a heart-shaped brooch: the final, most artificial and symbolically removed image of bodily mutilation. These organs are clearly signs referring to internal phenomena; eyes are not the experience of vision, they are the conduits, and the heart is not love, but a symbol of it. Likewise, Criseyde's image is not Criseyde, but a vain impression of her. What these isolated organs convey, therefore, is that the immaterial transience of Criseyde's image is no solid foundation for enduring, spiritual love. Troilus's vision and memory alone serve as the foundational structure for his love of Criseyde, and the poem's implication of its integrity is clear: Troilus builds his love on sand.

In conclusion, Troilus's dysfunction as both a lover and as a man in the poem stems, ironically, from his earnestness in performing the role of the romance lover. His lovesickness, caused by his over-reliance on vision-based modes of perception, is the "manly" disease that ultimately unmans him. It is Troilus's lovesickness that forms the prime vehicle for Chaucer's criticism of the social artifice and affectation of romance convention because Troilus is the only character unable to grasp the nuances of the genre. The ritualized behaviors of romance and courtship are understood by Pandarus, Diomedes, and Criseyde to be conventional/literary *signs* of genuine love, but are thought by Troilus to embody love itself.

Chapter 2. Pandarus the Messenger

As a go-between, Pandarus delivers letters, interprets dreams, reads emotions, and gleefully transmits packets of information back and forth between Troilus and Criseyde. This characterization of Pandarus as a carrier of messages is captured remarkably in the manuscript images of the *Troilus* tradition. Two French examples, in particular, choose to emphasize this role by devoting a full miniature to Pandarus's delivery of Troilus's letter to Criseyde (fig. 10, 11).¹² A similar image in Richard Pynson's edition of *Troilus and Criseyde* illustrates an imagined scene in which Pandarus delivers a ring to Criseyde, rather than a letter (fig. 12). If we keep in mind the tendency for early printers to reuse woodcut images for different texts, it becomes clear that the printer's choice was an approximation of the scene, and that the illustration emphasizes Pandarus's role as a messenger more than the significance of the delivered object. Furthermore, the meaning behind the symbolic language of love tokens (brooches, rings, and letters) often resides predominantly in the gesture, and not the object—an idea I will explore more closely in Chapter 3. As a go-between, Pandarus is really a messenger, and like any medium of communicative transmission, he colors the meaning of the messages he carries. Less than the images help to “characterize” Pandarus, they accentuate his role in one of the poem's most crucial motifs: the imperfect relation of emotions, messages, and stories between the two lovers.

Because Pandarus complicates and skews the meanings of the information he delivers,

¹² Figure 2 also shows Criseyde then reading the letter by the window (even at the time of this later manuscript's composition, the mid 14th century, conventions of how to depict a series of events in book illustration were not yet standardized as left to right and top to bottom. Therefore, the image depicts Pandarus giving Criseyde Troilus's letter and then her reading it near the window in the reverse order a modern Western reader would expect it to be represented in.)

his character comes to represent the inherent potential for misreading and imperfect understanding in the space between the written word and its reception. Pandarus, like meaning, is liminal; he waivers between binary archetypes, creeps between social and secret spaces, and trespasses across the divisions of gender. The sexuality of Chaucer's Pandarus is ambiguous, though I don't believe assigning modern classifications of sexuality to characters of medieval literature is a particularly valid endeavor.¹³ More concretely, I recognize a generalized "queerness" in Pandarus; an "otherness" that doesn't preclude same-sex desire but that encompasses a wider scope and which defies categorization. Pandarus flouts the binaries that medieval culture intensely values. His unfixed liminality effects a destabilizing force within the narrative that rattles our supposed notions of cultural oppositions and their discreteness. His character embodies the unseen forces of medieval courtship to which Troilus is blind and which Criseyde recognizes all too well. This chapter will explore the ways in which Pandarus deftly skips across the divisions between the cultural binaries inherent to romantic love and courtship. His relative irreverence for these distinctions exposes the real, social ambivalence which underlies the opposing dualistic cultural constructions of public and private medieval courtship and the emotional and the behavioral expression of feelings. And, above all, it will show how the messages he transfers between Troilus and Criseyde are reshaped and refashioned by Pandarus's uncharacteristically unconventional perceptions of the conventions of courtship in the *fin'amor* tradition.

Setting aside the minutia of Pandarus's character for a moment, Pandarus's archetypal role as go-between resists binary categorization. Pandarus's role in *Troilus and Criseyde*

¹³ For a discussion of Pandarus's potential same-sex desire, cf. Pugh's "Queer Pandarus? Silence and Sexual Ambiguity in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*."

straddles the romance canon's two archetypal forms: the one that "facilitates idealized love" and the one that works "in the service of lust and sexual conquest" (Mieszkowski 1). The first archetypal form is usually a confidant and social equal of the knight who does the going-between as a noble act of friendship. The latter is often an old peasant woman who entraps the lady for a fee. Pandarus, in both his homosocial desire to help Troilus and his eager willingness to coerce and trap his own niece for Troilus's pleasure, exists as a curious amalgam of these two archetypes. This blending of seemingly antithetical models of the medieval go-between exposes the links between Pandarus's actions as the noble friend and as the sordid lackey.

As an idealized friend, Pandarus is not only a confidant and comfort to Troilus's woes, he becomes a retainer of private, emotional duty. The narrator appropriates the very public language of vassalage to the private relationship between male friends when Pandarus is described as "desirous to serve / His fulle frend" and as having "assented / To ben his help in lovyng of Cryseyde" (I.1058-9, 1009-10). This grafting of the professional relationship roles that are typically used to describe state-recognized associations among men onto the personal friendship between Troilus and Pandarus emphasizes the ambiguity of the distinction between public and private relationships among men. Because chivalric culture values homosocial love, the lines between social and emotional orders in Troilus's world are obscured. When Pandarus behaves like a conventional idealized friend of romance (who both loves and desires to serve Troilus), he exposes the lack of a clear distinction. Likewise, as an ignoble go-between, who essentially tricks Criseyde into meeting Troilus, Pandarus betrays an inherent contradiction in the idea of a consolidated idealized friend and procurer of love. This awareness is realized by Chaucer's arrangement and contextualization of romance convention and not through any explicit declarations. As with the other two main characters, Chaucer employs a plethora of romance

conventions in constructing Pandarus, yet the contradicting and hodge-podge way in which he arranges these topoi make all three characters very much atypical romance figures despite this apparent conventionality.

The idea of Pandarus as a noble friend to Troilus is challenged when the object of Troilus's affection is Pandarus's own niece. In performing the "noble" service of procuring Criseyde for Troilus, there is the suggestion that he is also ignobly pimping his niece—something that Pandarus himself worries he may be doing: "That is to seye, for the am I bicomen, / Bitwixen game and earnest, swich a meene / As maken wommen unto men to comen" (III.253-5). And so, Pandarus's role as a go-between in *Troilus* is complicated by this contradicting and division-blurring characterization. As Pandarus moves between the lovers, he moves between these two conventional archetypes which are, in other romances, very well distinguished. Insofar as he deviates from the standard literary conventions of Chaucer's day he is an anomaly—we know the motivation of the noble go-between of romance (chivalric love for other men); and we know the motivation of the wicked intermediary of *fabliaux* (money). But what is Pandarus's motivation, who, in acting like both these archetypes, embodies neither? One clear and definable motive cannot be assigned. His determination might stem from the obligations of male chivalric friendship, homosocial desire, vicarious arousal, or perhaps even a general delight in the art of the scheme. There could, also, exist an implied subtext of sycophancy to Pandarus's eagerness; Troilus is, after all, a prince of Troy. His primary desire to help Troilus, though, seems to be a strange combination of these noble and mischievous motivations. The intensity with which Pandarus designs the affair betrays both devotion to his friend and delighted immersion in his clever plots. Yet, more than all of this, Pandarus's behavior springs forth from a libertine joy in disturbing the supposed order of spaces—in

reversing meaning and challenging the assumptions of his own social provinces by moving in and among the strongly delineated spheres of culture.

Our very introduction to Pandarus occurs in a moment of boundary stepping as he, eavesdropping on Troilus's lamentations, pushes himself into Troilus's bedroom "unwar" [unexpectedly] (I.549), under the pretext of a social concern: "O mercy, God! What unhap may this meene? / Han now thus soone Grekes maad you leene?" (I.552-3). By prefiguring his glib "concern" for Troilus's state as an ignoble skirting of public duty, Pandarus reverses the typical direction of social ridicule established earlier by Troilus. Before falling in love himself, Troilus delighted in mocking lovers simply for their being in love. Pandarus, however, sees the symptoms of lovesickness in Troilus and contextualizes it not into a sign of love, but into one of martial weakness. We then are told that Pandarus said this solely to "hym angry maken, / And with angre don his wo to falle" (I.562-3). And so, in just a few lines after approaching Troilus, Pandarus is already attempting to manipulate Troilus's emotions. Indeed, there is always something forceful about Pandarus's intrusions into rooms and into personal, emotional ordeals. Yet he couches these impositions (at least of Troilus) within words of friendship and support: "The wise seith, 'Wo hym that is allone, / For, and he falle, he hath non helpe to ryse' / And sith thou hast a felawe, tel thi mone;" (I.694-5). Pandarus suggests, therefore, that love (or, more specifically, lovesickness), like any other human adversity, benefits from some form of third-party support. Pandarus implores Troilus to tell him his suffering so that they can suffer together; he effectively tells Troilus that misery loves company: "Men seyn, 'to wrecche is consolacioun / To have another felawe in hys peyne" (I.708). In this proverbial speech, Pandarus alters lovesickness, which is a private phenomenon experienced by the lover alone, into one that

includes him communally as a third party to the situation. This is really Pandarus's way into the private affair; he makes the individual, common—the private, public.

Furthermore, Pandarus designs private, emotional experiences for Troilus and Criseyde by embedding them within larger, public moments. For instance, when Criseyde first sees Troilus as he rides by her window in a triumphal procession, it is clear that Pandarus has carefully planned this moment by bringing Criseyde to the window at just the right moment. In Pandarus's scenario, the procession simultaneously operates on public and private levels. On one level (the one perceived by all the ladies in the room save Criseyde), the triumphal procession is a public display that uses Troilus (whose name means literally, "little Troy") as a metonymic symbol of Troy's military prowess. The people even cry out when Troilus approaches, "Here cometh oure joye, / And, next his brother, holder up of Troye!" (II.643-4). The procession transforms Troilus and the other warriors into shared, public stock; Troilus is the people's joy, his brother, the city's support beam. For Criseyde, however, the public Trojan procession is also a private demonstration of Troilus's suitability as a lover. The march even generates an individual, corporeal effect in Criseyde that is intoxicating and visceral; upon seeing Troilus trot by she says to herself, "Who yaf me drynke?" (II.651). Pandarus's scheme illustrates the intersection of public reputation and secret courtly love, and how, somewhat ironically, they are inexorably intertwined. The same things that make Troilus a great public figure make him, in Criseyde's mind, a potentially great lover. This helps illuminate Pandarus's ability (or perhaps necessity) in manipulating public and private spheres of culture; for Troilus's courtship of Criseyde, clearly the distinctions between these categories are ill-defined and always shifting. In fact, as Pandarus shows, their love deconstructs the apparent binary between the public and private spheres of medieval culture.

