

Altered Images:
The Agency of the Gaze in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO
MAYAGÜEZ CAMPUS
2016

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ABSTRACT

In Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* the protagonists experience the process of falling in and out of love in very different ways. The poem is shaped through the agency of the gaze that transforms the developing events according to the perspective of each character. This thesis, then, highlights the importance of perspectives, particularly the impact of the gaze and anamorphic changes in perspective on the development of the narrative. Included within this is the manner in which the audience comes to understand the events being narrated, which are viewed through different perspectives depending on whose gaze focalizes our attention. This will be achieved through the complementary application of Lacan's observations on courtly love and the role of desire within this. However, the primary theoretical approach will be provided by Slavoj Žižek's theories on anamorphosis and the gaze. A central point for this discussion is the conception that our desires transform our gaze, creating an anamorphic view of the events being narrated. The thesis will demonstrate how this composite of perspectives creates meaning within Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*.

RESUMEN

En *Troilus and Criseyde* por Geoffrey Chaucer, los protagonistas viven el proceso de enamorarse y desenamorarse de maneras muy distintas. El poema se construye a través de la acción de la mirada que transforma los eventos de acuerdo a la perspectiva de cada personaje. Por lo tanto, esta tesis recalca la importancia de las perspectivas, particularmente el impacto de la mirada y de cambios anamórficos sobre la perspectiva en el desarrollo de la narrativa. Esto incluye la manera en que la audiencia llega a entender los hechos que están siendo narrados, los cuales son observados a través de distintas perspectivas de acuerdo a la mirada que enfoca nuestra atención. Esto se logrará a través de la aplicación complementaria de los postulados de Lacan sobre *courtly love* y el rol del deseo en el mismo. Sin embargo, el enfoque teórico principal será provisto por las teorías de Slavoj Žižek sobre la anamorfosis y la mirada. Un punto central para esta discusión es el concepto de que nuestros deseos transforman nuestra mirada, creando así una visión anamórfica de los eventos narrados. Esta tesis demostrará cómo esta combinación de perspectivas crea significado dentro de *Troilus and Criseyde* de Geoffrey Chaucer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee for guiding me and encouraging me through this lengthy process. Dr. Nick Haydock, thank you for your endless support. From the very beginning of this process, you have encouraged me to do my best. You have no idea how your faith in me has helped me grow as a person and a professional. A special thank you to Dr. Nandita Batra and Dr. José Irizarry for supporting my efforts and sharing your wisdom. It has truly been a pleasure working with you.

To my family, thank you for always being there through the good and the bad. It has not been easy, but your love and understanding got me through this process.

To my friends I would like to say thank you for being my sounding board and for always being there when I needed to talk. Thank you for always believing in me even when I did not.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* the protagonists experience the process of falling in and out of love in very different ways. The poem is shaped through the agency of the gaze that transforms the developing events according to the perspective of each character. This understanding shapes how the characters see each other and how they interpret subsequent events. Pandarus comes to see himself, within the context of the affair, as the architect that plans the structure of this affair; Troilus thinks himself Love's victim and Criseyde's, while she provokes seemingly endless debates about whether she is indeed more sinned against than sinning.

However, the perspectives adopted in the narrative also influence the impact of characterizations within it: for example, the first glimpse of Criseyde. The description offered by the narrator focuses on the otherworldliness of Criseyde's beauty: "Nas nevere yet seyn thing to ben preysed derre,/ Nor under cloude blak so bright a sterre" (*Troilus* I, 174-5). This furtive, otherworldly beauty then creates the foundation for the behavior that Troilus presents when courting Criseyde, since she comes to represent an ideal rather than a reality. Troilus' reaction to his first glimpse of Criseyde is embodied in the narrator's claim that "In beaute first stood she, makeles" (I, 172). From this first sighting, Troilus' gaze locks on to Criseyde and she rises above all others in his esteem; she is peerless in this regard. When their eyes accidentally engage, the power of her gaze is highlighted by comparing its impact to Cupid's arrows: Troilus "Was ful unwar that Love hadde his dwellynge/ Withinne the subtile stremes of hire yën;/ That sodeynly hym thoughte he felted dyen" (I, 304-6). This passage ascribes a supernatural force to her glance and furthers Troilus' perception of Criseyde as a woman without equal. Hence, he never really sees Criseyde for herself, but rather the image he has created of her. His male gaze transforms

her into a divine figure, in effect placing her on a pedestal from which she inevitably falls. This creates a parallel within the narrative between how the people of Troy see Criseyde and the interpretation of these descriptions that a reader constructs.

Moreover, the aforementioned behavior is not unique to Troilus since Criseyde also creates an idealized perception of him. The first time Criseyde sees Troilus as a love object is an event staged by her uncle Pandarus. She is witness to the military spectacle of Troilus returning victorious from a scrimmage with the Greeks: “But swich a knightly sight trewely/ As was on hym, was nought, withouten faille,/ To loke on Mars, that god is of bataille” (II, 628-30). In this instance, a parallel is being drawn between Troilus’ return to the city and an image of Mars returning from battle; the implication being that he also rises above his peers, as gods do mortal men. He is further described as “So fresh, so yong, so weldy semed he,/ It was an heven upon hym for to see” (II, 6363-7)—he embodies a heavenly image of idealized male beauty. This is the Troilus that Criseyde first contemplates, a beautiful and manly warrior. Her perception is altered by this presentation of Troilus as almost godlike and the matter is further exacerbated by her recollection of Pandarus’ description of Troilus as an equal to Hector. Thus, Troilus is also placed on a pedestal.

These idealized descriptions and perceptions of the characters influence the way in which readers form opinions concerning the events narrated in this epic poem. According to Lacan and further developed by Žižek, the gaze is the process by which our subjectivity is formed through the scrutiny of the Other upon us. Thus, the subjectivity of the characters in *Troilus* and subsequently their reactions to the events of the narrative are formed through this interchange of gazes between the subject and the Other. However, the importance of the gaze within *Troilus* transcends the mere action of creating the characters’ subjectivity and influencing the readers’

understanding of them.¹ It expands to encompass the very interactions between the characters that spark the events taking place within the narrative—the chief instigator of the action being the desire that is produced through the interchange of gazes. Robin Waugh explains this as a chain reaction, since “As soon as one realizes that the act of seeing leads to self-conscious apprehension of spaces, distances, subjects, others, subjects as others, and others as subjects, this type of act raises questions concerning the connections between one's gaze and one's desire and between one's gaze and one's sex” (1). Therefore, *Troilus and Criseyde* is a narrative of the gaze and the subsequent desires generated through this continuous process between the subject and the Other. *Troilus* could then be usefully described as a highly complex narrative, constituted by the amalgamation of points-of-view that enriches the development of the plot and is further complicated when we take into consideration how the gaze of the characters affects the readers’ impression of them and consequently of their actions.

This thesis will analyze the important role played by the interchange of gazes through the theory of the gaze by Slavoj Žižek, who elaborates upon Lacan’s notions about the formation of subjectivity, the role of the gaze in this process, and its implication in the development of desire. However, the most important consideration is that the Other is always affecting the self and therefore it is an ever-changing process. The gazes of others affect the fashion in which this

¹ In the act of gazing, there is an inherently gendered quality to the process. Based on Lacanian theory, the Gaze is gendered in the sense that it is comprised of an active male gaze and a passive female element subject to that gaze. The active male gaze uses the female object being observed as a receptacle for his fantasies, in a way establishing the idealization and objectification of the female within this process. Consequently, the male gaze takes control over the object being observed and transposes its desires upon it, insuring a blurring of the reality of this object. This then raises the possibility of feminist implications in *Troilus and Criseyde*, since the process is flipped. Criseyde takes on the active role of gazing at various points during the narrative, while Troilus is reduced to the observed object. Troilus then becomes the receptacle for Criseyde’s fantasies. For more details on the gendered gaze and visual pleasure, please refer to: Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1999: 833-44. Print.

process occurs. “To exist one has to be recognized by an-other” (Homer 26), which establishes that a subject must be acknowledged as such by other subjects.

We are constantly receiving stimuli from the real and the information gathered is either internalized or rejected, constantly changing our understanding of ourselves. This Other is mostly composed of the realms of language and culture, which includes the gaze of other subjects. However, the internal processes of the mind—the unconscious—also influence the manner in which we interact with the Other and therefore influences our subjectivity. Thus, Pandarus’ insistence that Criseyde should cast aside her widow’s garb and enjoy her youth while it lasts represents this intervention of the Other upon the subject: “And cast youre widewes habit to mischaunce!” (II, 222). Criseyde accepts this view and allows herself the chance to love Troilus.

Furthermore, our unconscious desire towards the phallus mediates many of our interactions with the Other and thus inevitably influences the type of stimuli that we reject or accept into ourselves; “Desire, therefore, is always the manifestation of something that is lacking in the subject and the Other – the symbolic order. It is through the Other that the subject secures its position in the symbolic, social, order” (Homer 72). By establishing this position, the subject creates a space within society and continues to exchange gazes with other individuals and to mediate the evolution of the subject. In the case of Criseyde, she is vulnerable due to her status as a widow and the daughter of a deserter; this exposed position is established through the gaze of the Other. The predatory and threatening nature of the gaze is nowhere more obvious than in the opening scene within the temple where Criseyde in obvious fear and anxiety does everything she can to avoid being seen by her fellow Trojans. Hiding beneath her widow’s veil and withdrawing into dark corners, she treats the eyes of others as a threat. It is this very

vulnerability, apparently, which draws Troilus' erotic gaze, which Criseyde in turn reads at first as a monitory glare: "What, may I nat stonden here?":

Troilus right wonder wel with alle
Gan for to like hire mevyng and hire chere,
Which somdel deignous was, for she let falle
Hire look a lite aside in swich manere,
Ascaunces, "What, may I nat stonden here?"
And after that hir lokynge gan she lighte,
That nevere thoughte hym seen so good a syghte.
And of hire look in him ther gan to quyken
So gret desir and such affeccioun,
That in his herte botme gan to stiken
Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun. (I, 288-98)

That Criseyde first treats Troilus' gaze as a threat, perhaps even as official surveillance, speaks volumes about the inter-implication of aggressive and erotic energies in the gaze. Specifically, what wins Troilus' heart is the quick transition in Criseyde's gaze from a self-possessed, "somdel deignous" look to a glance that lightens and brightens as she turns to confront her observer.

The aforementioned discussion of how external stimuli affect the subject is broadened through Lacan's theories on anamorphosis, which he described as "any kind of construction that is made in such a way that by means of an optical transposition a certain form that wasn't visible at first sight transforms itself into a readable image" (Lacan 135); an assertion that he applied to the study of courtly love as an illusion created for the sublimation of love. Courtly love is built upon the conception that one has "to be deprived of something real" (Lacan 150), hence, Troilus despairs after his first glimpse of Criseyde. He believes that his affections will not be reciprocated, yet he continues pining for her regardless of the perceived impossibility of the endeavor. This illusion of despair is eventually dispelled by Pandarus' involvement and serves as

a basis for the forthcoming illusion of his success when he believes he has secured Criseyde's love.

However, anamorphosis, in the sense utilized by Žižek, can be described as the action of seeing an object differently, depending on the angle used to do the viewing. Žižek elaborates on this point by explaining that "If we look at a thing straight on, matter-of-factly, we see it 'as it really is,' while the gaze puzzled by our desires and anxieties ('looking awry') gives us a distorted, blurred image" (11). The implication being that we cannot always take things at face value: a concept exemplified by how the lovers in *Troilus* view the love affair. Troilus views his desire for Criseyde as a manifestation of his true love for her. However, Criseyde, being more experienced, understands that their interactions are based on lust rather than love. Thus, Troilus' desire alters his understanding of the situation and through his gaze creates the illusion of true love out of a lustful affair.

Consequently, the impact of the events being narrated within *Troilus* depends upon the position from which they are viewed. For example, Criseyde does not pay much attention to Troilus until he is pointed out and emphasized by her uncle Pandarus. Even then, she observes that he is a comely youth, nothing more. It is not until Pandarus constructs an ideal image of Troilus, framing him as the heroic savior of Troy and "Hector the secounde," that Criseyde's desire is transformed. In his role as architect of the affair, Pandarus lays the foundations for Criseyde's admiration by constantly exalting Troilus' attributes and virtues; going so far as to present him as an equal to his brother Hector, a renowned warrior and leader. As a result, Pandarus reinforces in her the perspective of Troilus as a hero and as a desirable companion, intensifying her desire. This is accomplished when Criseyde contemplates Troilus, guided by the words of her uncle, since she begins to "caste and rollen up and down/ Withinne hire thought his

excellent prowess” (II, 659-60), as well as his other attractions. At this point the narrator introduces another perspective to this scene by explaining that it is “nought that she so sodeynly/ Yaf hym hire love, but that she gan enclyne/ To like hym first” (II, 673-5). She has already decided to allow herself the possibility of an affair. The emphasis given to the process through which Criseyde allows herself the liberty to desire Troilus represents the narrator’s attempt to protect her from the suggestion that she is changeable—a verdict that is delayed but not avoided altogether in this epic poem.