Pandarus begins his entreaty to Criseyde still firmly contextualized within a private, individualized sphere. He first makes his appeal using pathos and ethos by attempting to evoke pity and a sense of duty to Troilus in Criseyde by presenting her as a “cure:”

“Wo worth the faire gemme vertulees!

Wo worth that herbe also that dooth no bote!

Wo worth that Beaute that is routheles!

Wo worth the wight that tret ech undir foote!

And ye, that ben of Beaute crop and roote,

If therwithal in yow ther be no routhe,

Than is it harm ye lyven, by my trouthe!” (II.344-50)

The first two lines reference real areas of medieval medicine, the lapidary and herbal (stones were believed to have healing properties in the Middle Ages). But then Pandarus places Criseyde’s beauty among the other remedies. Of course, in typical Pandarus fashion, he constructs the rhetoric towards Criseyde as scornful admonition; instead of telling her that she is the only cure to Troilus’s mortal ailment, he shames her for possessing the remedy and refusing to “use” it. The melodramatic final line then derides Criseyde’s very existence by implying that her inactivity is actually actively harming Troilus: “Than is it harm ye lyven, by my trouthe!” (II.350). What Pandarus has done in this appeal, though, is literally objectify Criseyde by proposing that her beauty exists solely as a remedy for Troilus’s suffering. The argument does have a sound, justifiable basis according to the medieval medical tracts of Chaucer’s day which typically recommend sex (with anyone) as cure for lovesickness. The argument for Criseyde, however, clearly does not stand. When Pandarus constructs Criseyde as an object with a “use” and then admonishes her for not having enough mercy to allow herself to be “used,” he

simultaneously takes away her humanity where it will hinder his plan, and reaffirms it where it would serve to further it. His character exposes the illogic the male construction of womanhood in medieval courtship, which supposes that a woman can be at once the cause, aggravator, and remedy of a man's suffering—all without her ever knowing. Pandarus is really saying that all things good in femininity are only "good" when they can be used, consumed, or enjoyed by men. Clearly, Pandarus's entirely "private" and individual argument fails with Criseyde primarily because it is an essentially androcentric one.

After all, we know when Criseyde first sees Troilus and falls in love with him that she understands that being Troilus's lover would not signify (as the rituals of courtly love suggest) a self-empowering dominance over the prince, but rather realistically, the potential dissolution of the relative sovereignty she now enjoys:

I am myn owene womman, wel at ese—
I thank it God—as after myn estat,
Right yong, and stonde unteyd in lusty leese,
Withouten jalousie or swich debat:
Shal noon housbonde seyn to me 'Check mat!'
For either they ben ful of jalousie,
Or maisterfull, or loven novelrie. (II. 750-756)

Like Pandarus, Criseyde understands that the courtly "game" of love is zero sum—the *fin'amor* tradition is one where the lovers are positioned against each other as if on separate teams. The goal of love and of chess is to "check" one's opponent. Pandarus and Troilus go to great lengths to physically and socially corner Criseyde and place her in precisely a "check mat!" situation. When the lovers finally meet during Pandarus's meticulously strategized dinner at the house of

Deiphebus, Criseyde is not physically strong-armed, but nonetheless, Pandarus cruelly coerces her by threatening the emotional and social bonds upon which Criseyde depends as a widow in war time. The insidious, emotional violence of Pandarus's persuasion arises from its humiliating dominance over Criseyde's emotional autonomy, or at least her outward expression of it. Had Pandarus forcibly dragged Criseyde into the bedroom to see Troilus she might have been allowed some protest. Pandarus, however, constructs the meeting in such a way as to force Criseyde to not only perform his will but also to appear to feel the emotions he manipulates her to feel. By framing the coerced act as one of not only mercy but compassion, Pandarus forces Criseyde, who believes herself to be a kind and compassionate person, not only to do what he asks her to do, but to internalize the behavior as her own.

Pandarus's second attempt at convincing Criseyde is more successful, though. Here, he approaches the argument from a public viewpoint when he anticipates her fear that Troilus's visits to her would arouse public scorn. He claims that only a "fool of kynde" would interpret their meetings as anything more than "love of frendshipe" (II.370-1). But then he makes an interesting statement: "Swych love of frendes regneth al this town; / And wre yow in that mantel evere moo" (II.379-80). This language shifts briefly into a different register that seems to be stripped of the pomp and artifice of the preceding lines; here, Pandarus's proposal turns from an act of charitable love for Troilus into a socially advantageous public maneuver for Criseyde. Pandarus suggests that "swych love of frendes" (into which we can read a less than innocent subtextual implication) "regneth" ["prevails," but also in the monarchial sense of "reigns"] throughout all of Troy. He argues that this sort of love not only prospers, but governs Trojan society. Pandarus objectifies this love as a mantle, one that would not only keep Criseyde protected from the outside world (as a cloak would do) but that would also publicly signify her

elevated social status, as clothing often does. However, the word “wre” doesn’t mean merely “clothe” but also “cover, hide, or veil” (MED). Thus, Pandarus is advising Criseyde to “conceal” herself beneath a public friendship with Troilus—or at least the appearance of one. These lines imply that as long as the lovers’ furtive actions remain cloaked by the semblance of public friendship, their relationship will not only “prevail,” but will be a powerful social force in protecting and dignifying Criseyde and her public reputation. Unsurprisingly, it is after this stanza that Criseyde decides to entertain the possibility of appeasing Pandarus’s entreaty: “Now em,’ quod she, ‘what wolde ye devise?’” (II.388). Thus, while Pandarus manipulates public events to create private moments between the lovers, he also alters private issues to make them appear public.

Pandarus also transforms Criseyde’s private love for Troilus into a matter of public propriety. After admonishing Criseyde to *carpe diem* and make use of her beauty “er that age the devoure” (II.395), Pandarus presents the act of being in love to Criseyde as a public responsibility—or at least an important factor in forming her reputation. In his typical aphoristic fashion, Pandarus jests:

“The kynges fool is wont to crien loude,
What that hym thinketh a woman bereth hire hye,
So longe mote ye lyve, and alle proude,
Til crowes feet be growen under youre yë,
And sende yow than a myrour in to pryde,

In which that ye may se youre face a-morwe!” (II.400-5)

In Pandarus’s imagined scenario, Criseyde would be publicly shamed not, as we would expect, for loose or immoral conduct in love, but for acting too “haughty” in her refrain. He fantasizes in

having Criseyde gaze into a mirror that would show her appearance in the near future (“a-morwe”) so she could realize the vanity of her present beauty and recognize her “obligation” to use and enjoy it before it is gone. Windeatt, in “Love that Oughte Ben Secree” describes this process as a transference of “the pressures of social reputation to obligations to courtly love” (169). Simultaneously, then, Pandarus also makes private courtly love a public responsibility. The irony of his statement, though, is that at this moment he is encouraging Criseyde to engage in a *secret* affair with Troilus, not a public one. The seeming illogic of Pandarus’s statement is in the self-negating hypothetical argument that Criseyde’s clandestine romance with Troilus would affect her public reputation; of course, it would only affect her public reputation if it were known to the public and, therefore, not secret. Actually, what Pandarus assumes (and rightly so) is that the secret affair would indeed be something known—an “open secret” relatively well-tolerated and humored by Criseyde’s society. After all, Pandarus repeatedly exposes and exaggerates the necessary connections between the private and social spheres of love in almost every act he performs as a go-between. Not the least of which being that all of the initial private meetings that Pandarus organizes actually occur during very public events.¹⁴ Thus, Pandarus, impressively persuasive in his rhetoric, suggests that the rumor of illicit love would damage her reputation less than the potential public scorn she would garner for wasting her youthful beauty in her “virtuous” life as a widow. This is largely mimetic of Pandarus’s overall methodology in entrapping Criseyde; he constructs arguments that negate the validity of any choices beyond those which he initially supplies to the argument. He presents scenarios to Criseyde that illustrate two bad situations while emphasizing one as the lesser of two evils. The second part of this

¹⁴ First in at Diephabus’s house where Troilus has taken up in the bedroom feigning ill, and later when Pandarus has invited Criseyde and her retinue to dinner at his own house.

stanza is even more interesting, because here, as elsewhere, he highlights and exploits one of the great contradictions of his own society's system of values. By constructing a hypothetical mirror of Criseyde's future which (in his rhetorical example) forces her to mitigate her inner pride against her outward appearance, Pandarus basically illustrates the pessimistic truism that people are only as respectable as their society perceives them to be. And thus, for Criseyde, Pandarus proposes that public reputation is, in fact, distinct from one's own personal adherence to socially respectable behavior, and that sometimes, behaving nobly in one's private life appears indecent to an outside perspective—perhaps, even for all the wrong reasons. This complex yet culturally logical inversion of norms is the hallmark of Pandarus's rhetorical handiwork. Because he is able to move between and occupy opposing spaces in the binary constructs of courtship (public/private, emotional/behavioral, and the male/female) he has a sophisticated perceptual advantage in his artful arguments of persuasion. He recognizes the truth in this contradiction because he is both perceptively empathetic to Criseyde's self-identification as a respectable widow and fully aware of her public persona as a widow and a beautiful woman.

Beyond a vision of Criseyde's future appearance, the mirror also reflects the way in which Pandarus rhetorically infiltrates Criseyde's psyche. By suggesting that her acceptance of his argument will arise from a moment of introspection—seeing her image in a mirror—he implants his own conclusion into her individual deductive process. He essentially tells Criseyde that not only is his conclusion true, but she will understand this to be true one day of her own accord. Pandarus's language here is even more dense than I have shown, however, because this “myroure” also suggests that Criseyde's own ego is affected by and affects her outward appearance: she both alters her appearance to conform to the persona she desires to embody, and her identity is likewise altered by her appearance. We see this self-fashioning very early in Book

I as Criseyde throws herself before Ector in a carefully contrived costume of widowhood. Likewise, Pandarus's comment suggests that Criseyde's identity would be altered when witnessing her aged appearance in the mirror.

This notion of bidirectional influence also appears, on a less visual level, in Criseyde's conscientious adherence to supposed laws of decorum. But, like Pandarus's, Criseyde's speech often inadvertently belies the underlying contradictions of its cultural reasoning. Her behavior in these moments of exaggerated gentility expose incongruities in the social values she appears to observe. Perhaps the most extreme example of this is Criseyde's response to Pandarus when, jesting, he asks her to take off her wimple and dance with him:

"I! God forbade!" quod she. "Be ye mad?

Is that a widewes lif, so God yow save?

By God, ye maken me right soore adrad!

Ye ben so wylde, it semeth as ye rave.