As Marcie Smith Marzec has claimed, in Book II Pandarus begins a discussion about Hector with Criseyde and slowly shifts attention from Hector to Troilus by describing “Troilus as another Hector, delineating attributes that belong to Troilus’s brother and which, the text subsequently shows, are not, finally, applicable to Chaucer’s main character” (64). In effect, the various perspectives used transform her view of Troilus. In comparing the two, Pandarus allows Criseyde to infer that just as Hector is the protector of Troy, so Troilus, his double, could well serve as her protector. Pandarus frames her point-of-view in a very particular manner, staging the first time she sees Troilus as a heroic spectacle of masculinity on parade. He skillfully moves Criseyde throughout the room until he leaves her by the window. It is from this window that she has her first sighting of Troilus after her conversation with Pandarus, which acts as a frame and presents to her the image of a young and gallant knight. This creates the basis for Criseyde’s understanding of Troilus, a view that is colored by the desire that it generates, to which Criseyde reacts with the exclamation: “Who yaf me drynke?” (II, 651), presenting an intriguing example of the influential power of anamorphosis in its dizzying metamorphoses of the visual field. Criseyde’s sudden and potent desire is manifested through this verse and marks the point from which her view of Troilus has begun to alter through a combination of visual stimuli and

Pandarus' words. He is no longer just a comely youth; he has become an object of desire. Her perspective has undergone the effect of anamorphosis through the influence of her desire and in turn, her gaze comes to idealize him in a similar manner, as she is idealized by Troilus. Her view is now colored by desire, which transforms her sight, creating in her mind the conception of a gallant knight, rather than just a man. In this manner, she falls prey to the same shortcoming as Troilus; she places him on a pedestal just as he does to her. As human beings become ideals, statuesque personifications of desire, they bend and transform perception to such an extent that falling in love is also a falling into illusion.

Pandarus's staging of Criseyde's gaze serves as a good example of how he constructs himself as the architect of this illusion of love. The manner in which he stages the encounters between Troilus and Criseyde affects how we see them and how they see themselves. For example, Pandarus overemphasizes Troilus's manliness in comparison with the reputation of his brother Hector. Consequently, this becomes a recurring theme in the narration since "Chaucer takes pains, therefore, to present Troilus as admirable throughout; he is 'this ilke noble knyght' to the last (V, 1752)" (Mann 129)—an opinion shared by the narrator and Pandarus. The constant focus on the virtues of Troilus leads readers to idealize him, much as Criseyde does. This is rather ironic since in Book I Troilus assumes a submissive and un-heroic role as a character that is ailing due to unrequited love. Once Pandarus discovers that Troilus is suffering from lovesickness, he starts to reveal his position as goad, gadfly, and consoler. This is mainly due to Pandarus's view of Troilus and what his role should be; therefore, "'Manliness,' for Pandarus, means acting vigorously in one's own interest and letting the rest of the world go hang" (Mann 131). Thus, Pandarus preys on Troilus' lovesickness to orchestrate the love-affair between his niece and friend. However, the reader is introduced to a different side of Pandarus through the

commentary made by the narrator, which leads readers to question his motivations. This is of particular importance when we consider that he is supposed to be protecting Criseyde and not serving her up on a silver platter. By helping his friend, he is harming his niece.

In adopting a perspectival approach, it is then possible to explore how the subjective nature of the love affair is constructed in *Troilus and Criseyde*. This thesis will argue that the interchange of gazes and points-of-view that occurs among the characters and the narrator is the main force behind the complexity exhibited by the characterizations within the text, which contributes to its richness and longevity. The combination of various narrative elements contributes to the impact of the gaze within the narration, such as the use of particular literary genres to construct type scenes that feature the interchange of gazes. The genres incorporated into the structure of the poem inspire some of the most crucial scenes in which the interchange of the gaze plays an important role for the development of the narrative.

Barry Windeatt explains how *Troilus* blends together the following genres—epic, romance, history, tragedy, drama, lyric, fabliau, and allegory—as well as comedy. However, only some of these genres are crucial in the construction of key scenes concerning the interchange of gazes. *Troilus* incorporates romance within its narrative structure, though it presents certain deviations from the original formula for this genre. The most striking of these changes is that *Troilus* is not facing any outward quest or adventure; instead, it is an internal journey and quest that culminates in his disillusionment with love. *Troilus* also incorporates some type-scenes typical of romance narratives, such as the episode of the Lady observing her knight in a tournament—an example of the role of the gaze for the development of the affair and subsequently of the narrative. Chaucer stages this scene a bit differently than his source material and has Criseyde spot Troilus through a window. Other examples include the use of the language

of romance, the knight having a guide in his quest for love, among others. Furthermore, *Troilus* includes elements of an epic in that it incorporates invocations to muses, the concept of destiny, and the mention of some military events of the Trojan War. However, it is interesting to note that this poem has “the most un-epic of subjects—a very private and intimate affair” (Windeatt 141). Thus, a bifurcation in the understanding of the poem is highlighted. The reader’s perspective of the events is determined according to the lens through which he or she views events: is it a romance or an epic? Consequently, is it a poem about heroism or love? Is it a tragedy or a comedy?

Thus, the narrator becomes essential to the way in which we interpret events, not just for his description of characters and events, but more importantly, for his selection of the generic focus through which any particular event is viewed. Subsequently, he often identifies with the perspectives of his characters; for example, “Just as Troilus sees himself as a ship sailing towards his port, one tossed about by contrary winds, so the narrator tells us that the boat of his ‘cunnyng’ is at last sailing out of the tempestuous waters of Troilus’s despair” (Rowe 156). He identifies his own misfortunes in love with Troilus’ despair. Furthermore, the narrator makes a conscious decision to relate the narrative to the events of the Trojan War. However, he very specifically steers the focus of the tale from war to a love-affair taking place within its context: “how this town com to destruccion/ Ne falleth naught to purpose me to telle,/ For it were a long digression/ Fro my matere, and yow to long to dwelle” (I, 141-4). It is also worthy of note that the narrator himself represents an amalgamation of perspectives and, depending on which angle the reader focuses on, the role of the narrator shifts. This is due to the manner in which the narrator changes his role within the text, from historian, to translator, to love poet, and even “love doctor.” The differing roles played by the narrator in *Troilus and Criseyde* are possible due

to the nature of the “I” in medieval texts and the associated role of the narrator. The narrator as a separate consciousness, independent of its author, is a modern conception that oftentimes affects our understanding of medieval writings. In reference to this, A.C. Spearing notes that “The ‘I’ is not a participant in the poem’s events but an observer whose observations are rendered intermittently as experience,” which are no longer controlled by the author (28). Therefore, it is possible to assign various roles and perspectives to the narrator within a single narrative, depending on the point of view that the narrator assumes.

Moreover, the narrator influences the reader’s perspective through his own stance on the events being told, even though “he ostensibly removes any immediate basis for personal interest in the tale itself, asserting that emotional distance removes him from his ‘matere’” (Dinshaw 40). Nonetheless, he is not completely successful in this endeavor, consequently his opinion trickles through some of the narrative choices, since “he seems to take pleasure in what he doesn’t read: with delight he draws attention to what his *auctor* doesn’t say” (Dinshaw 41). In effect, the narrator oftentimes leads the reader to question the validity and importance of some of the characters’ actions. For example, particular attention is placed on the interchange of letters between Troilus and Criseyde, which consequently allows readers a more private perspective of them in contrast to earlier sources of the tale.

Scholars, such as Barry Windeatt, have explored how *Troilus and Criseyde* also depicts a particular notion of tragedy that shares some traits with Aristotle’s definition. It also includes notions from the Fall of Princes tradition and from romances that end tragically. Nevertheless, instead of depicting the fall of the prince through an outward material loss or political misfortune, it centers on the emotional loss represented by the disillusionment of love (Windeatt 157). This represents the importance of the choices made by the narrator: the unstable, constantly

shifting focus repeatedly alters how the reader perceives the characters. *Troilus* also utilizes the tragic convention of lamentations throughout the development of its narrative. Through such choices, the action of gazing is highlighted since the character dwells on their view of the Other. It is then ironic to note that at the end of the poem, *Troilus* presents the apotheosis of the hero's soul, which moves it "nearer to the perspective of divine comedy" (Windeatt 160). This represents a shift not only from tragedy to a Dantesque idea of "comedy" as an ascent to heaven; it also offers yet another and final perspective for the reader: a view from the heavens that condemns worldly concerns and transcends all earthly perspectives.

This thesis, then, highlights the importance of perspectives, particularly the impact of the gaze and anamorphic changes in perspective on the development of the narrative. Included within this is the manner in which the audience comes to understand the events being narrated, which are viewed through different perspectives depending on whose gaze focalizes our attention. This will be achieved through the complementary application of Lacan's observations on courtly love and the role of desire within this. However, the primary theoretical approach will be provided by Slavoj Žižek's theories on anamorphosis and the gaze. A central point for this discussion is the conception that our desires transform our gaze, creating an anamorphic view of the events being narrated. The thesis will demonstrate how this composite of perspectives creates meaning within Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*.

CHAPTER II

Act I: Setting the Stage for Love

Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is considered by many to be a complex literary jewel due, in part, to the amalgamation of genres it presents, the length of the narrative, and the rich combination of source material. However, another element that should be taken into consideration in terms of its complexity is the influence and impact that the act of gazing has on the narrative—an influence apparent in the characterization of the main characters and the illustration of their viewpoints and motivations. Of particular importance is the complexity that perspective adds to the development of the romance between Troilus and Criseyde, and Pandarus' role within it. Without the act of gazing this romance and the staging of it would not have taken place. The act of gazing is complemented by body language and the narrator's commentary.

Body language, particularly facial expressions, plays a significant role in the development of the love affair that is at the center of events in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. According to J. A. Burrow, it is important to note that “there is more to be learned about what other people are thinking and feeling from their faces than from any other part of the body” (69). In non-verbal communication the eyes oftentimes are the initial or only point of contact between the subject and its object of desire. However, more importantly, the eyes are the physical instruments through which the gaze is enacted upon the other. This act shapes our understanding of ourselves and of particular events. In this manner, *Troilus and Criseyde* presents a series of exemplary situations that reveal the unyielding power the gaze holds over individuals and their actions. Nonetheless, the role of the gaze goes beyond simply influencing a character's actions, it also holds the power to sway the readers' perception of them.

A Prelude

Before exploring the effects of the gaze within the narrative of *Troilus and Criseyde*, an important aspect to take into consideration is the manner in which the characters are described and how the narrator stages the setting. Both of these elements affect the way in which the reader may come to interpret the events of the poem, as well as how the characters come to view each other. From the very beginning the narrator states outright that this is in fact not a happy tale and prepares readers for a tragedy told with tears. The narrator begins by explaining that his purpose is to tell of “The double sorwe of Troilus,” (*Troilus* I, 1) about how his adventures go “Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie” (I, 4), and even invokes Tisiphone, one of the Furies, as his muse; introducing an element of violence to the narrative. Framing the introduction of the tale in such a manner creates in the reader an expectation of ill events to come. In fact, the first 53 lines focus on framing the narrative, almost as a cautionary tale. Asking those who have been blessed by love to spare a bit of prayer for those who suffer in despair, such as Troilus: “And preieth for hem that ben in the cas/ Of Troilus, as ye may after here” (I, 29-30). Therefore, the reader goes into the story already knowing that Troilus is at a disadvantage and will suffer because of love, which in turn encourages readers to identify and sympathize with his tragedy.

However, the key point in the prologue, at least as it concerns the figure of the narrator, is how he presents himself as one who has also been unlucky in love and is in need of these prayers as well: “And ek for me preieth to God so dere” (I, 32), thus, creating an initial link between himself and Troilus that is occasionally referenced as the tale progresses. In a way, this adds an additional layer of depth to the tale since it implies that what is being discussed is a matter that affects many, including the narrator. This is significant because as A.C. Spearing explains, in most Middle English romances “the narrator is not realized as an experiencing subject” since the

narratorial ‘I’ is not part of the story being told but belongs only to the rhetoric of telling” (19), meaning that we cannot immediately assume the narrator is in fact part of the tale being told. This is relevant to *Troilus and Criseyde* since it is made clear from line 1 that the narrator is retelling a tale and not actually experiencing it first-hand; therefore the narrator’s view of events colors the interactions being narrated. It is a second-hand experience for the narrator, since he describes how his verses weep, in effect, how he cries while writing this tale: “Thise woful vers, that wepen as I write” (I, 7). This may then imply that for Chaucer, the capacity to experience sorrow at the pain of others is part of being a lover. By creating a parallel between his experience in love and that of Troilus, the narrator makes the tale more personal, which in turn may affect the way the audience may read the story.

Consequently, the narrator’s description of the characters also affects the readers’ understanding of them. This is of particular relevance to the establishment of Criseyde’s character. Her description is important for the main event of Book I: the narrator’s first description of Criseyde (I, 99-105) allows readers to better understand the violent impact the first exchange of gazes has over Troilus. Of particular note is the fact that even before Troilus sees her, she is already being described in an idealized manner. The narrator even mentions that her beauty is so heavenly that it defies nature: “That down were sent in scornynge of nature” (I, 105). The narrator emphasizes that she is a widow, without the protection of her father and in need of a male figure to protect her: “For bothe a widewe was she and allone/ Of any frend to whom she dorste hir mone” (I, 97-8), which immediately presents her in a vulnerable light, almost the stereotypical damsel in distress. This image is cemented when she seeks out Hector in hopes that he will protect her: “On knees she fil biforn Ector adown/ With pitous vois, and tenderly wepynge,/ Hys mercy bad, hirselves excusynge” (I, 110-2). Hector grants his

protection, but not before the narration emphasizes that this is done after he looks at her and views her sorrow: “And that she was so fair a creature” (I, 115). She is further described as an unearthly beauty:

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

These lines establish the idealized/idolized figure of an otherworldly beautiful woman in a precarious social and cultural position, since she is without a direct male protector. This helps the reader to understand the ensuing events, why her gaze has such an impact on Troilus (she becomes the ideal Woman for him), and how the coming affair presents a risk for her. Through the portrait painted by the narrator, through setting and characterization, the reader already knows that Troilus will suffer for love and that Criseyde will cause it. The readers already know, before the main event is underway, that this will be a tragedy.

First Encounter: An Exchange of Gazes

When we first meet the character Troilus, he is described as a rather conceited individual, disdainful of lovers. He mocks those who suffer for love and makes sport of their useless yearning: “He wolde smyle and holden it folye,/ And seye hym thus, “God woot, she slepeth softe/ For love of the, whan thou turnest ful ofte!” (I, 194-6). He places himself above those in love; such a stance angers the god of Love and assures that Troilus will be his next target. The narrator foreshadows the ensuing events by commenting on how against Troilus’ will, “with a look his herte wex a-fere/ That he that now was moost in pride above,/ Wax sodeynly moost subgit unto love” (I, 229-31). Essentially, Troilus will be consumed by fire, meaning passion,

through the gaze. He is now fallen into the very situation he previously mocked. It is necessary to keep in mind and continue to observe how these instances of gazing are usually accompanied by or described through violent imagery; in this case his sudden rush into passion is described as a moment where he figuratively burns and is cast down, subjugated by a superior force.

The event is described almost as a parallel to a hunt where Troilus' eyes are searching for a target and through the crowd "His eye percede, and so depe it wente,/ Til on Criseyde it smot, and ther it stente" (I, 272-3). As mentioned, the act of gazing is being described with violent descriptors, reminiscent of the myth of Acteón and Diana. In this instance, his gaze is piercing through the crowd until it strikes Criseyde, and there it remains. Thus, Troilus gets his first glimpse of Criseyde and "Therwith his herte gan to sprede and rise,/ And softe sighed, lest men myghte hym here,/ And caught ayeyn his firste pleyinge chere" (I, 278-80). He comes to observe first-hand what the audience has already been told by the narrator: Criseyde's unearthly beauty. She has been defined as one that "In beaute first so stood she, makeles./ Hire goodly lokyng gladed al the prees./ Nas nevere yet seyn thyng to ben preysed derre,/ Nor under cloude blak so bright a sterre" (I, 172-5). It is therefore no wonder that his eyes have been roaming around the place until they struck upon Criseyde in her widow's garb, hiding in the shadows of the temple. They were halted by the vision of beauty that she presented. He now falls into the same category as the men he was mocking earlier, for now he is the one with a reason to pine and lose sleep. It seems that the God of Love has indeed taken notice of his disdainful attitude towards those in love and punishes Troilus' behavior. He is now to embark on his own quest for love, just like the people he has mocked in the temple.

Once Troilus spots Criseyde in the shadows of the temple he comes to observe her beauty and to acknowledge it. Thus, his gaze is transformed from a superior and mocking look when

observing others, to an almost physical touch when his gaze lands and remains on her. He observes every detail of Criseyde's form, of her womanhood: "But alle hire lymes so wel answerynge/ Weren to wommanhod, that creature/ Was nevere lasse mannyssh in semyng" (I, 282-4). He invades her personal space in a non-physical sense by forcing his gaze upon her, particularly in an instance when she is trying to avoid the gaze of others and is hiding from sight. She treats his admiration as a threat. For Burrow, the "gaze has the special capacity to single out a particular object, and those who find themselves the object of another's gaze commonly wonder what it may mean" (91).

Thus, Criseyde's reaction to the gaze of others, as observed by Troilus, is to disdain the intrusion of their gazes by seeming to reject its aggressive implications:

Troilus right wonder wel with alle
Gan for to like hire mevyng and hire chere,
Which somdel deignous was, for she let falle
Hire look a lite aside in swich manere,
Ascaunces, "What, may I nat stonden here?"
And after that hir lokyng gan she lighte,
That nevere thoughte hym seen so good a syghte.

And of hire look in him ther gan to quyken
So gret desir and such affeccioun,
That in his herte botme gan to stiken
Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun. (I, 288-98)

Criseyde begins this initial interaction with Troilus by grouping his gaze with those that she finds threatening while she hides in the shadows. However, her personality and defiance shine through when she feels Troilus' erotic gaze remain on her and she seems to question the invasiveness of Troilus' look: "What, may I nat stonden here?" Surprisingly, she relents and lightens her look when she confronts her viewer. It is this apparent change of heart that enchants Troilus most and seals their fate. She has left a lasting impression upon him that feeds his initial hunger for her.

Therefore, it is this first interaction between Troilus and Criseyde, chiefly driven by non-verbal communication, that serves as the basis for his obsession and firmly entrenches Criseyde in the role of Troilus' object of desire; thus, as Slavoj Žižek has observed "the fascinating object that drives the interpretive movement is ultimately the gaze itself" (*Looking Awry* 91). For at no point does Troilus approach her or try to initiate some type of interaction beyond the crossing of their gazes. His opinion of Criseyde and consequently the desire he develops for her are based solely on what his eyes have perceived and no other criteria. The enchanting figure she represents becomes embedded in Troilus' heart and mind, and she comes to embody the ideal woman for him. Thus, Criseyde comes to represent perfection for him and she is raised on a pedestal, above all others in his esteem.

This scene contrasts with its source material, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*.² In *Il Filostrato*, when Troilo first sees Criseida, she is not trying to hide behind her veil; she is claiming her space in the temple and defending it from others. Her gaze confers a related but strikingly different meaning ("No one may stand here," Boccaccio 28) from that of Criseyde in Chaucer's work. However, in Boccaccio's poem the intent of her gaze is different. Boccaccio's Criseida is assertive and confident and she is definitely not hiding from the gaze of others. In Chaucer, Troilus comes to admire Criseyde for her seeming reticence and hidden strength instead of the forwardness and disdainful self-possession Boccaccio's Troilo observes in his Criseida.

Criseyde, however, unknowingly reverses the conditions of this first encounter by changing her role within it. She is at first a passive receiver of Troilus' masculine gaze and desire, unconsciously being placed in the role of prey to Troilus' Actaeon-like hunter. However,

² It could be argued that in this particular instance, Boccaccio's version presents a less misogynistic portrayal of the first interchange of gazes between Troilo and Criseida (Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde). Criseida is not a passive participant in the interchange of gazes. She has agency, in contrast to Criseyde's more subdued demeanor.

Troilus soon finds himself the prey of Criseyde's piercing look, since he "Was ful unwar that Love hadde his dwellynge/ Withinne the subtile stremes of hire y  n" (I, 304-5). The narrator comments on the irony involved in this scene, where he who thought "hymselfen so konnyng,/ And scorned hem that Loves peynes dryen,/ Was ful unwar" (I, 302-4) that he was outwitted by Love and has been caught by Criseyde's beauty. In effect, her eyes have acted as a kind of Cupid's arrow and have pierced him deeply. This act emphasizes the importance of this event since, as Suzanne Conklin Akbari explains, "Seeing and knowing are inextricably linked in western culture. From antiquity to the present, vision is both explicitly and implicitly acknowledged as the highest of all senses" (3). Thus, the weight of her gaze has struck Troilus and created an awareness within him that she is essential for his continued existence. In effect, the act of seeing Criseyde generated within Troilus the knowledge that he now desires her.

The effect of this returned gaze is twofold: it signifies the beginning of Troilus' obsessive love, as well as his lovesickness. This extensive scene represents the starting point of the central plotline for the poem. Troilus' plunge into unwavering love represents a repetition of a popular theme among romances, almost a type-scene, which Mladen Dolar describes "as the myth of the first encounter, 'the first sight'" (132). Scenes such as this one may very well have inspired the coinage of the popular myth of *love at first sight* since "It epitomizes the gaze, the return of the gaze, as the crucial moment of that foundational myth of encounter. It is a moment of recognition" (Dolar 132). This particular encounter presents Troilus falling madly in love at first sight. It is exceedingly obvious to the reader that this is what has happened to Troilus. However, the narrative does not address whether Criseyde has a similar reaction at this point. Regardless, a subtle hint may be noted on whether there is a possibility of returned feelings on her part. The narrator describes how she challenges his gaze and then there proceeds to be a lightening of her

look towards Troilus: “And after that hir lokynge gan she lighte” (I, 293). At first she dismisses his gaze, and then she quickly adjusts her response. This may very well be foreshadowing how she first refuses him and later comes to accept his advances.

At this time Troilus leaves the temple “nat fullich al awhaped” (I, 316), after his encounter with Criseyde, and, recognizing his foolishness, he goes “Repentyng hym that he hadde evere ijaped” (I, 318). He has been stunned by the blow Criseyde's eyes landed; he now knows he has fallen in love. It is also important to note how this scene relies on violent imagery to describe how Troilus falls in love. In essence, Troilus begins this process through a violent blow proffered by Criseyde's gaze. The effect of such a violent action is immediate and he proceeds to contemplate the probability of his love being returned. He concludes that there is no hope for a reciprocation of feelings and begins to sicken in his despair; thus creating a connection between the violence of the act of falling in love and his descent into lovesickness. The significance of this moment is summarized in line 322 where he decides to hide the fact that he is in love: “His woo he gan dissimilen and hide” (I, 322). Mary Francis Wack comments on this reaction by showing how “The knowledge that he suffers from love as from a great sickness dawns on him at precisely the same time his resolve to love wavers” (*Lovesickness* 58). Therefore, he decides that it would be best if no one knows of his ailment. This decision can be credited as the basis for two very important elements in his quest for Criseyde's love: he comes to idealize an image and not reality, and he falls victim to love sickness.

Image Altered: The Influence of the Visual

It is at this point that Troilus' vision begins to be distorted through his action of gazing at Criseyde, his object of desire. However, her seemingly dismissive reaction to his gaze creates the

illusion in his mind that his object of desire rejects his love. This becomes part of the fantasy that he starts creating from the moment he lays eyes on Criseyde, without comprehending that “what the fantasy stages is not a scene in which our desire is fulfilled, fully satisfied, but on the contrary, a scene that realizes, stages, the desire as such” (Žižek *Looking Awry* 6). Troilus is setting himself up for failure by basing his perspective of Criseyde upon his initial observations of her, with no further input than what his eyes have seen.

His actions comply with Renata Salecl’s observations that “For romantic love to emerge, one thus does not need the real person present, what is necessary is the existence of the image” (187). This is indeed the case with Troilus. After the exchange of gazes with Criseyde, he leaves the temple for his rooms. Here he begins to contemplate the image he has retained of her from their encounter: “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). Criseyde in the flesh is not essential for love to manifest itself; the mental recollection of her form is all that is needed. However, this only guarantees that Troilus will further come to idealize an image rather than a person since at this time he only ruminates over his recollection of her—a recollection based on only a single encounter of non-verbal communication. It is, therefore, a flawed basis for his obsession to take root in and sets the tone for the later events of the poem and represents the overpowering influence of the gaze upon Troilus’ actions.