It satte me wel bet ay in a cave

To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves;

Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves." (II.113-19)

Besides the obvious hyperbole in the juxtaposition of such extreme images of dancing maidens and saintly hermits, the very tone of her response is indicative of her continual fashioning of her own public identity. She begins here by establishing an external point of comparison with which to measure her "widewes lif" against by describing Pandarus as "wylde," and thus, defected from civilized, social norms.¹⁵ Pandarus is "wylde," and yet, Criseyde then attempts to construct her

¹⁵The Middle English "wylde" carries many of the same meanings as MdE "wild:" *indomitus*, *agrestis*, and even *insanus* (OED)

widowhood in opposition to Pandarus's behavior by invoking the imagery of a religious hermit: "It satte me wel bet ay in a cave / to bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves." In her extravagant response is almost an implicit wink towards Pandarus as if to say that of course she won't be in a cave somewhere reading saints' lives, especially since at this moment she is reading romances in the garden with her ladies. Her response, however, is also a total reversal on the notion of society as civilized. The irony of her comparison is that hermits leave civilization and enter the "wylde" in order to devote themselves to God. Thus, in this rhetorical figure, dwelling in a cave becomes decorous (even more "civilized") lifestyle for a widow while the dancing maidens and young wives—courting and pairing off in socially normative ways—becomes "wylde" behavior. Criseyde essentially uses her own construction of widowhood to figure Pandarus's version of civilization as untamed and uncultured. And clearly, her refusal is predicated more upon her desire to reinforce her public reputation as a virtuous widow than it is formed from her own personal inclination; after all, she does not state that she does not want to dance, she says merely that it wouldn't suit someone of her status: "Is that a widewes lif, so God yow save?" (II.114). It is notable that she should defer responsibility to a higher power in this moment because it shows how Criseyde effectively appropriates systems of social control when they work in her favor. She uses the concept of widow morality when it allows her to deflect Pandarus's attempts at ensnaring her—but we know Criseyde has no qualms about not behaving like a widow when she entertains Diomedes's advances in Book V. Widowhood, for Criseyde, seems to exist only insofar as it does when she is wearing the widow's habit. She can don and remove the identity as necessary. This is just a small part in understanding how malleable and changeable social ideas and traditions are in Criseyde's hands. She can at once reinforce the dominant meaning of

widowhood while simultaneously reversing the entire context of the concept.¹⁶ Pandarus is the only character that recognizes this ability in Criseyde; his complex and nuanced rhetorical approaches towards persuading her show this understanding. And so, as Pandarus manipulates the boundaries between public and private spaces (real or figurative) to bring Troilus and Criseyde's relationship to fruition, he tunes his methodology to the individual perceptual faculties of each lover.

The blurred boundary between the social and the private is not the only liminal location occupied by Pandarus, though. On a more abstracted level, Pandarus operates in *Troilus* as a personification of the psychological space between inner emotions and outward behavior. To make a linguistic analogy: the medieval courtship of *Troilus* is a language that attempts to signify the elusive emotional reality of "love" through the outward actions and words of lovers just as language itself attempts to signify meaning through signs. The amorous words and actions of courting lovers, then, are the imperfect signs of romance's language. Thus, Pandarus represents a sort of corporealized *différance* in this system. He revels in the linguistic gap between sign and meaning—always deferring the elusive emotional reality of the signified (love) through the infinite multivalence of words and symbolic actions. He consistently alters the lovers' emotions by carefully informing their behavior; at the same time, he reinterprets their behavior as indicating emotions they may not actually be experiencing. He understands that things can only truly be defined by what they are not: "By his contrarie is every thyng declared. / For how myghte evere swetnesse han ben knowe / To him that nevere tasted bitternesse?" (I.637-9), and so Pandarus is able to use ambiguity to convey the story he desires to compose, regardless of the raw material he must work with. Of course, the imperfect nature of language

¹⁶ Interestingly, Troilus too makes a saintly comparison to Criseyde (V.550).

applies to Pandarus's own speech as well, and in the end, his work is subsumed by its own deference, of meaning and overcome by the failure of Troilus and Criseyde's relationship.

Pandarus's ability to manipulate the meaning of the lovers' behavior is exacerbated by certain standard conventions of the romance genre. The trope of the "go-between" itself is perhaps the largest factor in this, because it so dramatically widens and complicates the channel of communication between the lovers. Rather than merely being a matter of sending information directly between the lovers (which provides ample enough room for misinterpretation), raw audiovisual data must now be conveyed via a third-party mediator—Pandarus. Of course, Pandarus's own desires and murky motivations come into play and further distort the communication between the lovers. Arguably, the entire relationship of Troilus and Criseyde is born of Pandarus's deftly constructed and intentional *miscommunications* in courtship. Let us revisit Pandarus's first meeting with Troilus. Overhearing Troilus "Bywayling in his chambre thus allone," Pandarus pokes fun at his apparent weakness; "Han now thus soone Grekes maad yow leene?" (I.547, 553). But when recounting the same moment to Criseyde, Pandarus imparts so much invention to the event as to render it a fantasy.¹⁷ In Pandarus's version, the two men are within "the paleis gardyn, by a welle," and Troilus is talking military tactics while they both practice throwing spears (II.508). After such vigorous exercise, Troilus is tired and lays down in the grass, but he is unable to sleep due to his insufferable love-pangs, and so he begins groaning for Criseyde, which Pandarus overhears. By changing the scene to a "palace garden by a well" (a

¹⁷ The event could technically have occurred; we know that Troilus was lovesick for a few days before he told Pandarus, and therefore, Pandarus could have overheard Troilus's lamentations at some earlier point. However, given that Pandarus doesn't seem to know that Troilus is love in the bedroom scene and given his penchant for manipulation, it seems much more likely that Pandarus invented this entire scene—or, at the very least, Chaucer is suggesting that this could be the case.

very conventional *locus amoenus* drawn from the most widely read romantic dream-vision poem of the Middle Ages, *The Roman de la Rose*), Pandarus has imbued the moment with the romantic implications of its literary setting. By allowing these literary allusions to freely attach themselves to the moment in Criseyde's mind, he alters her reception of the message. Likewise, he carefully emphasizes aspects of Troilus that Criseyde would find appealing with his descriptions by highlighting Troilus's powerful public influence in his discussion of war plans and his strength and virility in the image of him casting spears.

Pandarus's narrative invention illustrates above all else how keenly aware he is of the signifying power of outward behavior. By actively reimagining his meeting with Troilus, he can alter Criseyde's interpretation of Troilus's true intentions. The words that Troilus speaks to Pandarus are largely the same in both versions; for instance, Troilus melodramatically references the mortality of his love-wounds in both: "which cause is of my deth," "I woot that I moot nedes deyen" (I.579, II.536). The greatest difference is, of course, the description of Troilus's behavior leading up to this moment. He was either manfully throwing spears and plotting the next attack against the Greeks, or he was weeping in bed. Thus, though the words remain more or less the same, the surrounding actions effect a much different characterization of Troilus in Criseyde's mind.

This brings me back to the illustrations of Pandarus delivering the letter; because although they only depict him delivering the letters, Chaucer's Pandarus also inserts himself into these messages as co-author. In fact, it is only upon Pandarus's suggestion that Troilus decides to write a letter in the first place: Pandarus says,

"...but if I were as thow

God help me so, as I wolde outrely

Of myn owen hond write hire right now

A lettre, in which I wolde hire tellen how

I ferde amys, and hire biseche of routhe.

Now help thiself, and leve it nought for slouthe!” (II.1003-8)

Therefore, Pandarus not only commands Troilus to write the letter, but he tells Troilus what to write. By choosing the medium through which Troilus will convey his emotions, Pandarus fixes the message he desires to send. He knows that Troilus is unsure of what to say in a letter to a lady; Troilus himself says so himself: “Allas, my deere brother Pandarus, / I am ashamed for to write, ywys, / Lest of myn innocence I seyde amys” (II.1046-7). Therefore, Troilus’s total ignorance in how to approach writing a love letter makes Pandarus’s suggestion to ask for Criseyde’s mercy really the only choice for Troilus. Therefore, although appearing to be solely the messenger, Pandarus, in assigning the medium, has actually also chosen the content.

It should be of no surprise, then, that Pandarus also tells Criseyde how to interpret the letter when he gives it to her. When Criseyde refuses to receive the letter Pandarus shoves it down the front of her dress and then warns her that if she throws it away now people will stare at them (II.1154-7). Thus, Pandarus again reverses the standard public pressures to further the development of their relationship; because Criseyde believes that taking the letter would bring her public shame, by shoving it down her dress Pandarus makes the act of not accepting the letter, should she pull it out and throw it on the ground, an embarrassing public spectacle. After Criseyde has a moment to herself to read the letter, Pandarus then asks her to write one in return and offers to sew up and deliver it to Troilus: “Aquite [repay] hym wel, for Goddes love,’ quod he; / ‘Myself to medes wol the lettre sowe” (II.1200).

Interestingly, this is one of the few places in which Chaucer condenses Boccaccio’s text

rather than expands it, for he replaces the seven stanzas of Criseida's letter for a mere five lines of summary. Furthermore, Chaucer's Criseyde suggests that this is the first letter she has ever written: "God help me so, this is the firste lettre / That evere I wroot" (II.1213-4). As with Troilus, the unfamiliar medium she is forced to transmit her message through would perhaps have enabled Pandarus to more greatly influence its content as well as its interpretation by Troilus. The fact that Chaucer doesn't give us the verbatim letter, as Boccaccio does, also reinforces the idea that the seemingly straightforward and unalterable meaning of the written word still ultimately relies on the reader's interpretation. Chaucer also prefaces the summary of the letter with an acknowledgement that he may have interpreted it incorrectly: "And sette hire down, and gan a lettre write, / Of which to tell in short is my entente / Th'effect, as fer as I kan understonde" (II.1218-20). Thus, Chaucer gives the impression of having read the actual letter (which, we know Chaucer did when he read *Il Filostrato*) by admitting that he may not have understood it completely; and therefore, he prefigures the possibility that his characters would have the same limitations in reading it as well. After all, Criseyde believes that her letter is written in such a way as to not lead Troilus on: "but holden hym in honde / She nolde nought¹⁸" (II.1222-3); Troilus, however, interprets it as nothing but encouraging: "he took al for the beste" (II.1324). When Pandarus comes to Troilus with the letter he says, "thow shalt arise and see / A charme [a healing incantation] that was sent right now to the, / The which kan helen the of thyn accesse [fever]" (II.1313-5). By presenting the letter as a cure to Troilus's lovesickness, Pandarus influences Troilus's interpretation of it, and, in effect, alters its true message of relative disdain. It is quite clear that Troilus's judgement of Criseyde's words is less predicated on the

¹⁸ In ME, the double negative often intensifies negation, as it does here, rather than effecting a positive meaning.

textual content of the letter itself than it is influenced by Pandarus's delivery of the message.

This manipulation of meaning through framing is something that Pandarus continues to do throughout the entire poem. Even after the separation of the lovers in Book V Pandarus interprets Criseyde's letter writing (incorrectly) for Troilus when he states that the act of writing him alone is evidence that she is still faithful to him. And so, just as Chaucer elucidates, rewrites, and occasionally invents passages from *Il Filostrato* as he translates the poem into *Troilus and Criseyde*, so too does Pandarus insert and maneuver passages in the courtship plot to manipulate Criseyde. In the careful engineering of stories (by the narrator and Pandarus) an affinity of experience is established between Criseyde and ourselves as readers. Thus, the image of the letter comes to represent not only the transmission of messages and distortion of meanings within the poem, but also our own experiences as readers interpreting the poem itself. Pandarus is not only the facilitator for Troilus and Criseyde's love affair, but an intermediary representation of Chaucer himself who, as author, moves between the world of his story and our own.

Chapter 3. Criseyde in the Garden

Wynkyn de Worde's 1517 edition of *Troilus and Criseyde* begins and ends with a frontispiece depicting the eponymous lovers standing in a walled garden (fig. 13). Criseyde is depicted offering a ring to Troilus's outstretched hand.¹⁹ In the image, "Troylus" and "Creseyde," aptly labelled, are dressed in a rich array of billowing fabrics, ermine fur-lined sleeves, tassels, and jewelry. The representation of Criseyde in this woodcut is perplexing to a reader familiar with the poem, because we know that Criseyde does not explicitly remove her characteristic "widewes habit blak" (I.170) until Book V after having left Troy and Troilus behind.²⁰ Furthermore, Edward Hodnett, in *English Woodcuts 1480-1535*, catalogues the Criseyde figure in this image as "a lady with a marguerite on her breast" (1009). The "marguerite" or daisy on her dress also adds another layer of dissonance between the image and the poem because, in the Middle Ages, the daisy "represented the Virgin Mary, and maidens more generally" (Gilchrist 94).²¹ When worn by Criseyde, herself a widow and depicted here in an act of nonmarital love, the marguerite's implication of maidenhood is puzzling. Perhaps more important than what the object is, however, is that the jewelry, like all of the outwardly visual symbols and clothing surrounding Criseyde, denote meanings that can readily be attached or removed from Criseyde's identity. Even more perplexing, though, is that there is no such garden

¹⁹ The detail of the ring is difficult to discern from the version in the STC and can be mistaken for a flower. Other versions of this image prove that the object is indeed a ring, however.

²⁰ We can infer that Criseyde no longer dons a wimple when Chaucer describes her as wearing her hair braided and tied with gold thread in Book V:

And ofte tymes this was hire manere:
To gon ytresed with hire heres clere
Doun by hire coler at hire bak byhynde,
Which with a thred of gold she wolde bynde; (V.810-12).

²¹ The word "marguerite" can also refer to a pearl, but it seems more likely that Hodnett is referring to a daisy here, considering the distinctive, petal like shape of the object.

ring-exchange scene described anywhere in Chaucer's poem. The "inaccuracy" of the image is created by its use here; this woodblock print is no doubt a factotum image, reused, repurposed, and circulated among printers to illustrate various works.²² The names that appear in the scrolls above the lovers' heads are not xylographic, but movable type, inserted into a recess in the woodblock. This technique allowed printers to swap out names and reprint the same images in different contexts.

However, I do not believe that de Worde's choice here was arbitrary; scholars have shown that Wynkyn de Worde's editions show "a concern for the close correlation of the verbal and visual aspects...without precedent in early sixteenth century English printing" (83).²³ Furthermore, there is an exchange of rings in Book III when, after consummating their love, the lovers "pleyngre entrechaungeden hire rynges" (III.1368). This occurs, however, in a private bedchamber, not outdoors in a garden. But the garden too has a strong textual source in *Troilus*; as Criseyde decides whether or not to love Troilus, the garden plays an essential role (as a realized psychological space) in her emotional process. Likewise, the "inaccuracy" of the lovers' grand, luxurious costumes suggest that Troilus and Criseyde are "ennobled" by their experiences in love—or at least seem to be via their external appearances.

Thus, although not directly illustrating an individual scene from the poem, the print does evoke a relevant collage of ideas and images from the text that illustrate Criseyde's experience

²²According to Edward Hodnett's catalogue, this specific image first appears in de Worde's 1511 edition of Stephen Hawe's *The Pastime of Pleasure* (1009). We know, in part, that the woodcut was used for Hawe's text first because the image, as it appears in *Troilus*, shows a break in the woodcut not present in *The Pastime*.

²³ Edwards, A. S. G. 1980. "Poet and Printer in Sixteenth Century: Stephen Hawes and Wynkyn de Worde." *Gutenberg Jahrbuch*, 82–88. See also Carol Meale, "Caxton, de Worde, and the Publication of Romance in Late Medieval England."

and character in a way that has not yet been recognized by scholars.²⁴ As an “iconographic collage,” the woodcut operates much like the mnemonic illustrations (*imagines rerum*) Mary Carruthers describes in *The Book of Memory*: “the *imagines rerum*...lay out the essential subjects...in a clear order, quickly apparent to one who recognizes the cues provided” (285). Its setting in an Edenic walled garden is perhaps the romance genre’s most conventional *locus amoenus*—a setting utilized most famously in the most influential allegorical romance of the Middle Ages, *Le Roman de la Rose*. The conventional imagery of the walled garden not only helps to suggest that the poem is a romance, it further constructs the image as an abstracted “word-picture,” rather than an illustration of a specific scene from the poem like the other woodcuts (such as figs. 5 and 6 as I discussed above). Overall, the woodcut’s depiction of symbolic exchange of the rings, its visual ennoblement of the lovers through dress, and its horticultural setting all reference important elements of Criseyde’s characterization and emphasize certain social factors that influence the development of her love for Troilus. Therefore, in this chapter I will use this composite image as a lens for understanding how Criseyde’s struggles with the private promises of courtship that she is forced to mediate through her public persona.

Wynkyn de Worde’s woodcut seems to reference the aforementioned “exchange of rings” scene in *Troilus and Criseyde*, albeit in an altered setting. The corresponding scene in the poem, however, posits a *mutual* exchange of rings, while the image very clearly depicts a one-sided exchange. Thus, I believe the image references, in its unreciprocated gesture, the more

²⁴ One of the only articles to examine this image in depth is Seth Lerer’s “The Wiles of a Woodcut: Wynkyn de Worde and the Early Tudor Reader.”

significant act of Criseyde giving Troilus the heart brooch that occurs at the end of the same stanza as the ring trade:

Soone after this they spake of sondry thynges,
As fel to purpos of this aventure,
And pleyinge entrechaungen hire rynges,
Of whiche I kan nought tellen no scripture;
But wel I woot, a broche, gold and asure,
In which a ruby set was lik an herte,
Criseyde hym yaf, and stak it on his sherte. (III.1366-72)

Here, the narrator establishes a priority in his description of the brooch over the exchange of rings. He gives no physical description of the rings and even emphasizes the vagueness of their presence in scene when he notes that he “kan nought” if they bore any inscription; an inscription, perhaps, that would clarify their meaning within the story. This implied gap in the narrator’s knowledge suggests that Chaucer himself “kan nought” whether this moment symbolizes a clandestine marriage ceremony, or if it is merely an extramarital love ritual performed between lovers. Some scholars have read the ring exchange in Book III as being in accordance with the formal wedding ritual of Chaucer’s day.²⁵ Henry Kelly in *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, writes that “given the honorable and sinless motives of Troilus and Criseyde, these words and actions [of Book III] could hardly have failed to indicate to Chaucer’s audience that they had entered upon a true marriage” (230). But Kelly takes for granted Criseyde’s active willingness in the affair by neglecting to acknowledge the extreme coercion that she is subjected

²⁵ The issue of clandestine marriage was of ambiguous legal status in Chaucer’s age as being both “valid” and “forbidden by Church law” (Kelly 217). Also see Kelly (163-216).

to prior (and even during) this moment. Thus, if the scene does resemble the rites of marriage, especially in the exchange of rings, the symbolic “binding” imagery of the ring ritual may insinuate Criseyde’s thralldom more than it evokes the idea of nuptial bonds. Like so many aspects of the poem, here too Chaucer undermines any straightforward interpretation of the scene with dark undercurrents of uneasy contradictions. If Criseyde chose this outcome by her own volition, then why did Pandarus feel the need to go to such extreme lengths to deceive her? Furthermore, the lack of inscription upon the rings also forces the reader into assuming Troilus’s critical perspective. Like Troilus, we too must take the symbols at face-value, and thus, we experience the shortcomings of Troilus’s perceptive faculty. Our interpretations of what the rings mean may differ from those of Troilus and Criseyde, or the narrator, or Chaucer himself. The inscriptionless rings accentuate the fact that all symbols lack essential meanings.

The stanza’s rhyme royal scheme further undermines the validity of the lovers’ “marriage” by formally tying the “rynges” of the stanza’s third line to the first line’s “thynges.” This subtle rhyming echo of “thynges” in this line colors the ring-exchange with a shade of trivial vanity; it nudges as if to say these rings are merely objects—simply “thynges.” Criseyde’s giving of the heart brooch, however, is approached with much more clarity. Here the narrator claims to know very well (“wel I woot”) what it looks like, and, by implication, what it means. The description is brief, but adequately visualized; the brooch consists of a heart-shaped ruby set in a gold frame which itself is perhaps inset with lapis lazuli. The piece’s composition is striking in its juxtaposition of the gilded frame and the stylized visceral organ-shaped gem. We can

imagine how the brooch's bold colors would have radiated off of the black habit Criseyde presumably removed it from.²⁶

The brooch, also, as jewelry suggests a public function, for although originally used to fasten clothing, after the introduction of lacing in the 14th century, brooches "served a predominantly decorative purpose that was often linked to aspects of social identity" (Gilchrist 73). It may be at first surprising that Criseyde chooses to symbolize her secret love in what seems to be a very public way, but notice that Criseyde pins the brooch to Troilus's "sherte." The word "sherte" in this context refers to a specific layer of men's clothing in Chaucer's age. Men in the later 14th century would wear their "sherte" under a doublet, which in turn may be worn under a tunic.²⁷ Thus, Troilus would be wearing the brooch on what we would consider underclothes, and therefore, unlike the rings, it would remain hidden from public view. This does not mean that the rings would have necessarily signified courtship to the public, though, because rings carried much more varied symbolic social meaning in the Middle Ages and did not exclusively, or even obviously, denote romantic betrothal.²⁸ Also, the rings' apparent lack of inscription further obscures public interpretation. Heart-shaped jewelry, however, would have been explicitly romantic in Chaucer's time.²⁹ Therefore, the brooch, which by its very nature should function as a public object, ironically signifies a secret love in *Troilus*. Likewise, it adorns

²⁶ Laura Hodges in *Chaucer and Array* posits that the brooch's "symbolic colors" of red and blue signify "passion and constancy," respectively (75).

²⁷ For more on the sartorial conventions of both men and women in Chaucer's age see Forgeng and McLean's *Daily Life in Chaucer's England* (111-159).

²⁸ Furthermore, Kelly notes that "the use of two rings for marriage was customary only in the East. Though this would be very fitting for a marriage that takes place in Troy, the likelihood is that Chaucer knew nothing about the practice" (231). Therefore, Troilus wearing a ring would not publicly signify his having a lover or a wife.

²⁹ "The heart was used as a romantic symbol from an early date, perceived as the inner location of the self and the source of all feeling. Items depicting or referring to hearts are likely to have been love tokens given in the early stages of courting" (Gilchrist 110).