This flawed representation leads to differing interpretations of the events, such as Robert Henryson’s *The Testament of Cresseid*. In this work based on Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, Henryson demolishes the idealized portrait of Criseyde that Troilus creates; in turn, providing the reader with the image of a fallen beauty. She is no longer a desirable prospect, but an outcast among her people, gods, and Troilus. Cresseid warns the women of Troy and Greece to beware

the fantasy and to internalize her image as a warning of the fall of beauty and the punishment for unfaithfulness:

And in your mynd ane mirrour mak of me:
As I am now, peradventure that ye
For all your micht may cum to that same end,
Or ellis war gif ony war may be. (Henryson, 457-60)

The first line of this passage echoes Troilus' contemplation of Criseyde in Book I, in which he also made a mirror of his mind, to remember every detail of the beauty he had just seen in the temple. However, Cresseid uses the same expression to warn women to remember every detail of her punishment, to not fall as she has. Henryson's narrator goes on to comment on how fantasies disrupt reality in the sense that Troilus was so in love with an idealization, he could not recognize the reality of Cresseid's diminished visage right before him:

Na wonder was, suppois in mynd that he
Tuik hir figure sa sone, and lo, now quhy:
The idole of ane thing in cace may be
Sa deip imprentit in the fantasy
That it deludes the wittis outwardly,
And sa appeiris in forme and lyke estait
Within the mynd as it was figurait. (Henryson 505-11)

Troilus was incapable of recognizing the truth before his eyes and Cresseid was forced to face the pain of knowing that without her beauty, she was unrecognizable to him. The image formed at a glance has completely displaced reality.

Even so, an important point to take into account is that regardless of the lack of real interaction with Criseyde, beyond non-verbal communication, Troilus decides to devote himself to her: "For with good hope he gan fully assente/ Criseyde for to love, and nought repente" (I, 391-2). For better or worse he has chosen his path. The narrator comments on this turn of events by pointing out how Troilus was "Ful unavysed of his woo comynge" (I, 378); such an

observation informs readers of just how little control Troilus truly has over his actions—a conclusion alluded to throughout the poem via multiple references to Fortune's wheel.

Nonetheless, Troilus' actions are, if not normal, at the very least expected within the framework of a romance. Thus, the interchange of gazes has led to a physical manifestation of its power over an individual. Troilus is already emotionally compromised by the influence of the gaze due to his obsessive contemplation of the idealized image he has retained of Criseyde. Troilus now carries this image like a wound that festers. This imagery calls to mind a scene in Virgil's *The Aeneid*, where Dido is compared to a wounded hind, unknowingly shot by a shepherd, that continues to run heedless of its injury: "Across the city she wanders in her frenzy—even as a heedless hind hit by an arrow when a shepherd drives for game [...] she roams the forests and the wooded slopes of Dicte, the shaft of death still clinging to her side" (Virgil 81). Troilus has unknowingly been wounded by Criseyde's gaze and now he walks around wounded by love in the same manner that Dido does in *The Aeneid*.

Lovesickness: A Consequence of the Gaze

Troilus' obsessive love for Criseyde has an unexpected effect upon him, it makes him ill. This introduces another traditional element of romance where the protagonist suffers from lovesickness, giving the act of unrequited love a negative connotation. This is supported by Derek Neal's observation that "Whatever the case, medieval medical writings related the direct physiological consequences of lovesickness to the victim's obsession with a mental image of the beloved" (198). The act of gazing is not an innocuous activity, but is instead a highly influential act that may be considered dangerous for one's health. Through the gaze Troilus has acquired Criseyde's image and has now fixated on her. This fixation has caused his body to show

symptoms of lovesickness. He at the very least realizes that he has fallen ill during the *Canticus Troili* and to a certain extent acknowledges that it is due to love that he suffers. He at first observes that “I noot, ne whi unwery that I feynte” (I, 410) and he questions this newfound weakness: “Allas, what is this wonder maladie?/ For hote of cold, for cold of hote, I dye” (I, 419-20). In spite of his condition, he does not relent in his love for Criseyde; instead, he embraces it and declares that “wheither goddesse or womman, iwis,/ She be, I not, which that ye do me serve;/ But as hire man I wol ay lyve and sterve” (I, 425-7). Criseyde has now effectively become his sole reason for living, regardless of the fact that this malady has caused him to feel: “Al sterelees, withinne a boot am I/ Amydde the see, bitwixen wyndes two/ That in contrarie stonden ever emo” (I, 416-8). Troilus feels like a boat lost in the middle of a storm, an apt image for the turmoil that these unwanted and unexpected feelings have created in him. This leads to further contemplation of Criseyde’s image and gives the readers an intimate view of what he is thinking of her and of the fact he has decided to serve her. However, these lines also emphasize that Troilus is questioning Criseyde’s nature, just as the narrator does with his early descriptions of her, trying to pinpoint if she is earthly or godly. This repetitive contemplation of her nature draws the reader’s attention, which emphasizes the narrative’s concern with the topic. Therefore, the gazes of Troilus and the narrator have led the readers also to contemplate Criseyde's nature.

The situation worsens when through his considerations Troilus applies a greater meaning to Criseyde's fleeting look in the temple. At this point he already realizes that he is now at the mercy of the god of Love. He declares that “Ye [the god of Love] stonden in hir eighen mightily” (I, 428); he has moved from contemplating Criseyde’s physical beauty and her nature, to attributing emotions to her. He believes that love dwells in her eyes, even though he had only a minimal glimpse of them from across a crowded space and does not know her at all. This

obsessive contemplation and apparent illness reveal to the readers that Troilus' desire is more than a fleeting infatuation, at least to his own mind. The creation of such an unlikely scenario gives credence to the notion that Troilus has begun to construct a fantasy in order to acknowledge and pursue his desire. In other words, he believes it is not possible in reality; therefore, he constructs a "reality" that will permit its realization.

Žižek explains that this is the nature of fantasy, it points us in the direction of what we want since "a fantasy constitutes our desire, provides its coordinates; that is, it literally 'teaches us how to desire'" (*Plague of Fantasies* 7). At this point Troilus has acknowledged that he wants Criseyde; however, this does not fully explain why he assigns so much power to her gaze or embellishes his observations to support his desire. This could be considered through Žižek's notion that "'there is no sexual relationship', no universal formula or matrix guaranteeing a harmonious sexual relationship with one's partner"; therefore, "every subject has to invent a fantasy of his or her own [...] —for a man, the relationship with a woman is possible only inasmuch as she fits his formula" (*Plague of Fantasies* 7). Thus, Troilus has been constructing a perfect Criseyde in his mind, without bothering to get to know the reality, in order for her to fit his fantasy.

This mindset begins to have a psychological as well as a physical effect on him. The narrator informs the reader "That sexti tyme a day he [Troilus] loste his hewe" (I, 441), an external physical clue to the illness he suffers. His behavior shifts and his every waking hour are consumed by thoughts of her: "His herte, which that is his brestez yē,/ Was ay on hire" (I, 453-4). With this commentary, the narrator may be suggesting to readers that Troilus' heart also engages in its own act of gazing. This emotional gaze is compounded by the product of the physical one—meaning the idealization of Criseyde in his mind—and further strengthens the

hold his desire has over him. It is becoming harder to hide his current condition, particularly when he resolves to better himself for her:

And yet was he, where so men wente or riden,
Founde oon the beste, and longest tyme abiden
Ther peril was, and dide ek swich travaille
In armes, that to thenke it was merveille. (I, 473-6)

He has resolved to be the best warrior out there and brings a new level of rage to the battle against the Greeks. The gaze has gone beyond a physical and emotional effect; it has now affected his character as well. The narrator gives further insight to Troilus' new devotion to warfare by commenting that his rage was not motivated by hate or for the safety of the town, "But only, lo, for this conclusion:/ To liken hire the bet for his renoun" (I, 480). Troilus now strives towards bettering himself according to what he perceives that his ideal Criseyde would find attractive in a man. He seems to believe that what she desires is the bravest of knights, thus, he fights to win such renown and in the process win her love. Therefore, to a certain extent, he is also a byproduct of his fantasy.

Throughout the whole process of Troilus gazing at Criseyde and coming to realize what his feelings concerning the matter are, his main concerns have been to keep his lovesickness secret from everyone and to contemplate obsessively his fear that Criseyde will never want him. This behavior is part of the traditional construction of lovesickness in the medieval period. Derek Neal explains how "Lovesickness was thus a cultural symptom in which men who were socially expected to be powerful and invulnerable could allow themselves a 'willed vulnerability'" (199). A clearer picture starts to unfold concerning Troilus' behavior in Mary F. Wack's analysis of lovesickness in *Troilus and Criseyde*: "In depicting Troilus's physical and psychological reactions to love using the symptoms of *amor hereos*, Chaucer can probe how man understands his own composite nature and how he acts based on that understanding" (*Lovesickness* 60).

Criseyde's image has now become a wound upon his psyche, which he barely tries to cure. At some level Troilus acknowledges his vulnerability when he hides his symptoms from others and tries to diminish his sense of being unworthy of Criseyde by becoming a fiercer warrior. However, he does not try to cure himself of the illness; he only addresses some of the symptoms superficially. It is not until Pandarus enters the scene that Troilus begins to hope that a cure may be possible.

Pandarus: Love Doctor and Go-between

As revealing of Troilus' character as this illness is, it also serves another purpose for the plot, since it provides a suitable opportunity for Pandarus' machinations. Troilus has been very careful in keeping his fevers and fainting spells hidden, yet his close friend Pandarus walks in at a vulnerable moment and discovers his secret: "Bywayling in his chambre thus allone,/ A frend of his that called was Pandare/ Com oones in unwar, and herde hym groone" (I, 547-9). Pandarus quickly assesses the situation and starts berating Troilus for his sorry state in an effort to get him to react through anger: "And with angre don his wo to falle" (I, 563). This approach does not work at all since Troilus is convinced that nothing can be done. Troilus' refusal to react to Pandarus' taunting necessitates a change of tactics and he adapts his approach accordingly.

Pandarus begins by reminding Troilus of their deep friendship by declaring that:

[...] if evere love or trouthe
Hath ben, or is, bitwixen the and me,
Ne do thow nevere swich a crueltee
To hiden fro thi frend so gret a care!
Wostow naught wel that it am I, Pandare? (I, 584-88)

This declaration of friendship is very important for the audience's understanding of the events to come and the severity and impact of Pandarus' gaze and actions throughout the rest of the

narrative. It also reveals Pandarus' gaze as therapeutic in nature—which further develops as his role within the narrative progresses beyond that of a friend—since he is stubbornly trying to ascertain the origin of his friend's illness in order to cure it. Tison Pugh effortlessly highlights this particular instance as a pivotal point in the narrative of Book I since “Pandarus refers to the love and truth that exists between Troilus and himself, and their relationship is thus revealed to be predicated upon deep emotional ties and openness” (Pugh). Such a declaration creates the impression in the readers' mind that Pandarus is truly concerned for his well-being and wishes to assist Troilus. Pandarus further embellishes his presentation by implying to Troilus that it is a friend's duty to share the good and the bad: “To entreparten wo as glad desport” (I, 592). This seems to be enough to spur Troilus to confess that he is under Love's power even though he does not want to be. He further explains the reason for his secrecy:

So hide it wel—I tolde it nevere to mo,
For harmes myghten folwen mo than two
If it were wist—but be thow in gladnesse,
And lat me sterve, unknowe, of my destresse. (I, 613-6).

This passage reveals to the reader the reason Troilus has been keeping his desire for Criseyde a secret; he acknowledges that the truth may hurt both of them, which is unacceptable. Thus he prefers to languish and await his death, rather than woo Criseyde and possibly hurt her in the process—or so he says at this point. Even though he clearly “manifests all the classic symptoms of *amor hereos* to such an extent that he has to fake another illness to hide his true malady. His fear of ridicule is as strong as his love-sorrow, and together with his failing health leads him to conclude that he is the victim of destiny” (Wack *Lovesickness* 58). Thus, his fear, fatalism, and lovesickness combine to render him unable to help himself. To Pandarus, this declaration highlights that Troilus is suffering from lovesickness due to an unrequited love. So far, the entire interaction between these two characters has revealed how Pandarus employs a therapeutic gaze

upon Troilus in hopes of finding a clue to what ails his friend, in order to decide on a course of action.

This new understanding of the situation leads Pandarus to scold Troilus for not seeking his help before, since he may be able to advise Troilus on how to woo his love, depending on who it may be. Troilus reacts to this remark by questioning Pandarus' qualifications as a love advisor since he has been unsuccessful in love. The exchange proceeds as follows:

“How hastow thus unkyndely and longe
Hid this fro me, thow fol?” quod Pandarus.
“Paraunter thow myghte after swich oon longe,
That myn avys anoon may helpen us.”
“This were a wonder thing,” quod Troilus;
“Thow koudest nevere in love thiselven wisse.
How devel maistow brynge me to blisse?” (I, 617-23).

Pandarus defends himself from Troilus' accusation as follows:

“Ye, Troilus, now herke,” quod Pandare;
“Though I be nyce, it happeth often so,
That oon that excesse doth ful yvele fare
By good counseil kan kepe his frend therfro.
I have myself ek seyn a blynd man goo
Ther as he fel that couthe loken wide;
A fool may ek a wis man ofte gide. (I, 624-30).

These two stanzas illustrate how Pandarus shifts his relationship with Troilus from friends to that of guide and follower. The first stanza demonstrates the closeness of their friendship since Pandarus feels betrayed by Troilus' silence and in turn Troilus' accusation of incompetence showcases the fact that they are close enough to question each other's actions and character. Lines 627-30 highlight Pandarus' desire to be seen as not just Troilus' friend, but also as an experienced guide capable of helping him. He acknowledges his lack of success in love; however, he has enough experience in the matter that he considers his failures to have lent him valuable knowledge in the subject. Regardless, in his presentation, from friend to advisor,

Pandarus still keeps a hold of the former by reminding Troilus that sorrows are easier to carry when the burden is shared: “Though I desyre with the for to bere/ Thyn hevy charge; it shal the lasse dere” (I, 650-1).

Nonetheless, Pandarus' manipulation of his perception does not end here, for he continues to shift his presentation and concludes by embodying a traditional archetype in medieval narrative. He has moved from presenting himself as Troilus' friend, to becoming an advisor figure, and finally proceeds to present himself as a physician. It is important to note that Pandarus' actions as Troilus' physician parallels Lady Philosophy's role in *The Consolation of Philosophy*; one of Chaucer's main sources for *Troilus and Criseyde*. At the very beginning of Book I in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, in Prose 2, Lady Philosophy informs Boethius that “it is time for medicine rather than complaint” (Boethius 6). Pandarus has made a similar declaration to Troilus through his actions. He tries to convince Troilus that he needs to act rather than lie in anguish. To this end, Pandarus explains to Troilus that his situation is similar to that of Oenone and Troilus' brother Paris. The tale of Oenone serves the purpose of introducing the notion that individuals cannot cure themselves; they require a physician to diagnose the symptoms and prescribe a cure. Pandarus focuses his tale on the presence of Phoebus (Apollo) in Oenone's tale and her explanation of how he was incapable of treating his own sorrow:

“‘Phebus, that first fond art of medicyne,’
Quod she, ‘and couthe in every wightes care
Remedye and reed, by herbes he knew fyne,
Yet to hymself his konnyng was ful bare,
For love hadde hym so bounden in a snare,
Al for the doughter of the kyng Amete,
That al his craft ne koude his sorwes bete.’ (I, 659-65)

Thus, Pandarus, through this reference to Apollo, is capable of illustrating to Troilus how love renders us incapable of diagnosing our own maladies and deprives us of the opportunity to cure

ourselves. Therefore, as an outsider to the situation and with his ample experience in the subject, he can act as Troilus' physician and prescribe a cure for his state. The importance of this stanza is also highlighted by its absence from Chaucer's primary source material *Il Filostrato*. The readers can then assume that Pandarus self-comparison to Apollo is of great importance to the narrative since:

By identifying himself with Apollo through the figure of Oenone, Pandarus self-consciously defines his relation to Troilus as that of a healer toward his patient, and furthermore specifies the illness for which he offers his skills as love-sickness: Phoebus, like Pandarus and Troilus, suffers from the lover's malady. (Wack *Memory and Lovesickness* 70-1)

Pandarus' recognition of the nature of Troilus' condition and his self-appointment as physician reflects pre-modern medical discourse, accordingly "The history of lovesickness in the Middle Ages is the record of physicians' attempts to understand what happens to the body and the mind when passion renders a lover a patient" (Wack *Lovesickness* 55). A medieval audience would have expected such a turn in the narrative, since lovesickness was a known ailment at the time. Pandarus has now altered his subjectivity in the minds of Troilus and the readers to represent himself as Troilus' love-doctor, though he will continue to allude to his capacity as friend and advisor. The narrative invites readers to see Troilus through Pandarus' eyes, at least throughout most of Book I. Pandarus, as a character, emerges from a combination of self-description, comparison, and actions. Thus, his insistence on diagnosing Troilus plays up the part he chooses to act as, that of a physician.

As any physician might, Pandarus proceeds to examine his patient's symptoms and begins his treatment. This process begins by following one of the traditional remedies for the stupor that lovers fall into during lovesickness—a suggestion that would have been known to a medieval audience. Wack emphasizes that "Medieval medical treatises do in fact prescribe sharp,

sudden, and loud noises to arouse a patient from torpor; characteristic of Pandarus, however, is the use of words to fulfill the function of stimulating noise” (Wack *Memory and Lovesickness* 76). Such a conception of the healing process explains why he literally screams at Troilus to “‘Awake!’ ful wonderlich and sharpe;/ ‘What! Slombrestow as in a litargie?” (I, 729-30). Yet Troilus remains a recalcitrant patient and refuses to aid his own recovery. He continues to resist Pandarus' curiosity about the object of his desire. He insists that he prefers to keep the cause of his sickness secret, since “Nor other cure kanstow non for me;/ Ek I nyl nat ben cured; I wol deye” (I, 757-8). Troilus' perception of his own situation is unacceptable to Pandarus. Thus, in a final effort to convince Troilus, Pandarus points out Troilus' foolishness while simultaneously softening his critique by offering to do the dirty work, so to speak: “Dorstestow that I tolde in hire ere/ Thi wo, sith thou darst naught thiself for feere,/ And hire bysoughte on the to han som routhe?” (I, 767-9). This plea is furthered by Pandarus' explanation that in order for a cure to be administered the patient must reveal his wound: “To hym byhoveth first unwre his wownde” (I, 858). That is to say, Pandarus needs to know who the lady in question is before he can truly help his friend. These lines not only act as an offering of assistance or a suggestion of action for Troilus, they also further the amalgamation of roles that Pandarus has taken upon himself.

As the previous discussion has illustrated, Pandarus has presented himself as friend, advisor, and physician. However, in lines (I, 767-9) he sets the stage for his primary role in the narrative as a go-between, since he jokingly brings forth the idea that he can be Troilus' intermediary. Gretchen Mieszkowski explains how the medieval tradition of go-betweens is traditionally divided into two types that point at two different traditions: “going between that facilitates idealized love and going between in the service of lust and sexual conquest” (*Go-betweens* 1). What makes Pandarus such a complex character and complicates his relationship

with Troilus and later with Criseyde is that he does not fit completely into either of these categories. He is an amalgamation of both.

So far, the act of falling in love has been described through violent descriptors, it is therefore interesting to note that the prescribed cure is also violent. However, in this case, the violence is therapeutic. Having presented his case, Pandarus finally succeeds through his medical approach and urges Troilus to reveal the name of his tormentor. This pivotal moment of healing is conveyed through the imagery of blood-letting, as if Troilus has begun to purge his illness through his confession: “Tho gan the veyne of Troilus to blede” (I, 866). Troilus begins to heal through this symbolic and violent act. Thus, Criseyde is revealed as Troilus' impossible love interest. Pandarus is relieved by this confession and his gaze describes Criseyde as a worthy object of desire:

Ne nevere saugh a more bounteous
Of hire estat, n'a gladder, ne of speche
A frendlyer, n'a more gracious
For to do wel, ne lasse hadde nede to seche
What for to don (I, 883-7)

With these words, Pandarus adds further input to the image that is slowly being built for Criseyde as an idealized woman. Like the narrator and Troilus, he focuses on describing Criseyde as the best of the best. However, Pandarus refrains significantly from the heavenly comparisons employed by the narrator and Troilus. It is around this point in the narrative that the reader may begin to perceive a hidden agenda in Pandarus' actions, which goes against his portrayal, so far, as an idealized go-between. Pandarus, once he has offered to act as Troilus' go-between, mentions how a successful execution of his plans would mean happiness for the three of them: “And so we may ben gladed alle thre” (I, 994). He is clearly far more invested in the outcome of this affair than a mere confidant, physician, or even go-between. However, we are

not given any clear indications or even hints of a reason since, as Tison Pugh observes, “Pandarus's actions stress his desire to help Troilus in his romance with Criseyde, but the motivations behind this desire remain unspoken” (Pugh).

Regardless of this, Pandarus does fulfill the main requirement of a go-between, which is to get the narrative going. Gretchen Mieszkowski comments on this particular aspect of the traditional figure by explaining how “The lovers' extreme emotions routinely paralyze them, men and women both, and they have to be rescued by their go-betweens en route to their stories' happy endings” (*Go-Betweens* 6). However, this does not mean that Troilus trusts in Pandarus' ability to address Criseyde in his stead, regardless of Pandarus' kinship to her. Pandarus then asks Troilus to let him do his job: “So lat m'alone, and it shall be thi beste” (I, 1028). In other words, Troilus has no business concerning himself with the particulars of contacting Criseyde; it is the sole purview of the go-between to worry about these things. Reinvigorated by Pandarus' pledge, Troilus continues with his plans to win more battles in order to be a better prospect for Criseyde “And in the feld he pleyde tho leoun” (I, 1074). In contrast, Pandarus begins his plotting. The narrator describes his actions by drawing comparisons to the manner in which an architect constructs a house—through meticulous planning: “Al this Pandare in his herte thoughte,/ And caste his werk ful wisely or he wrought” (I, 1070-1).

Taking all of this into consideration, it is not difficult to see how the gaze in Book I plays an essential role in establishing characters and delineating events that form the basis for Chaucer's epic narrative. The one instance of gazing between Troilus and Criseyde represents the spark that lights the fire of Troilus' desire and begins the idealization of her as *the* woman rather than *a* woman. The gaze of the male characters in Book I articulates Criseyde as an idealization rather than a real person. Troilus is represented, through the gaze of the narrator and Pandarus, as

a character that disdains love and lovers and is brought low by the very thing he mocks and, as the romance tradition dictates, he requires his friend's help in order to achieve his goals. Finally, the narrative, at this point, begins to shape the character of Pandarus not only through the gaze of the narrator and Troilus, but also through Pandarus' own self-representation. He is confidant, physician, and go-between, and it is clear that he will act as the architect of Troilus and Criseyde's affair. Therefore, the gaze is crucial for character and narrative development in Book I. It will also continue to play a central role through the development of the love affair.

CHAPTER III

Act II: Let the Game Begin

Book II of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* marks the point from which Pandarus begins to function as a go-between for Troilus. Throughout this process, Pandarus will rely on the power of the gaze and his rhetoric to persuade, almost seduce, Criseyde into accepting Troilus' affection. As discussed in the previous chapter, the gaze influences the manner in which the characters of this narrative perceive themselves and how the readers come to understand them. Pandarus has represented himself as Troilus' physician, friend, and go-between by manipulating the way in which Troilus sees him. This was accomplished by listening to Troilus' woe and by presenting him with a plan to follow in order to win Criseyde. In essence, Troilus comes to see Pandarus as an indispensable friend and guide in his quest for love. Furthermore, the gaze of the narrator and of Pandarus, as well as Troilus' own voice, have shaped the initial understanding we have of him as a romantic hero, suffering from unrequited love.

However, Criseyde does not have the benefit of presenting herself, thus the reader begins to form an idealized image of her through the masculine gazes of Troilus, Pandarus, and the narrator. Sarah Stanbury comments on this development by explaining how "By describing her only generally, the text iconizes her; she is visible but untellable, or perhaps fetishized in attributes of her own power and sexual status, her 'look' or her gaze and her widows' weeds" (*Visualizing* 476). In other words, by the end of Book I, Criseyde is *the* woman,³ rather than *a* woman for Troilus and the readers. This difference in perception is explained by Žižek in how *the* woman is the one "who could fill out the lack in man, the ideal partner with whom the sexual relationship would finally be possible, in short, The Woman who, according to Lacanian theory,

³ Idolized/distorted perception of a woman.

precisely does not exist” (*Looking Awry*, 80). That is to say, the Criseyde that Troilus sees is an idealization of his conception of the perfect woman rather than an acknowledgement of the real Criseyde—flaws and all. Nonetheless, this visualization of Criseyde is challenged in the development of events in Book II and Book III, since we begin to receive input from Criseyde herself.