Troilus yet is hidden beneath his clothes; it functions essentially as “private” decoration. The brooch exists, cool gemstone and metal, as a physical, but twice-removed manifestation of the unseen. Criseyde’s pinning of the brooch, therefore, suggests also that witnessing real, individualized private love requires an “undressing” or stripping away of the outer costumes and conventions of public life; or at least as much as it is possible to do so—after all, although intimate, Troilus’s underclothes still conceal his naked flesh beneath just as, even in this moment of passion, the soul’s language is still mediated by the constraints of social decorum before being expressed as words and deeds between lovers.

Whether or not Troilus continued to wear the brooch on his *sherte* is unclear, and perhaps not important. In pinning the brooch to Troilus’s undershirt, Criseyde insinuates her desire for their love to remain secret—a desire she also explicitly verbalizes: “So werketh now in so discret a wise / That I honour may have, and he plesaunce” (III.943-4).³⁰ And yet, by rendering her inner love for Troilus as an external object, she addresses the social “materiality” of her love, and therefore, its potential for exposure, perdition, and transference as something tangible and valuable. It is as though, with the brooch, Criseyde signifies her acknowledgement that her love has been objectified through Troilus’s courtship and that, as an object, her love may be handled, given, bought, and sold. This, I believe, is the only way we can reconcile what is perhaps Criseyde’s cruelest deed in the poem: giving Troilus’s brooch to her new lover, Diomedes. Even the poem’s narrator, who consistently makes every effort to cast Criseyde in good light, cannot resist scornfully stating, “that was litel nede”—literally, “there was little need for that” (V.1040). But Criseyde’s act is not as unfeeling as it first appears to be. The brooch does not mean the

³⁰ The ME word “discret” could mean “capable of keeping secrets” by the early 14th century (OED).

same thing to Criseyde that it does to Troilus and his imagined male audience. For Criseyde, the brooch is really a concessive symbol of her forced coercion in love. By contextualizing Criseyde's gift to Troilus within her immediate prior experiences, the act seems less romantic and even less genuine.

Criseyde's entrapment in the bedroom is really the coup de grâce of Pandarus's long chase to capture her for Troilus. Up to this moment, Pandarus has coaxed her relationship with Troilus by ensnaring her in series of carefully executed plots. The moment when Criseyde gives Troilus the heart-brooch is also the moment at which she is most tightly bound in Pandarus's net. Not only did Pandarus threaten to revoke his protection over her if she refused to come to his house that night, but he also orchestrated her surprise meeting with Troilus in a scenario he knew Criseyde would be unable to resist.³¹ Pandarus made sure that her bedroom was surrounded by her retinue and the house full of important people so that if Criseyde were to refuse Troilus and yell out or leave the room, everyone would discover that she had been alone in the bedchamber with him. I don't, however, believe that this precludes any reading of the poem in which Criseyde genuinely does love Troilus, but any behavior resembling love expressed by Criseyde predicated on this extreme intimidation should be interrogated: this is especially true since we know that Criseyde is uniquely adept at reading emotional signs in sophisticated and nuanced ways, as her outwitting banter with Pandarus attests.

The language of entrapment, and, more generally, of human bondage, saturates the poem, and especially the idea of immaterial capture. Pandarus introduces the idea when he lauds Criseyde's ability to make Troilus fall in love with her: "And right good thrift, I prey to God,

³¹ As a widow abandoned by her own father during a time of war, Pandarus's protection would have been more than a mere comfort, it would be the only thing protecting her from extreme violence or death if Troy were to fall (and it would, of course).

have ye, / That han swich oon ykaught withouten net!” (II.562-3). Echoing (and perhaps imitating) Pandarus’s statement, Troilus blames Criseyde and her “humble nettes” of seduction for all of his suffering: “It weren ye that wroughte so me swich wo, / Ye humble nettes of my lady deere!” (III.1354-5). And shortly after, he asks Criseyde in Book III, “How koude ye withouten bond me bynde?” (III.1358). Love is thus consistently imagined as a powerful *binding* force in the poem. Even its dissolution is prefigured in terms of loosening and disentanglement. The narrator states in Book IV that nothing in this world can “unbynde” Criseyde’s love, but we know that by the end of the poem, Criseyde’s love for Troilus will untangle and “bothe Troilus and Troie town / Shall knotteles thoroughout hire herte slide” (V.768-9). Throughout the poem, Criseyde is cast in the role of the captor, and Troilus her captive—at least in this very abstract, emotional sense. The only time that Criseyde is described as “captured” by Troilus is when she is very literally being held tightly in his arms as he says to her, “now be ye kaught; now is ther but we tweyne!” (III.1207). Considering that Criseyde is really the only character held against her will in physical spaces (the bedroom at Diephabus’s house, and in her bed at Pandarus’s) it is ironic that this motif of *figurative* entrapment always positions Troilus as the prisoner. The conventional language of romance so obviously distorts the reality of Criseyde’s situation that it serves as an ironic foil to Criseyde’s very real entrapment by Pandarus and Troilus. Thus, even though the narrator seems to conform to the conventional romance rhetoric of love-capture by casting Criseyde, the lady, in the role of captor, it actually illustrates an unconventional actuality: that Troilus’s status as prisoner to Criseyde’s love is not only merely figurative convention, it is entirely self-inflicted.

Thus, I would argue that the brooch for Criseyde is an oblique surrendering of precisely what Troilus wants—her heart—and yet, of course, what she actually gives him is merely an

image and a symbol of her love. Criseyde knows that this symbol will adequately satisfy Troilus's visually-informed understanding of love. And indeed, for Troilus, the brooch *is* Criseyde's love, not merely a symbol; when Troilus sees it pinned on Diomedes's armor (which had been captured and was being displayed by Deiphobus in a victory procession) he knows that Criseyde's love no longer belongs to him.³²

But the iconography of this symbolic object also places it directly within a larger tradition of late medieval culture. Criseyde's gift of the heart-brooch reenacts the iconographic romance gesture of "the offering of the heart" (fig. 14). The act of a lady giving her heart to a lover (or a lover to his lady) is an image of the courtly love tradition illustrated in countless manuscripts and inscribed, painted, and carved into everyday items of the medieval court from the early 14th century onward.³³ The motif is very clearly a metonymic metaphor for the figurative endowment of one's entire being to his or her lover, and the total ubiquity of this gesture in Chaucer's age denotes its conventionality. So to see the "offering of the heart" motif depicted here as Criseyde gives Troilus her heart-brooch emphasizes the calculated artifice of her gesture. The extreme conventionality of this act would be akin to giving a box of heart shaped chocolates on Valentine's day (and indeed, this modern gesture is a direct descendent of late medieval culture). Criseyde consistently demonstrates her fluency in the language of courtly love; she understands how to play along and reenact the symbolic gestures of the *fin'amor* tradition. Her gift of the love token brooch, therefore, can be read as another example of her performing the role of courtly lover as Troilus expects her to. The brooch's own artful craftedness reflects the equally

³² Although not explicitly defined as the brooch that Criseyde gives Troilus in Book III, it is reasonable to assume that Troilus would have given the same brooch back to Criseyde when she left Troy considering it figured so largely in their first night together as lovers.

³³ Michael Camille discusses "the offering of the heart" motif in his book, *The Medieval Art of Love* (111-119).

artificial quality of her society's conventional love-gestures. But this is clearly something Criseyde comprehends; unlike Troilus, Criseyde's problems do not arise from her inability to perceive the unseen meaning embedded beneath public actions. Criseyde knows that giving Troilus the brooch is a symbolic gesture that merely *represents* inwardly felt sensations of love but that does not necessarily embody or even prove their existence. After all, "although the heart is the greatest gift of the self, it is only an image, a sign that has no guarantee of authenticity... the images and objects described here did not necessarily represent true feelings but provided a series of conventions that could be adopted and used when necessary" (Camille 114). Criseyde's dilemma actually stems from understanding too well the psychological gap between inner emotions and outward behavior. By fixing the brooch to his shirt, Criseyde implies that just as the brooch is hidden from public view by layers of fabric, so too is there a semi-permeable veil of identity that hangs between inner psychological experiences and outward behavior, and that tangible symbols of love can only ever signify these underlying feelings and never embody them.

The brooch, also, as an object of adornment, reflects Criseyde's understanding of the actions and behaviors of courtship to be mostly ornamental, and part of a larger, "paynted proces." When Criseyde reproaches Pandarus for his improper suggestion that she meet and have mercy on Troilus, she describes his attempts as a "paynted proces" (II.424). Her language here, however, reasonably applies to the overall decorated discourse, "proces," of her courtship. The words "paynted" and "proces" both suggest a few different things about Criseyde's attitude toward Troilus's advances (via Pandarus). "Paynted" means "ornamented," or "decorated with paint/colors," as well as "feigned or pretended" (MED). Of course, the word also refers the distinctly feminine practice of painting one's face. All of these denotations influence the meaning of Criseyde's words. On the most obvious level, Criseyde is referring to Pandarus's

machinations as distinctly colored with deception, but the source of this meaning really stems from the suspicious act of rhetorical ornamentation, a behavior which is curiously attributed to Pandarus especially considering that in romance, “women became associated with rhetoric and poetics, seducers of false subtlety” (Bloch 53). Pandarus tries to deceive Criseyde with heavily rhetorical, proverbial, and decorated language. But the language and behavior of courtly love itself is also “paynted.” The use of highly figural language between lovers is a strong characteristic of romantic discourse. Troilus and Criseyde often call each other “swete hertes,” a synecdoche lovers continue to use today—the art of rhetoric and poetics is so ingrained in courtship as to be almost unrecognizable. Likewise, the MED defines the word “proces” as a “course of events, of nature, or of time” an “argument or plea,” and a “narrative or story.” This fairly wide range of definitions reflects an equally wide range of meanings in Criseyde’s statement. That “proces” denotes an argument points to Criseyde’s recognition of the artifice of Pandarus’s language. She sees the ornamented rhetoric of his speech as aiding his goal of deception. When Criseyde describes Pandarus’s “reasoning” with her as a highly ornamental and decorated *story*, she signals to her uncle that she wholly understands the rituals of courtly love to be figurative and perhaps even contrived.

But perhaps more significantly, the meaning of “proces” as both “natural course of events” and a “story or narrative” demonstrates her attention to the distinction between the unmediated progression of time and the formation of narrative. Criseyde understands that by the mere act of choosing which events to relate to her, Pandarus is constructing an artificial narrative. Of course, what Pandarus presents to Criseyde is indeed more than just a carefully selected series of events; it is a fully developed story that has been skillfully composed, decorated, and, at times, invented. But when Criseyde then describes this whole scene as a

“paynted proces,” she exhibits complicit understanding in the inherent artifice and embellishment of courtly love. Ultimately, Pandarus doesn’t fool her, but he doesn’t actually need to; he just has to make the right social signals to force Criseyde into this “paynted proces.”