Setting the Table

In the preface to Book I, the narrator prepared readers for the emotional rollercoaster in Troilus’ tale “Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie” (I, 4). The narrative presents us with Troilus’ woe; he falls in love at first sight but believes that his lady will not reciprocate his feelings. By the end of Book I, Fortune’s wheel begins to turn for Troilus when his friend Pandarus offers to assist him in this endeavor and act as his go-between, introducing movement toward joy (“wele”) since our protagonist was stagnating in his sorrow. The prologue to Book II invokes Venus as the poet’s muse (in contrast with the Fury, Tesiphone, in the previous book). This is the first inkling that our hero’s fortune may be on the rise, since the invocation is for the goddess of love. Furthermore, the narrator uses an elaborate trope of a ship sailing from deep water towards a safe haven in order to signify a slow movement away from misery: “Owt of thise blake wawes for to saylle” (II, 1). This metaphor picks up on and continues the trope presented in the *Canticus Troili* in Book I,⁴ which was discussed in the previous chapter. Troilus’ inner turmoil concerning his sudden feelings for Criseyde is cast in terms of being lost at sea. Moreover, special note should be taken of the narrator’s reminder that he is retelling a story. This reaffirms, yet again, as discussed in the previous chapter, that the reader is receiving information that has been distorted

⁴ *Canticus Troili* (I, 416-18); Chapter I, page 13

twice: first from a purportedly eye-witness source, and secondly by the gaze of the narrator⁵: “But syn I have bigonne,/ Myn auctour shal I folwen, if I konne” (II, 48-9). It may also imply that this retelling may not be completely accurate since the narrator confesses he will try to follow his source if he can. David C. Benson explains how the act of retelling affects the reader: “One of the central dramas of *Troilus* is the narrator's struggle to make sense out of the old books that tell of the romance of his Trojan lovers” (44). A careful reader may take this as a warning that there might be some inaccuracies further on, since the narrator is attempting to make sense of the tale in order to retell it. This confirms how the gaze of the narrator has further distorted the events of this story—keeping in mind that this is the second distortion they receive since the narrator did not experience them first hand. Benson—*nota bene* (note italics)—refers to Chaucer’s multiple sources, which are radically non-commensurate, contradictory, even contentious among themselves. In continually foregrounding his difficulty in reconciling his sources, Chaucer also introduces the multiple perspectives from which he must choose. Hence, we have at least two levels of competing perspectives here: 1. intertextual—differing versions of the love affair and its characters as well as the different attitudes of Chaucer’s *auctores*; 2. intra-textual—different and shifting perspectives of the characters within Chaucer’s poem on the progress of the love affair. Both of these competing perspectives contribute to the complexity of the narration in terms of how we come to understand the manner in which the characters fall in love. This is mostly due to the simple fact that competing perspectives will inevitably force the reader to follow one or the other through the narration. Therefore, it is easy to understand the

⁵ The gaze of the narrator refers to the notion that the audience is receiving the narrative through the added distortion of the narrator’s perspective on the tale he has read and is now retelling.

importance of the gaze for the narration, since each perspective affects what the reader takes from the story.

Finally, Book II presents the manner in which Criseyde falls in love. As discussed in the previous chapter, Troilus' fall into love occurs through the gaze—love at first sight. Still, as we will see in this chapter, Criseyde's own journey into love is different. She requires persuasion beyond that offered by her own eyes. In this process, Pandarus—in his role as go-between—teaches Criseyde how to look at Troilus and tells her what she sees, staging her gaze on Troilus, so that when she does fall in love at *second* sight, her desire is every bit as mediated by Pandarus as Troilus' was by Cupid's arrow.

Pandarus' Game Begins

Book II is where the action truly begins in Chaucer's narrative at the instigation of Pandarus. It also highlights how much Pandarus contradicts and confuses competing ideas about the go-between, ensuring that he cannot be comfortably contained in either category: a go-between for love or a go-between for lust. Gretchen Mieszkowski comments on this particular situation by suggesting that, "The traditional idealized go-between would have eased Troilus out of his paralysis and helped him become a lover. Pandarus instead reinforces Troilus's paralysis and reserves the courting of Criseyde for himself" (*Go-between*, 143). Pandarus sets in motion a two-part plot to steer Criseyde towards Troilus; first with his words, and later with her gaze. He begins his efforts as go-between in an indirect fashion by attempting to convince Criseyde to discard her widow's garb and dance⁶: "Do wey youre barbe, and shew youre face bare;/ Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce" (II, 110-1). Criseyde is scandalized by her uncle's request

⁶ An occurrence that is repeated in line 222

and asks him whether “Be ye mad?” (II, 113) and that “Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves” (II, 119), revealing with these words that she no longer perceives herself as a young woman. Pandarus proceeds to change the topic and Criseyde confesses her fear of the Greeks: “I am of Grekes so fered that I deye” (II, 124). These two exchanges in the conversation give Pandarus critical clues to the direction he must take his efforts on behalf of Troilus. She no longer deems herself young enough to enjoy life as young girls do and she is deathly afraid of the Greeks: two points that Pandarus will exploit in order to get Criseyde interested in Troilus.

In order to achieve this, Pandarus finally comes to the point of his visit and smoothly introduces Troilus into their conversation. However, the manner in which he broaches the topic is rather important. Criseyde asks about how Hector fares in the war. Pandarus explains that he is well and proceeds to expound in grandiose terms on the virtues of Hector’s brother, describing Troilus as a second Hector:

And ek his fresshe brother Troilus,
The wise, worthi Ector the secounde,
In whom that alle vertu list habounde,
As alle trouthe and alle gentilesse,
Wisdom, honour, freedom, and worthinesse. (II, 157-61)

Pandarus tries to associate Hector’s reputation as a fierce warrior and a man of honor with Troilus in order to highlight his suitability as a protector. At first, Criseyde does not seem too impressed and attempts to return the conversation to Hector. As Marcia Smith Marzec comments, “In this scene, Hector’s praise is readily on the lady’s lips, whereas she needs be convinced of Troilus’s worth” (64). Pandarus redoubles his efforts and continues to highlight Troilus’ heroic prowess, including his popularity with the people. To which Criseyde concedes that she has heard good things of him. Nonetheless, Pandarus continues in his efforts to, in a

way, seduce Criseyde through his rhetoric, and he goes on to liken Troilus to a shield protecting Troy:

Ay wher he wente, it was arayed thus:
He was hire deth, and sheld and lif for us,
That, as that day, ther dorste non withstonde
Whil that he held his bloody swerd in honde. (II, 200-3)

This passage can be seen as a masterful stroke on Pandarus part since Criseyde is deadly afraid of the Greeks, as previously observed.⁷ By painting Troilus as a hero and protector, Pandarus begins steering Criseyde towards Troilus—controlling her perspective. Criseyde soon tires of Pandarus' roundabout conversation and requests that he speak plainly. Therefore, he proceeds to frame his explanation in such a way that Troilus' life depends on Criseyde's response: "The noble Troilus, so loveth the,/ That, but ye helpe, it wol his bane be" (II, 319-20). Pandarus then redoubles the danger by informing Criseyde that if his friend dies, so shall he: "But if ye late hym deyen, I wol sterve—" (II, 323). The plea here subtly transforms into a threat; already the victim of rabid suspicion, Criseyde is now burdened with responsibility for the safety and welfare of Troy's second most worthy defender.

This is the beginning of an intense argument where Pandarus tries to shame Criseyde into accepting a meeting between herself and Troilus. Pandarus tells Criseyde that her beauty should be synonymous with kindness and finishes this part of his appeal by pointing out that he is not playing a trick on her, that he would rather all of them die, before acting as a pimp for Troilus: "And also think wel that this is no gaude;/ For me were levere thow and I and he/ Were hanged, than I shoulde ben his baude" (II, 351-3). Pandarus continues to attempt to control how the lovers view his role. Pandarus now feels the need to reassure Criseyde that he is not a pimp, just a concerned friend. Criseyde expresses her own apprehensions about her precarious position in

⁷(II, 124)

society and her anxieties about how receiving visits from a man, other than kin, might be perceived by those already eager to ostracize her. She worries how others will judge her. At this point, the reader should remember that in Book I Criseyde asked for Hector's protection due to her father's desertion to the enemy camp and her own status as a widow. in his own genial manner Pandarus dismisses her fears, assuring her that nobody would see anything amiss: "That every wight, but he be fool of kynde,/ Wol deme it love of frendshipe in his mynde" (II, 370-1).

He proceeds to give her some tips on what she should do, in terms strikingly like the strategy of the Friend against *Dangier* in the *Romance of the Rose*. His major recommendation is for Criseyde to "lat youre daunger sucred ben a lite,/ That of his deth ye be naught for to wite" (II, 384-5).⁸ The aforementioned advice demonstrates that Pandarus is yet again telling Criseyde that she holds Troilus' life in her hands. It is with this step that the reader may first detect Criseyde beginning to succumb to Pandarus' rhetoric, and she then requests some advice.

Pandarus' Rhetoric: A Key Component in Criseyde's Seduction

So far, all of Pandarus' strategy has relied on words, rather than the gaze, in order to influence Criseyde's perspective of Troilus. However, at this precise point in the game, when Criseyde asks for advice, Pandarus begins to introduce the gaze into his scheme by pointing out to Criseyde that she should not let her beauty fade due to her "daunger": "To late ywar, quode Beaute, whan it paste;/ And Elde daunteth Daunger at the laste" (II, 398-9). In other words, Criseyde's beauty has an expiration date; she should take advantage of her current circumstance before the gaze of others detects her diminishing charms. This passage makes the reader and Criseyde even more aware of the effect of the Other's gaze. Once the Other gazes at her waning

⁸ The concept of "daunger" is a common trope of medieval courtly romance that is characterized by the lady's aloofness to her suitors advances.

beauty, her value as a woman may be diminished. She was clearly already aware of the impact of others' gazes when she pleaded with Hector for his protection. Pandarus has now made her aware that the gaze of others will soon judge her for her diminishing beauty as well as for her father's desertion. Consequently, she may come to lose a corner stone of her identity, her beauty—which depends on the gaze of others. It is important to note that this instance of the gaze is not part of the source material: Chaucer added the entire scene. This informs the reader on the author's concern with portraying Pandarus' precise actions and emphasizing the relevance of the gaze, particularly in the creation of the character's self-image and desires.

After hearing all of Pandarus' appeals for her to allow Troilus in, she bursts into tears once she realizes that her kinsman—who should defend her against any impropriety—is pushing her towards this questionable association with Troilus: “Allas, what sholden straunge to me doon,/ Whan he that for my beste frend I wende/ Ret me to love, and sholde it me defende?” (II, 411-3). Most of her concern centers on the possibility of drawing the reproving gaze of society upon herself and tarnishing her reputation, as well as realizing that she has no familial protection if the people should turn against her. This also reveals a preoccupation with how others see her—an understandable activity since Trojan society (as well as Chaucer's own world) placed great value on appearances. Pandarus dismisses her concerns and assures Criseyde that discretion should be enough to conserve her status and position. Having been placated, Criseyde proceeds to ask her uncle how he came to know about Troilus' feelings. Pandarus neglects to speak of the one instance the readers recognize as the moment Troilus confesses his feelings to him—as presented in Book I—and instead tells Criseyde of how he overheard Troilus' despair in the palace gardens. The readers will perhaps entertain the possibility that this supposed encounter is an invention of Pandarus, another artifice designed to sway Criseyde to his purpose, since this is

the first we hear of it. Regardless of whether this tale is true or not, Criseyde is moved by Pandarus' idealized story.

However, the most important occurrence in this particular encounter between these characters is how Pandarus discusses Troilus' belief that Criseyde's gaze in the temple wounded him: "For certes, lord, so soore hath she me wounded,/ That stood in blak, with lokyng of hire eyen" (II, 533-4). This is an important repetition of the idea presented throughout Book I—and discussed in the previous chapter—that there is a physicality and a power inherent in the gaze; one that is manifested and described in this narrative through violent imagery. It is a restatement that love is a painful endeavor for the lovesick suitor, which is a concept that a medieval reader would have been familiar with since it forms part of the romance tradition and the type scenes of courtly love narratives.

This interchange between Pandarus and Criseyde illustrates exactly how he attempts to use rhetoric to stage Criseyde's gaze as well as how to interpret the gaze of others. Pandarus' approach is proven effective once Criseyde has her first glimpse of Troilus through her window, since she is overcome by desire.⁹ Once Criseyde observes Troilus through the framework Pandarus has created and she begins to fall in love, the notion that this poem presents how its main characters fall in love in very different ways is confirmed. Troilus falls in love at first sight, while Criseyde requires a second glance as well as her uncle's redirection.

The Gaze: A Visual Seduction

While Criseyde sits pondering her uncle's words, she hears a commotion from the street, and through her window she sees Troilus and other soldiers returning from battle. What follows

⁹(II, 650-51)

is the visual seduction of Criseyde. The narrator describes the manner of Troilus' return in an impressive way; he is likened in form to the god Mars: "But swich a knightly sighte trewely/ As was on hym, was nought, withouten faille,/ To loke on Mars, that god is of bataille" (II, 628-30). It seems that Troilus' decision to better his standing as a warrior has borne fruit, since he now embodies, according to the narrator, every physical expectation of a warrior. Furthermore, as was the case with Criseyde in Book I, Troilus is now the one equated with otherworldliness. The narrator describes his physiology in detail, commenting on how:

So lik a man of armes and a knight
He was to seen, fulfilled of heigh prowessse,
For bothe he hadde a body and a myght
To don that thing, as wel as hardynesse. (II, 631-4)

These lines reveal that physical beauty is also a trait admired in men, and how the qualifications for it differ from what is expected of women. Troilus' beauty lies in how well he conforms to the physiology expected of a great and noble warrior, modeled by the characteristics of Mars.

Physical appearance was an important part of how medieval society assessed a man's worth.

Derek J. Neal provides an impeccable explanation of this since:

Form and appearance commented further on the character of the man; physiology implied personality. Part of form was physical maturity. One condition of manhood was having a man's body—which might or might not be a manly body, in turn reflecting its inhabitant's masculinity. The body conveyed masculinity also, both to society and to the self, through its function, what it did. (125)

In this instance, Troilus' body is communicating to Criseyde his status as a warrior and the people's reception of him denotes success; thus, granting the comparison to Mars. His appearance also further cements in Criseyde's psyche the notions that Pandarus' words began to create in her, particularly the comparison of Troilus to a shield that protects. Specific care is taken by the narrator to describe the state of Troilus' shield: "His shield todasshed was with

swerdes and maces,/ In which men myghte many an arwe fynde/ That thirled hadde horn and nerf and rynde” (II, 640-2). The physical evidence of Troilus’ might is recorded by the marks on his shield—demonstrating his prowess as a protector.

Criseyde is observing all of this through her window, which frames and contains the moment Troilus becomes her object of desire. Slavoj Žižek describes the object of desire as “an object that can be perceived only by a gaze ‘distorted’ by desire, an object that *does not exist* for an ‘objective’ gaze” (*Looking Awry*, 12). In this case, Pandarus’ rhetoric and Criseyde’s own fears distort the image of Troilus and make him desirable, the epitome of masculinity. At this point, he comes to embody all that Criseyde believes she wants—protection with the added bonus of youth and a comely face. The realization is so sudden that she compares the effect of the sight of Troilus to being intoxicated or undergoing a love potion: “Who yaf me drynke?” (II, 651). This is a sharp contrast to how Troilus falls in love; his gaze was enough, he only had to look at her to desire her. On the other hand, Criseyde first needs Pandarus’ rhetoric in order for her gaze to distort Troilus into what she believes she desires. The swiftness in which her perception of Troilus changes prompts the narrator to intervene and prepare a defense against those who might judge her as fickle or superficial:

Now myghte som envious jangle thus:
“This was a sodeyn love; how myght it be
That she so lightly loved Troilus
Right for the firste syghte, ye, parde?
Now whoso seith so, mote he nevere ythe!
For every thing a gynnyng hath it nede
Er al be wrought, withowten any drede. (II, 666-72)

This passage reveals a gendered double standard in the narrator’s judgments. Troilus falls for Criseyde with only a look and the narrator feels no need to defend him from possible moral censure. However, when Criseyde acknowledges an attraction after her persistent uncle’s

machinations, the narrator feels the need to intervene on her behalf. For David C. Benson the audience's reaction to the tale and its teller is ethically complicated: "In addition to stirring our emotions, the narrative voice also tests our judgement. Its comments force us to question not only the ultimate meaning of the story but also its very telling" (116). In this instance, a modern audience would detect the double standard based on gender since Troilus and Criseyde are judged differently for the same action—expressing desire. This also reveals, as Donald W. Rowe notes, how "In the course of the second book, the narrator has difficulty keeping his distance and perspective" (158), periodically interrupting with his commentary.

Nonetheless, as Priscilla Martin observes, "Criseyde is stirred by the sight of Troilus but, after he rides from view, she continues to deliberate" (171). Gazing is not enough for her. Therefore, she evaluates his worthiness and what she finds most compelling and pleasing is the fact he suffers for her: "But moost hire favour was, for his distresse/ Was al for hire [...]" (II, 663-4). She again proceeds to compare him to Hector and even though she still acknowledges Hector's superiority, Troilus still pleases her: "For out and out he is the worthieste,/ Save only Ector, which that is the beste;/ And yet his lif al lith now in my cure" (II, 739-41). She finds him worthy enough—even though he is second to Hector—due to the power she holds over him as his "cure."

Having established this she turns her sight inward and evaluates her own worthiness. She sees herself as beautiful and acknowledges that it is no wonder he fell for her:

I am oon the faireste, out of drede,
And goodlieste, who that taketh hede,
And so men sey, in al the town of Troie.
What wonder is though he of me have joye? (II, 746-9)

Criseyde is also aware of her reputation amongst the people; she knows the town sees her as beautiful. She also evaluates her social standing: "I am myn owene womman, wel at ese—/ I

thank it God—as after myn estat,/ Right yong, and stoned unteyd in lusty leese” (II, 750-2). This is followed by her declaration that there should not be any shame in giving in since she is not a nun and Troilus is worthy of her attention—as long as her reputation is cared for: “I am naught religious” (II, 759)... “is the worthieste” (II, 761) and “it may do me no shame” (II, 763). These lines reveal Criseyde’s self-awareness. She also comes to acknowledge how loving Troilus could be a risk to all she has—her independence, her honor, her sense of self: “That thought was this: “Allas! Syn I am free,/ Sholde I now love, and put in jupartie/ My sikernesse, and thrallen libertee?” (II, 771-3). Criseyde is certainly weighing the possible gain and loss of accepting Troilus’ attention. Winthrop Wetherbee emphasizes the importance to the narration of the fact “Criseyde *thinks* things over: the word ‘thought’ [—as exemplified in the previous quote—] occurs more than a dozen times in the 200-odd lines that describe her reaction to the prospect of reciprocating Troilus’s love, and detail after detail points to the control and deliberation of her response” (183). It is also telling that the word “thought,” in medieval English, has the added meaning of “anxiety.”¹⁰ Thus, anxiety can also be ascribed to Criseyde’s continued evaluation of Troilus’ worth and her hesitance in making a choice.

She knows she has much to lose if she acquiesces to Troilus’ advances. One of her main concerns is that she is aware of the danger women face if they are too trusting of a man’s intentions: “How ofte tyme hath it ykownen be/ The tresoun that to women hath ben do!” (II, 792-3). Priscilla Martin points out that this particular section of Criseyde’s contemplation reveals how “The poem acknowledges that sex is both desirable and dangerous for women and that they are judged more harshly than men whether they engage in or refrain from it” (178). Criseyde is afraid of the repercussions to her name and person if she acquiesces to Troilus’ advances.

¹⁰ In Medieval English thought can be interpreted as “a state of anxiety or distress; also, an anxious thought, a care” (<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED45413>).

Another important aspect of Criseyde's deliberation at this stage is that she does not allow Troilus' beauty to be the deciding factor. As observed in the previous examples, she also gives serious attention to the disadvantages if she were to accept him, which is a "contrast to the deliberate calculations of Bocaccio's Criseida, who weighs pros against cons and allows Troiolo's handsome person to tip the balance (*Filostrato* II 69-78, 83)" (Mann 20). It also is the section where "Chaucer presents Criseyde as both subject and object, examining both her mind and her world, the social and political pressures upon her from outside, the emotional problems within [...]" (P. Martin 164). After all of this intense deliberation, Criseyde concludes that "He which that nothing undertaketh,/ Nothyng n'acheveth, be hym looth or deere" (II, 807-8).

Pandarus Changes the Playing Field

Once Pandarus leaves Criseyde to her thoughts, he continues to plan the next step in his endeavor to secure Criseyde for Troilus. He now decides that it is necessary for Troilus and Criseyde to meet in person, and he proceeds to make arrangements. Pandarus proceeds to construct an elaborate lie to convince Deiphebus to have a dinner and invite both Troilus and Criseyde to his home in order to discuss a supposed conspiracy against her. Pandarus enlists the chivalrous aid of Deiphebus against a certain Poliphete, said to be targeting Criseyde—playing on the notion that she is a damsel in distress and requires their protection.

During his conversation with Troilus, Pandarus utilizes an interesting metaphor that reveals more of his nature to the reader: "Lo, hold the at thi triste cloos, and I/ Shal wel the deer unto thi bowe dryve" (II, 1534-5). That is to say, Pandarus sees himself and Troilus as hunters and Criseyde as prey. He is in effect setting a trap for her. This further evidences the interesting juxtaposition between what is expected of Pandarus as Criseyde's sole familial protector in Troy

and his allegiance to Troilus, which tends to vitiate his responsibilities as her uncle. Pandarus also instructs Troilus to feign an illness in his brother's house so he can remain in a separate room. Such a setting would allow Pandarus to maneuver a private meeting between the would-be lovers.

The Remedy for Love-sickness

Pandarus' machinations go as planned. With a clever ruse he manages to distract his hosts, permitting a relatively private meeting between Troilus and Criseyde. However, he remains in the room with them. Pandarus then attempts to use his rhetoric to further convince Criseyde of her duty towards Troilus, since as he has pointed out before Troilus' life depends on her compliance. She proves her own cleverness by ignoring her uncle's words and directly asking Troilus to explain his intentions: "I wolde hym preye/ To telle me the fyn of his entente./ Yet wist I nevere wel what that he mente" (III, 124-6). Saul N. Brody ascertains that "Her insistence on learning the *entente* of words and actions keeps her from being the passive, unquestioning woman that Pandarus hopes for" (139). She thus demonstrates a shrewdness that was only hinted at during her contemplation of Troilus. To which Troilus replies:

O goodly, fresshe free,
That with the stremes of youre eyen cleere
Ye wolde somtyme friendly on me see,
And thane agreeen that I may ben he,
Withouthen braunche of vice on any wise,
In trouthe alwey to don yow my servise (III, 129-33)

This stanza clearly points towards the influence Criseyde's gaze has upon Troilus, for he desires her acceptance—hopefully as lover or even as merely a friend. His behavior is supported by his actions in Book I and Book II where he sought to better himself in order to appeal to her; thus, this is the moment where he will know if his efforts bear fruit. Once he makes his plea, Criseyde

grants him the gaze he desires: “With that she gan hire eyen on hym caste/ Ful esily and ful debonairly” (III, 155-6). She then answers that she will accept Troilus as long as he keeps his word to honor and protect her reputation: “And myn honour with wit and bisynesse/ Ay kepe” (III, 165-6). This apparent surrender, however, comes with conditions: “A kynges sone although ye be, ywys,/ Ye shal namore han sovereigete/ Of me in love, than right in that cas is” (III, 170-2). Criseyde makes it clear that she will retain her independence.

Consequently, once this meeting nears its end, Pandarus offers to engineer another meeting for the lovers; for which he offers his own home as a venue: “That at myn hous ye ben at my warnynge,/ For I ful well shal shape youre comynge” (III, 195-6). Criseyde soon leaves and Pandarus remains in conversation with Troilus. During this interlude, Pandarus tries to steer Troilus’ perspective of him:

That is to seye, for the am I bicommen,
Bitwixen game and earnest, swich a meene
As maken women unto men comen;
Al sey I nought, thow wost wel what I meene. (III, 253-6)

In other words, Pandarus declares to Troilus that he is a pimp in this endeavor only because he loves Troilus. However, Pandarus is very careful in this instance not to use the proper term of ‘baude,’ perhaps in the hope that Troilus will not look too closely into Pandarus’ actions on his behalf. Pandarus requests discretion on behalf of Troilus since any slip could sway public opinion against them and Criseyde: “That ‘firste vertu is to kepe tonge” (III, 294). He also requests that Troilus not endanger Criseyde’s reputation and social standing: “For Goddes love, and kep hire out of blame,/ Syn thow art wys, and save alwey hire name” (III, 265-6).

Furthermore, Pandarus vehemently declares that if the public were to know of his actions on behalf of Troilus at the expense of his niece, they would call him traitor: “Whi, al the world upon it wolde crie,/ And seyn that I the werste trecherie/ Dide in this cas, that evere was bigonne” (III,

277-9). It is clear that Pandarus is wary of how the gaze of the Other may affect his schemes and his personal standing more than his niece or even Troilus; particularly in light of the careful self-portrayal he has been attempting throughout the narrative so far. Nonetheless, regardless of his methods, Criseyde's apparent acceptance has begun to cure Troilus of his lovesickness—it seems that Pandarus' scheming has worked: “And al the richesse of his sikes sore/ At ones flede; he felte of hem namore” (III, 349-50).