And thus, the brooch, in all its glimmering facets, captures the multivalence of Criseyde’s interpretation of her situation. By placing it on Troilus’s shirt, Criseyde imbues the object with psychological meaning. It is a statement of her understanding that true passions are obscured by layers of social artifice; it is a symbol of her commodified love-actions which are coerced from her and traded among men; and it is an acknowledgment of love as an oxymoronic, “private adornment” which, like jewelry, beautifies its wearer, and yet, unlike jewelry, requires no public display. This, of course, captures something of Criseyde herself who is a shining beauty obscured by widow’s weeds: “under cloude blak so bright a sterre” (I.175). On one level, Criseyde’s habit very literally covers up her beauty, but on another, this metaphor reflects an inner luster of the soul masked by modesty and restrained by the rules of a stratified, class-based society. Understanding this tension between inner dignity and outer displays of nobility and status is crucial to our reading of the de Worde frontispiece and of the poem itself.

Above, I noted how Criseyde’s clothing in the frontispiece to Wynkyn de Worde’s *Troilus* directly contradicts Chaucer’s description of her customary widow’s habit—a costume she apparently wears until Book V. But de Worde’s woodcut also depicts Criseyde in clothing far exceeding her status. Her ermine sleeves match Troilus’s, suggesting an equal class-ranking between the two. In Chaucer’s text, Criseyde does seem to have come from a relatively wealthy background, but Troilus is a prince of Troy, and Criseyde is a daughter of a “devyn” or “soothsayer”—clearly, Troilus outranks her in status. According to late medieval sumptuary laws, “women were allowed expensive clothing only by reference to their association with

prominent men” (Kovesi 785). Thus Criseyde, who is the widowed daughter of a traitor, has little social (and economic) capital to warrant her wearing of exceedingly showy clothing. But rather than attempting to just characterize Troilus and Criseyde, the woodcut appears to serve as a subtext and sly commentary on the surface-level action of the poem by *metaphorically* illustrating, through dress, the socially-validated ennobling of character experienced by the Criseyde in her brief romance with Troilus. Thus, her expensive and ostentatious clothing in the woodcut mirrors her inwardly-felt elevation in status and integrity effected by her love for Troilus. What the woodcut really captures, then, is the most dramatic turning point in Criseyde’s relationship with Troilus (before, of course, the dissolution of it) when Criseyde is able to navigate what is for her the greatest contradiction of *fin’ amor*: that her secret love can be both ennobling and illicit; it has the power to at once dignify and shame.

The idea of “ennobling love” in romance is well established. Andreas writes about the ennobling effects of love in *De arte honesti amandi* when he states that “amor horridum et incultum omni facit formositate pollere” [love makes the rough and uncultivated man most rich in beauty] (I.iv.1). Important to note, is that in Latin, “formositate” is a totally physical estimation (from *forma*, lit. “shape”), even though the English “beauty” has the potential for a more spiritual, and metaphorical denotation (e.g., “beautiful” in spirit or in character). Andreas is suggesting here that being love makes a man more appealing in a very visual, or at least publicly perceivable way. This notion is indicative of a cultural perspective that interprets inner states (such as being in love) from outward behavior. Thus, from a public point of view, love does not ennoble a man because he experiences some inner blessed state of emotion; it ennoble him because love compels him to behave in publicly noble ways. For example, as Andreas notes, “obsequia cunctis amorusus multa consuevit decenter parare” [the amorous man is accustomed to

decently prepare many favors for all] (I.iv.1). These very public effects of love are directly reflected in *Troilus*. In Book III, after being cured of his lovesickness (through coition, naturally) Troilus becomes the best courtier, citizen, and warrior (save Ector), in all of Troy. Troilus's sea change—from lovelorn lout to most distinguished Trojan—is effected wholly by his love for Criseyde and his desire to win her favor: "And this encrees of hardynesse and myght / Com hym of love, his ladies thank to wyne, / That altered his spirit so withinne" (III.1776-8). But that love "altered his spirit so withinne" also suggests that an inner, "private" ennobling also occurs.

Ironically, in this androcentric construction of "ennobling love," even the seemingly anti-social symptoms of Troilus's lovesickness would publicly ennoble him. According to Andreas's definition of love as a certain "*passio innata*" (I.i.1, emphasis mine), love has the potential to ennoble its unwilling participants through an oblique version of *imitatio Christi* logic. The Christian connotations of the word *passio* are certainly present in Andreas's definition. Meaning both a "suffering" and an "enduring" in Latin (clumsiness of the English gerundive noun aside), *passio* carries a heavy theological weight, and in Christian societies, the prolonged suffering of an individual always, at least implicitly, connotes the Passion of Christ. In this way, secular love-suffering can dignify the afflicted through its semblance to the suffering of Christ. Similarly, Crocker and Pugh argue these apparent signs of weakness in Troilus actually reflect a new model of manhood in 14th century which constructs itself through its "radical passivity" (90):

Troilus's passivity, paired with the ennobling autonomy of endurance that he manifests in suffering...creates a new model of manhood, which is based on sacrifice and forbearance rather than aggression and authority...In Chaucer's tragic romance, Christ as much as Lancelot lends heroic intelligibility to Troilus's pain (87).

The religious connotations of ennobling lovesickness and suffering are further strengthened by the prominent “religion of Love” romance trope present in *Troilus* which imagines the system of courtly love as a religious hierarchy of servants/disciples (lovers) submitting to the God of Love (Eros).

Up to this point I have made no mention of how love ennoble Criseyde, and this is precisely her dilemma; the rules that govern the system of courtly love are designed to ennoble the male lover alone. In Criseyde’s (anachronistically medieval) Trojan society, which values the Christian virtue of virginity, it is typically the lady’s disdain for love and her chastity that ennoble her in romance. In fact, it is precisely her rejection of love which makes her desirable.

As Howard Bloch writes in *Medieval Misogyny*:

Stated simply, to the extent that the woman of the [courtly love] lyric seduces but is never seduced, she represents virgin. The prerequisite of her being desired is that she be perfect, ideal, complete unto herself, without imperfection or lack and therefore without desire; the *sine qua non* of loving, therefore, is that one not be loved in return. (151)

Even Pandarus warns Troilus that their love could potentially shame Criseyde: “And forthi se that thow in special, / Requere naught that is ayeys hyre name; / For vertu strecchech naught hymself to shame” (I.901-3). But Wynken de Worde’s woodcut depicts her as ennobled and standing in equal status with beside Troilus, and thus it raises a perplexing question of how Criseyde is able to convince herself that she too can be ennobled in love *as a woman*. Criseyde, who is so strongly driven by a desire to preserve her dignity and reputation, needs to convince herself that love can be as ennobling for a woman as it is for a man in order to allow herself to love Troilus—a process that the woodcut actually alludes to in its garden setting. The garden is the space where Criseyde is able to “appropriate” the concept of ennobling love for herself,

because it represents the ideal psychological space for reflecting Criseyde's inner cognitive and emotional processes as both a natural and civilized force; especially in comparison to Troilus's wholly artificial understanding of love.

This difference between natural and civilized love is reflected in each of the lovers' individual love-spaces. Troilus often experiences his love in the bedroom. It is where he first retires too when struck with his love for Criseyde, and it is his constant place of retreat when experiencing his most intensely felt love pangs. Troilus's chamber represents a more "civilized" form of love; the space is private and bound within four walls of man-made construction. He literally "shuts out" the outside world by closing the doors and windows. Thus, although the bedroom is a civilized space, it is not, at least in Troilus's case, a social space. In many ways, this reflects Troilus's condition. His love for Criseyde is "built" by Pandarus using the civilized or constructed conventions of courtly love, and yet, because the lovers never intend to marry or even allow their relationship to enter into the public sphere, their love remains "civilized" but not "socialized." The problem with this is that civilized things usually serve a public function, or at least form part of a larger system working for a community. For Troilus and his bedroom, the artifice and ritual of courtly love is appropriated but never then applied to a greater social purpose. Just as the bedroom can only exist in the larger context of a household, so too can courtly love only be effective as an aspect within a larger culture. Because Troilus isolates the tradition, it destroys him.

Criseyde, on the other hand, plays the game of courtly love with Troilus to increase her safety in the public sphere. Likewise, she does the same when she connects with Diomedes. For Criseyde, Pandarus, and Diomedes, courtly love is a means to some greater end; it is useful social tool to effect change. And so, if Troilus is thematically linked to the bedroom, Criseyde's

moments of love-meditation/mediation becomes associated with the garden. This is where she retreats after first seeing Troilus. The garden, like the bedroom, is a civilized space, and yet the garden represents a balance between nature and artifice that isn't reflected in the "idea" of a bedroom. In a garden, natural things are ordered and restrained, a civilizing influence. If love is a "natural thing" then the garden becomes a metaphor for the balance that needs to be cultivated in order to for love to exist within a society. A garden requires a dutiful gardener; civilized love requires responsible lover. Furthermore, the dichotomy between Troilus's idea of love in the bedroom, and Criseyde's in the garden, is that Criseyde has real, *natural* love to tame (she has flowers to tend to, bushes to prune, soil to rake), while Troilus, has only the artificial constructs he dreamt up in his room. Criseyde understands the artifice of love-traditions but also sees their connection to real, natural love—Troilus connects the rituals to fantasies, and nothing exists to substantiate this "love."

The behavior of the lovers in each of their respective love-settings is telling. Troilus's bedroom-ruminations on love are *introspective*, but Criseyde's are constantly outward-looking. Troilus's lovelorn apostrophes are usually addressed to himself, but Criseyde looks to other people to gauge her decisions, and Antigone's song in the garden seems to be a more crucial factor in her choice than any of her internal monologues on the subject. This whole concept of extra/introspection connects back to the idea of the lovers' gazes in the first book when Troilus, looking out in the crowd, first catches sight of Criseyde. This moment turns out to be really an *insight* into his feelings of love for her than an understanding of who she is. Criseyde, however, upon seeing Troilus parade by her window, looks and listens to the other women in the room. Part of this is socially deliberate; noblewomen in the Chaucer's age were rarely allowed any time alone, their retinue of ladies would accompany them throughout the day. Still, the difference

between how the lovers each react to this initial “seeing” elucidates their unequal understanding of social rules and emotional realities. Where Troilus is struck down by love, Criseyde explicates, ruminates on, and weighs all the risks and potential gains from this relationship before falling in love. The garden, however, also functions in a very specific way for the plot. It is in the garden where Criseyde hears Antigone’s song. The song allows Criseyde to momentarily reconcile the opposing social roles of a widow and courtly lover, both of which Pandarus implored her to adopt.

Clearly, the life of a widow is the more noble path for Criseyde, and it is a life she is happy to lead until Pandarus forces her to confront her role as a secret lover. At first, the two identities seem to be antithetical, and yet both are ill-defined and intersecting. For instance, the secret tradition of illicit courtly love is not only generated and disseminated, but actively celebrated in the public readings of romances by courtiers.³⁴ Thus, the illicit behavior of courtly love is also a publicly-acknowledged aspect of courtly culture. Furthermore, Criseyde’s status as a widow demands that she modestly remove herself from the public sphere (or at least, relocate to its margins). Criseyde exemplifies this in her public appearance at the temple in Book I:

...she “stood ful lowe and stille allone,
Byhynden other folk, in litel brede,
And neigh the dore, ay undre shames drede,
Simple of atir and debonaire of chere,
With ful assured lokyng and manare. (I.176-82)

³⁴ One such public reading of a romance is described in Book II: “...and they thre / Herden a mayden reden hem the geste / Of the seige of Thebes, while hem leste” (II.82-4).

What is emphasized here in her public comportment is ultimately her fear of being shamed for ostentatious behavior unbecoming of a widow. But the role of secret lover would require much the same inconspicuousness, driven by the same social fear of public shame. Thus, from a popular perspective, Criseyde as a widow and Criseyde as secret lover would be similarly enacted. It is only in Book V, when Criseyde is *openly* betrothed to Diomedes, that she transforms her public identity through her change in dress: “metaphorically, as represented in the gold-dressed hairstyle, as well as the transfer of the glove, sleeve, and brooch, Criseyde, in Book V, is dressed in her public acceptance of Diomedes as a lover” (Hodges 87). With Diomedes, Criseyde is able to remove her habit and adorn herself and her lover with visible symbols of love (the brooch and the sleeve) because her love of Diomedes is reputable and will presumably lead to marriage. With Troilus, however, her identity as lover would always remain illicit. Therefore, Criseyde needed to reconcile the relationship by changing her perception of “female lover” identity. But it is not until she hears Antigone’s Song in the garden (a negotiated space between civilized/public and natural/private life) that she is able to bridge the cultural gap between widowhood and life as a secret lover because it enables her to imagine the ennobling effects of love as applicable to women.

Kara Anne Doyle, in “Criseyde Reading Criseyde,” argues that Criseyde allows herself to fall in love with Troilus only after hearing Antigone’s song because the song reverses the traditional gender roles of the love lyric (83). Doyle notes that by grammatically placing the female speaker of the love lyric in the subject position, Antigone’s song grants a newfound agency to the lady, who is typically the “object” of the lyric (83). Upon hearing a publicly delivered song in which a woman who adopts the vocabulary and concerns of male lyric song-makers is the subject of the love lyric (and not the object), Criseyde is able to identify with the

speaker and thus, she has a model of female agency to apply to her love for Troilus. I would argue, though, that perhaps more influential than her identification with the male subject in this reversal is her identification with his ability to be ennobled by love. When, after the song Criseyde asks Antigone “Who made this song now with so good entente?,” she is very quick (“anoon”) to answer “...the goodlieste mayde / Of gret estat in al the town of Troye, / and let hire lif in most honour an joye” (II.880-2). It is Antigone’s emphasis that this woman can be both a lover and a great, honorable lady of good estate which finally convinces Criseyde to yield her love to Troilus:

But every word which that she of hire herde,
 She gan to prenten in hire herte faste,
 And ay gan love hire lasse for t’agaste
 Than it dide erst, and synken in hire herte,
 That she wex somewhat able to converte. (II.899-903)

Criseyde, from then on, feels ennobled by her love with Troilus, but she has always been severely attentive to class and social rank, especially her own. We see this in Book I as she exactly calculates how best to present herself before Ector to plead for his protection after her father abandons her. She wears her “habit large of samyt broun” and “On knees she fil biforn Ector adown / With pitious vois, and tendrely wepynge, / His mercy bad, hirselves excusynge” (I.109-112). Because *Troilus and Criseyde* generally lacks conventional passages of *descriptio* (lengthy diversions from the plot that catalogue characters’ dress, jewelry, and general accoutrements in intricate detail), when Chaucer does take the time for sartorial description, extra attention to the implications of the clothing’s symbolic and contextual meaning is warranted. Clothing does more than characterize Troilus and Criseyde; it exposes displays

currents of social tensions that run throughout the poem. We see in this early episode with Ector that Criseyde uses clothing to maintain and reconstruct her social status—whereas Troilus, on the other hand, primarily wears his clothing as affirmation of his unchallenged noble status.

After Criseyde convinces herself of her ennobling love, however, she comports herself differently before Troilus. In her early correspondence with Troilus, for example, she does not speak to the prince with the humility of a woman of a lower class. Attention to class is essential to the functioning of *fin'amor*; this is most evident in the exemplary dialogues in Andreas' *De amore* which each illustrate a conversation between two archetypes of class (for instance, the first dialogue is titled "A noble addresses a common woman." Furthermore, even though the lady is presumably always placed above the man in the hypothetical model of courtly love, Andreas' dialogues prove that distinctions in class are always predominant. A woman of a lower class can certainly show disdain, but it must be modest, self-effacing disdain: surely I am unworthy of a prince's affection. Criseyde, however, makes no references to her lower social status in her letters to Troilus; in fact, she writes as though her ennobling love has elevated her to Troilus's rank. In her first letter to Troilus she offers Troilus her sisterly love: "...but as his suster, hym to plese, / She wolde fayn to doon his herte ese" (II.1224-5). Thus, in her suggested relationship, she would be sister and, therefore, princess to prince Troilus: she has essentially elevated herself to a position of natural-born nobility.

The paradox underlying the entire idea of ennobling courtly love, of course, is that the kind of love in romance that supposedly generates these ennobling effects is nearly always adulterous, or at least nonmarital. For all its positive effects in the public sphere, courtly love is essentially anti-social. This is the terrible realization that Criseyde inevitably comes to. And thus, her trespasses against Troilus in Book V need to be tempered with this understanding. Criseyde

genuinely attempted to reconcile her public reputation and her private love for Troilus, but ultimately found the two incompatible for a widow living in Troy. Other aspects of Criseyde's behavior expose her desire to consolidate the two spheres: the brooch she gives is potentially an outward, visual sign of betrothal, but it remains hidden under his tunic—a symbol of Criseyde's desire for public visibility but also of her acknowledgement that her love must remain a secret. The very secrecy of the affair is questioned by Chaucer; after all, it is Pandarus who acts as prime mover in nearly every aspect of their love. His constant intrusions into the private sphere of the lovers (eavesdropping on Troilus's chamber, pushing letters down Criseyde's dress, and even climbing into the lovers' bed) illustrate the permeability of the boundary between their secret relationship and society. Furthermore, Troilus and Criseyde's initial love-meetings (in the temple, during Troilus's triumphal march, at Diophobus's house, and while attending Pandarus's rainy-day dinner party) all take place in social contexts. Diomedes even recognizes that Troilus is in love the moment he sees him, and easily infers that Criseyde is the object of his affection.

Noticeably absent from *Troilus* is the romance genre's typical attention to the illicitness of the lovers' affair. In fact, the narrator never explicitly makes clear how or even why exactly Troilus and Criseyde's relationship would be perceived as "illicit." Thus, the failure of their secret relationship seems to suggest the folly of attempting to keep it secret in the first place. The secret love in *Troilus* is an open secret—upheld only by an imagined social reality that would condemn it. It is this imagined social force that pressures Criseyde to abandon her love.

Wynkyn de Worde's choice of woodcut for the frontispiece to *Troilus* captures a unique and multifaceted reading of Criseyde's situation in montage as a woman profoundly perceptive of social artifice and true emotion and yet still bound and restricted by the public systems of *fin'amor*. The frontispiece emphasizes Criseyde's attention to outward display of dress and

adornment, artifice that allows her to self-fashion and manipulate her public identity. The clothes she wears reflect the emotional states and social statuses that she desires to project. After all, one of the last promises Criseyde makes to Troilus before leaving Troy is to wear black as a sign of the metaphorical death she will experience being separated from him: “Troilus, my clothes everchon / Shul blake ben in tokenyng, herte swete” (IV.778-8). Criseyde’s promise to Troilus shows her willingness to employ conventional imagery and ideas in order to fashion the outward signs of her emotional state, and to manipulate her identity through word and costume. By explicitly stating what her appearance will represent, she transforms herself into an iconographic figure. Thus, just as Wynken de Worde’s composite iconographic woodcut frontispiece to *Troilus* portrays the multiple levels of identity chosen and read through conventional gestures and images, Criseyde’s awareness and appropriation of these conventions is reflected in her promise to wear black clothes “in tokenyng.”

Conclusion

Towards the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer makes a fascinating plea to his “litel book” in which he urges the poem not to be altered or misinterpreted:

And for ther is so gret diversite
In Englissh and in writyng of oure tonge,
So prey I God that non myswrite the,
Ne themysmetre for defaute of tonge;
And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,
That thow be understonde, God I biseche! (V.1793-98).

Clearly, Chaucer’s fear is primarily linguistic; he worries that the diverse dialects of the Middle English language will corrupt the meaning, intent, and even meter of his words. But he also fears that wherever his poem may be “red” or “songe” it may be understood incorrectly. Thus, Chaucer’s anxiety surrounding the reading and analysis of his text directly echoes the “readings” (and at times, “misreadings”) experienced and perpetrated by the characters of *Troilus and Criseyde* within the poem’s narrative. These multi-faceted understandings of the poem’s situations by the characters have been, in turn, interpreted and re-presented in the manuscript illuminations and woodblock prints that have become associated with Troilus’s story.

The “Prostrate Troilus” images show how Troilus’s individual understanding of courtly love is predicated wholly on the outward signs of affect, because it characterizes him primarily through his lovesickness. Troilus’s *amor heroës* is a disease engendered by immoderate thought and obsessive “imagining.” The images of Criseyde that Troilus forms and meditates upon in his mind are only his fantasy of love, and not the living human from whom his love supposedly springs. Thus, the illustrated Troilus who lies in bed pointing encodes a double meaning. The

image says what Troilus believes to be the truth: “I am the wretched victim of this love,” and yet it also implies another reality of his condition: “I am the cruel inflictor of this self-punishment.”

Even in the wholly bespoke *Kelmscott Chaucer* (1896), an illustrious late Victorian masterpiece of the book-arts, we find a version of the “Prostrate Troilus” image accompanying the prologue to Book III of *Troilus and Criseyde*. I would argue that this image endured throughout the centuries because it captures so well the underlying irony with which the poem is imbued. In fact, the entire epic Trojan backdrop of the poem comes in direct conflict with some of the mores and traditions of the romance genre that operate in the foreground of the poem. That is not to say that romantic love is incompatible with epic poetry, as this is clearly not the case; nor even are the specialized rituals of courtly love incongruent with an epic hero’s behavior. Rather, the ever-looming and inevitable destruction of Troy makes the “threat of death” inherent to Troilus’s self-inflicted *amor hereos* seem ridiculous. As the hero staggers between the roles of the courtly *amoureux pathétique* and the contemptible “pathetic lover,” we realize that as a warrior in the Trojan War, lovesickness is very clearly *not* the greatest hazard to Troilus in the poem. After all, Troilus ultimately dies while fighting Trojan War—not from his loss of Criseyde.

The image of Troilus in bed seems to also reflect Chaucer’s amusement or frustration with potential audiences who may read his romance from a singular viewpoint, particularly one as naïve as Troilus’s. Inevitably, there would be those that read or hear *Troilus and Criseyde* and interpret the poem as a grand romance tragedy. They would scorn Criseyde and weep for Troilus. They would be dazzled by the courtly conventions of romance and all the while blind to the pointed questions raised by the narrative and the judgements delivered by Chaucer’s narration—just as Troilus is blind to Criseyde’s inner emotional experience and uncomprehending of his

own. Thus, in a very metafictional way, Chaucer is commenting on Troilus's interpretation of love as the division in the readership of Chaucer's poetry: those who read romance simply to make judgments about the two lovers based on their outward displays of emotion ("true Troilus" and "wicked Criseyde"), and those who are able to discern the subtleties of Chaucer's narration that accounts for the psychological depth of the characters.

Likewise, the images that depict Pandarus as a messenger emphasize his understanding of courtly love as a language of images, gestures, and words. As a language, this system can be manipulated, and the unstable meanings of signs exploited. The letters that Pandarus delivers in these images are messages themselves—regardless of their textual contents—because Pandarus actively *reads* and interprets their meaning for the lovers. His machinations and schemes are, above all, rhetorical games and astute yet slanted textual analyses.

Like "Prostrate Troilus," the "Pandarus as Messenger" image becomes attached to the character of Pandarus because it expresses with neat economy his status as mediator between people, ideas, and spaces. Although Pandarus is witty, charming, cruel, irreverent, above all his character seems to deflect categorization and remain undeniably liminal. I have shown how the binary relationship of the public and private spheres in *Troilus* are consistently invaded and inverted by Pandarus's behavior. He turns public spaces into private stages of intimate moments between lovers. At the same time, by designing and then infiltrating private spaces as an outside party to the romance, Pandarus makes them semi-public. He enters each lover's personal, emotional, and even corporeal space. He translates (and shamelessly manipulates) emotions from internal phenomena to external expression, and he blurs the distinctions laid out by his society. Thus, as both prime author and sole witness to the love affair between Troilus and Criseyde, one of Pandarus's greatest roles in the poem is in obscuring the social divisions of Troilus and

Criseyde's secret relationship. More so than Criseyde, and certainly Troilus, Pandarus becomes an active reader of his own story, and thus, an interpreter like we ourselves become as readers. Pandarus ultimately functions within the story just as the illustrations do: emphasizing certain aspects of relationships and social situations, presenting scenes from different or even unexpected perspectives, and remediating messages from the poem through iconography and conventional imagery.

Perhaps the most complex image I have examined is the de Worde frontispiece to *Troilus and Criseyde*. It is at once an amalgam of conventional romance tropes and a pointed illustration of Criseyde's psychological state. Unlike Troilus, who reads but does not interpret, or Pandarus, who actively reads his own meanings into messages, Criseyde's reading is reflective. Her interpretations are directed inward and are filtered according to how she perceives other people might "read" her appearance, behavior, and projected identity.

At first, Wynken de Worde's frontispiece to *Troilus and Criseyde* may seem the outlier in my approach; it neither illustrates any specific scene from the poem nor portrays the lovers in an obviously characteristic way. Rather, I argue that the key to this image may be found in how it manipulates the conventional imagery and iconography of romance. We do, however, need to take into account the framing and focalization of the frontispiece by asking the question that Michael Camille suggests we pose to all medieval secular art depicting scenes of love: "whose desire is being represented?" (34). Most often, Camille argues, it is the desire of the male character, poet, knight, or artist that is reflected in the visual arts of medieval love (34). By this standard, I perceive an anomaly in this frontispiece. On one level, the image could certainly reflect Troilus's *desire*, and particularly, his desire for their love to remain within the fantasy of romance. Through Troilus's eyes, the image would be a comforting one. Just as the garden is

walled off from the outside world, so too could their romance remain insulated from the social forces that ultimately tear them apart. But on another level, the image represents Criseyde's desire, or at least her passing fantasy that the love she holds for Troilus could ennoble her rather than shame her. Her extravagant clothing in the frontispiece abstractly reflects the ennobling effects of love because the "ennobling love is primarily a public experience, only secondarily private," because the ennobling characteristics of courtly love are only realized in the public sphere (Jaeger 6). Troilus benefits from this publicly-realized ennoblement during the height of their affair in his military acts of love-impelled valor. Criseyde's experience with "ennobling love," however, is itself informed by the *public* discourse of Antigone's lyric. Troilus's ennoblement is unknowingly self-generated by his masculinity, whereas Criseyde must appropriate for her own, feminine identity the very conventional androcentric perspective that defines what ennobling is.

By approaching *Troilus and Criseyde* via this small collection of manuscript illustrations and early woodblock prints, I have attempted to approximate the experience of the medieval reader of romance who would have found the act of reading images inextricable from the experience of poetry. There are some important potential pitfalls of my approach, however. I have been careful not to succumb to the intentional fallacy as it applies to book illustration by casting aside assumptions about the motivations of the illustrators and rather simply attempting to understand how the images ultimately function in their contexts. In some cases, like the "Prostrate Troilus" motif, these images operate like manicules, pointing to certain moments, motifs, or ideas raised in the text. In others, like the de Worde frontispiece, they seem to collect and concentrate iconographic meaning in telling arrangements. Furthermore, I have concluded

that regardless of whether the image was fashioned exclusively for the text or merely reused/refashioned, the illustrator (or printer) has made two very significant choices which help us understand his reading of the poem. He must first select which scenes get illustrated, and then he must decide which images to use in representing them. We know from contemporary glosses of 14th century texts that medieval readers of romance could at times be extremely critical interpreters. Thus, we can posit that the *Troilus* tale, as it exists as a textual object, is “read” and, at times, remediated through these images, just as Chaucer had “read” Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato*, and as Boccaccio, in turn, had “read” Benoît’s *Le roman de Troie*. Certainly, in both manuscript illustrations and woodcut prints, the conventional images have lived on, and remain, to some extent, attached to modern readings of the poem.

This act of “reading” and “rereading” the *Troilus* tale continues throughout the ages, from its first substantial invention by Boccaccio, through to Chaucer, remediated into drama by Shakespeare, and then reinvented in the 20th century in William Walton’s opera, *Troilus and Cressida* (based more on Chaucer’s poem than Shakespeare’s play). Among these works of the *Troilus* tradition, there is one fragment of meaning in particular that links together the images I have chosen to examine: Troilus’s address to the “heighe worthynesse” of Love. Boccaccio originates the conceit in *Il Filostrato* when Troilus thanks Love and Pandarus for their work: “Lodato sia Amor che mi fe’ suo, / e similmente il buon servizio tuo” (III.58.7-8).³⁵ Chaucer translates the general idea of this in *Troilus and Criseyde* as Troilus says to Pandarus, “...thanked be the heighe worthynesse / Of Love, and ek thi kynde bysynesse” (III. 1609-10). Here, however, Chaucer shifts the object of Troilus’s praise from Love himself to Love’s

³⁵[Praised be Love, who has made me hers, and likewise your good service]. Boccaccio’s Italian text is cited from Windeatt’s edition of *Troilus and Criseyde* (1984).

“worthynesse,” which rhetorically and syntactically equates Pandarus with Eros. Shakespeare, in his *Troilus and Cressida*, alters the idea further still by erasing any direct divine influence over love when Troilus implores, “...O gentle Pandarus, / From Cupid’s shoulder pluck his painted wings / And fly with me to Cressid!” (III.2.12-14).³⁶ And lastly, in the glorious final bars of the first act of Walton’s *Troilus and Cressida*, the idea is once again repeated: as Pandarus delivers a scarf that Cressida has sent to Troilus, Troilus ignores Pandarus’s service and devotes his praise exclusively to the divine force of Venus:

Goddess of mortal love,

Tall Aphrodite,

Glory and thanks be to thee,

Perfect in beauty.

In thy name shall I triumph! (Act II)

All of these short passages allude to some of the major ideas presented in the manuscript illuminations and woodcut prints. Troilus’s uncritical and overstated gratitude to Love’s effects and Pandarus’s service betray the underlying ignorance of his own agency in the affair, just as the “Prostrate Troilus” images emphasize the willfulness of his passivity. Each passage also touches upon Pandarus’s perceived role as the go-between and messenger for the lovers that we see reflected in the “Pandarus and Messenger” images. They all question Pandarus’s role in the tale: is he really the sole architect of their love, as Shakespeare’s Troilus seems to believe? Or is Pandarus’s role overshadowed by the forces of fate, as Walton’s Troilus understands it to be? The frontispiece image of the lovers in the garden, too, is ensnared in Troilus’s plea. In their

³⁶ Quotations from Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* are cited from *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed. (2016).

exaggerated rhetorical style of apostrophe and panegyric, these texts echo the convention and artifice presented in the iconography of the frontispiece. Clearly, some kernel of Boccaccio's original sentiment survives all of these versions; each embellished, redirected, or even inverted by their new authors. This is how I consider the illustrations of the *Troilus* tale to function within their narrative contexts—as reimagined and reimagined “readings” of the story.

Figures



1. Cambridge Library, Corpus Christi MS 61 fol. 1v.



2. Bodleian Library, MS Arch. Selden. B. 24 fol. 1r.



3. Bodleian Library, MS Douce 331 folio 8r.



4. Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Français 25528 fol. 21v.



5. STC 5095 fol. 97r



6. STC 5096 fol. 37v.



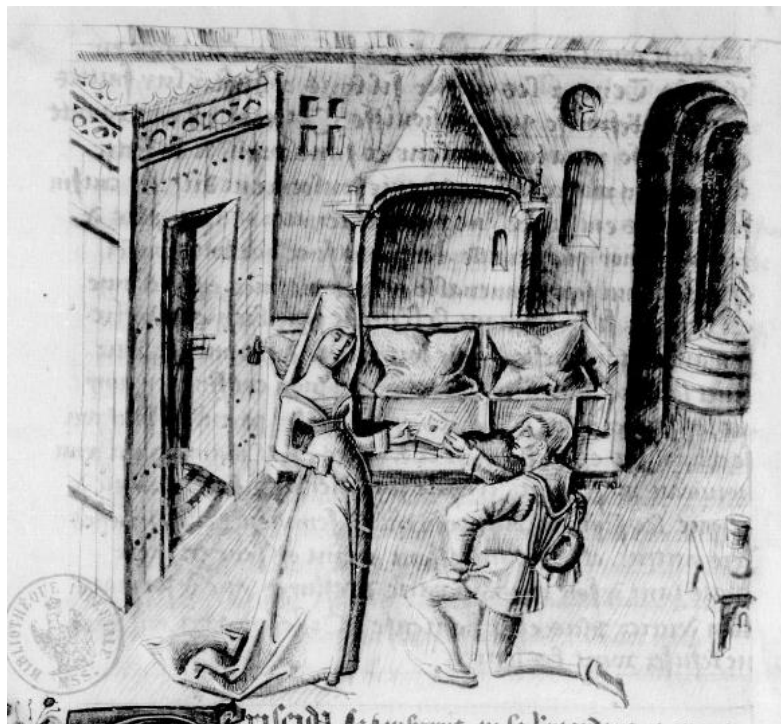
7. Master Taking of Tarento (Florence) "The Triumph of Venus, worshipped by six legendary lovers" Louvre, Département des Peintures, Paris, France. [Troilus is located on the far right.]



8. Demon (Detail) Bodleian Library MS Douce 134 fol.067v



9. Alexander the Great Encounters the Blemmyae (Detail.) British Library Royal MS 20 B xx [f. 80r]



10. Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Français 25528 fol. 49v.



11. Bodleian Library, MS Douce 331 fol.19v.



12. STC 5096 fol. 16r.



13. STC 5095 fol. 1r.



14. Romance of Alexander (c.1338, French) Bodleian Library MS Bodl. 264, 59r.

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