Thus begins a period of courtship through letters in anticipation of their next meeting at Pandarus' house. This period affords them more time in which to cultivate their desires and expectations for each other. The narrator remarks particularly that Criseyde no longer felt afraid since she has found a shield in Troilus and his 'obeisaunce' pleases her, finally convincing her to allow the affair to happen:

For whi she fond hym so discret in al,
So secret, and of swich obeisaunce,
That wel she felte he was to hire a wal
Of stiel, and sheld from every displesaunce. (III, 477-80)

She finally accepts his regard and, thus, “The importance of these stanzas is that they show us that Criseyde's willingness to surrender is created by Troilus's 'obeisaunce', not by Pandarus's coercive manipulation” (Mann 85). Criseyde has exerted a certain level of control over her actions independent of her uncle's rhetoric—even if she is influenced by it. The greatest influence is that that her gaze now firmly sees Troilus as her shield and she desires him for it. Nonetheless, Pandarus now considers his schemes truly underway and reinforces his self-representation as the architect of this affair since “This tymbur is al redy up to frame” (III, 530). The timber being all the groundwork he has laid down in order to persuade Criseyde to accept Troilus' affection.

Now comes the challenging part and, thus, Pandarus proceeds to construct the frame of the encounter by organizing a secret meeting in his own household, buttressed with imagined conspiracies. To accomplish this, he invites Criseyde to his house in order to share a meal. She comments on how she hopes Troilus will not be there since she does not wish for gossip to arise if they were to meet in person. He assures her that Troilus is out of town: “He swor hire nay, for he was out of towne” (III, 570). Pandarus also declares that even if he were not, she would be safe in his house—both assurances prove false as the narrative (and the plot) unfolds: “Yow thurste nevere han the more fere” (III, 572). The narrator retains a certain level of detachment from these events, particularly in his insistence that his source material is lacking in some details. One such detail is whether Troilus is truly out of town. Dieter Mehl deftly addresses this ambiguity as follows: “Some of the most interesting interventions of the narrator concern our moral judgement and our evaluation of the characters. The narrator shares these problems with us by refusing, for instance, at some critical points of the story, to offer a definite verdict” (217).

It is interesting to note that in the source material of *Il Filostrato*, it is Criseida who engineers the meeting with Troilo at her own house. This shows initiative and assertiveness in Boccaccio’s heroine foreign to Chaucer’s Criseyde, who is manipulated constantly by her uncle. He in fact takes advantage of the hour and the weather to convince Criseyde to remain at his home. Moreover, in *Il Filostrato*,¹¹ Troilo is in fact out of town, therefore it is not a ruse since “Boccaccio's Criseida plans the night of love herself and confides her desire to Pandaro, who grieves her by telling her of Troilo's absence and co-operatively sends a friend to recall him” (P. Martin 191). In contrast, Criseyde has no control over this encounter and she believes that Troilus is away.

¹¹ *Il Filostrato* (III 21, 22)

The Trap is Set

Criseyde arrives at Pandarus' house with her attendants and enjoys the evening meal with her uncle. When it grows late, she decides to take her leave. However, it has begun to rain and Pandarus convinces her to remain in the house. What Criseyde does not know—though the audience does—is that Pandarus has smuggled Troilus into a hiding place, apparently within a bathroom, where he secretly observes the object of his affections:

But who was glad now, who, as trowe ye,
But Troilus, that stood and myght **it** se
Thoroughout a litel window in a **stewe**,
Ther he bishet syn mydnyght was in mewe,
Unwist of every wight but of Pandare? (Emphasis added; III, 599-603).

By presenting the event in this way the narrative may lead the audience to condemn Pandarus' betrayal of his niece. This stanza also brings forth a couple of possible unflattering allusions that would have been obvious to a medieval audience. Particularly the reference to Troilus' hiding place as a 'stewe' would have alerted the audience to possible lustful connotations, as Saul N. Brody points out: "Since the association of stews for public bathing with brothels was commonplace in the fourteenth century, if Chaucer's audience understood Pandarus's *stewe* to have been a room for bathing, the association of bathing with lechery would have come to mind easily" (123). Thus, the narration hints to the audience the less than noble intentions behind Pandarus' orchestration of the affair.

It also provides a fascinating counterpoint to the scene in Book II where Criseyde observes Troilus—in secret—through the frame of her window. However, in this instance, it is Troilus who gazes at Criseyde through the frame of a "litel window." Though similar, Troilus' scene carries a different connotation since he is acting as a voyeur. He is observing Criseyde without her consent and deriving pleasure from it—he "was glad now." Gazing eagerly and

unobserved on a woman who embodies his sexual desire, Troilus' gladness seems strikingly voyeuristic and predatory, particularly, since he dehumanizes Criseyde by qualifying her as an "it" rather than a "her," a mere object for his pleasure rather than a person. This demotion of Criseyde to a mere object is troubling, especially if we consider that Troilus already does not see her as a person, rather an ideal. This scene also illustrates how the wooing of Criseyde has turned predatory, in a way, realizing Pandarus' earlier hunting metaphor.¹² Troilus is lying in wait for his prey.

Now that he has convinced Criseyde to remain in his house, Pandarus makes a production of arranging her stay. This is accomplished through the intricate assignation of sleeping quarters that Pandarus concocts. He explains the sleeping arrangements as follows:

By God, right in my litel closet yonder.
And I wol in that outer hous allone
Be wardein of youre wommen everichone.

And in this myddel chamber that ye se
Shal youre women slepen, wel and softe;
And there I seyde shal youreselven be. (III, 663-8)

Assuring Criseyde that no harm will come to her reputation, Pandarus explains that he will remain in the outer room to guard her, while her retinue sleeps in the middle room and she sleeps in the bedroom. Pandarus is yet again manipulating how he is perceived by presenting himself as a respectful and considerate protector to Criseyde and the audience.

Once they all fall asleep, Pandarus makes his way towards the 'stewe' and urges Troilus to action. At this point Pandarus reveals his impatience with Troilus and hints at how he interprets Troilus as lacking initiative: "Thow wrecched mouses herte,/ Artow agast so that she wol the bite?" (III, 736-7). Troilus then follows Pandarus through the house until they reach a

¹² (II, 1534-5), discussed on page 50 of this thesis

trap door in the bedroom where Criseyde is asleep. Pandarus goes first in order to wake her and explain the situation to her. This instance marks a clear shift in Pandarus' endeavor as a go-between. So far, he has mostly been a go-between for love. As Gretchen Mieszkowski points out, "But once Pandarus sets his traps for Criseyde at Deiphebus's and then at his own house, his going between shifts definitively to the techniques of the stories about sexual conquest: elaborate deceptions and lies about who is or is not where" (Mieszkowski, *Go-Betweens*, 160). In fact, Pandarus' ingenious use of the trap door stratagem evokes comparisons with the Trojan Horse: Criseyde, like Troy, will be conquered by stealth. Criseyde wakes and questions Pandarus on his presence and he, yet again, manipulates her perception of events by concocting another false story. In this instance, Pandarus' words frame a tale of jealousy where Troilus has heard rumors that Criseyde loves a man called Horaste and he is deeply wounded by this: "How that ye sholden love oon hatte Horaste" (III, 797). By creating this rumor, Pandarus is trying to make Criseyde fear that Troilus may see her as a betrayer. Jill Mann argues that "The character of betrayer is one with which events invest her, not one we are persuaded is hers from the beginning, whether by virtue of her sex or by virtue of her individual character" (18). In essence, at this point such a characterization is a creation of Pandarus.

In conjunction with Pandarus' previous warnings that Criseyde holds Troilus' life in her hands, this new imaginary threat causes her to bemoan the serpent Jealousy: "Why hastow Troilus mad to me untriste,/ That never yet agylte hym, that I wiste?" (III, 839-40). Consequently, she decides to clarify matters with Troilus in the morning. Pandarus preys on her distress and urges her not to leave Troilus in misery for so long: "Ye ben to wys to doon so gret folie,/ To putte his lif al nyght in jupertie" (III, 867-8). Yet with Jill Mann, we might well pause

at this point to remark on the irony of false rumors. Before she makes love to Troilus or betrays him with Diomedes, Criseyde already stands accused of infidelity.

Criseyde is now subjected to more of Pandarus' manipulations, where he tries to convince her to see Troilus at that hour of the night. She is understandably surprised by this, since it is a scandalous suggestion to invite Troilus into the room with her, particularly if we consider her state of undress. Priscilla Martin explains that "the custom at Chaucer's time was to sleep naked" (180) and therefore, we can better comprehend part of Criseyde's distress with Pandarus' insistence for this meeting to take place right at that moment. Pandarus senses her unease and attempts to soothe her by assuring his presence during this meeting: "Ne, parde, harm may ther be non, ne synne:/ I wol myself be with yow al this nyght" (III, 913-4). Pandarus continues to portray himself as the concerned uncle, though Criseyde is already suspicious of his true intent. Criseyde finally succumbs to the pressure and allows Troilus' entry with the caveat that he and Pandarus must be discreet about the meeting in order to reassure Troilus and to assure her honor as well: "So werketh now in so discret a wise/ That I honour may have, and he plesaunce" (III, 943-4). Her response reinforces, yet again, the mixture of fear and love that drives Criseyde. As Brody elaborates, "Criseyde is moved by a combination of her feelings for Troilus, the privacy the *closet* provides, and her willingness to accept Pandarus's story at face value" (138). All of these combined factors, as well as her demand for discretion, convince her to allow Troilus' entry.

Pandarus' Success and Troilus' Untimely Faint

Troilus enters the chamber and the narrator acknowledges how, to Pandarus, this is all a game: "But Pandarus, that so wel koude feeles/ In every thyng, to pleye anon bigan" (III, 960-1).

Such a declaration about Pandarus contrasts with his carefully constructed image of the devoted friend and go-between, bringing into question his intentions towards his friend, and kin. Troilus kneels before Criseyde and she then proceeds to defend herself by stating that the rumors of her unfaithfulness are false: “And I, emforth my connyng and my might,/ Have and ay shal, how sore that me smerte,/ Ben to yow trewe and hool with al myn herte” (III, 999-1001). Her distress at the thought of Troilus thinking her false is such that she begins to cry. It can be argued that what distresses her most is that Troilus will see her differently, that her carefully constructed image of a respectable woman and faithful lover may be tarnished. Furthermore, the realization that he has made her cry pains Troilus so that he faints: “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, 1090-2). Troilus’ distress is such that he breaks his carefully constructed façade of the invulnerable warrior and reveals his vulnerability by fainting. However, fainting is not an unmanly action nor does it deviate from the idealized image of the knight in medieval romance. According to Gretchen Mieszkowski, “Being capable of extraordinarily intense, idealizing love is an attribute of greatness in these romances, and fainting is a sign of that capacity. By romance convention, it is the greatest warriors and the greatest lovers who faint” (*Faint*, 50). The act of fainting may in fact add more relevance to his constructed self-image of the grand warrior he wishes to be and/or portray for Criseyde.

Pandarus, nonetheless, is in fact exasperated by Troilus’ faint and proceeds to pick him up, throw him into bed, undress him, and question his manhood: “O thef, is this a mannes herte?” (III, 1098). Criseyde assists her uncle and also questions Troilus’ manliness: “Is this a mannes game?/ What, Troilus, wol ye do thus for shame?” (III, 1126-7). Still, a medieval audience would recognize and understand that “What they [—Pandarus and Criseyde—] are condemning as

unmanly is not Troilus's fainting; it is that Troilus is not making love to Criseyde” (Mieszkowski, *Faint* 57). That is to say, his inaction and lack of initiative in this situation are what is considered unmanly, not his fainting. Therefore, his image as a fierce warrior can survive this moment of apparent vulnerability and slight comedy.

The Consummation

A significant portion of Book III's narration is dedicated to the consummation scene, which lends it weight and importance within the narrative. It represents the success of all of Pandarus' machinations and confirms his success as a go-between. Pandarus, as well as the audience, is aware that this moment would not have been possible without his continued intervention. However, Troilus does take some credit for himself in that when he finally holds Criseyde in his arms he describes it as finally having caught her: “Now be ye kaught; now is ther but we tweyne!” (III, 1207), ascribing to himself a more active role than he indeed had.

Furthermore, Troilus declares to Criseyde that he was created to be at her service: “Syn God hath wrought me for I shall yow serve” (III, 1290). His identity has been distorted by his desire for Criseyde to the extent that he can no longer imagine himself without her as a crucial component of his sense of self. To further understand this shift in Troilus' sense of self we must understand that, as Žižek theorizes, “The *objet a* is precisely that surplus, that elusive make-believe that drove the man to change his existence” (*Looking Awry*, 8). Troilus' very act of designating Criseyde as his object of desire is what put into motion the change in his sense of self and creates a dependence on her. Troilus is still incapable of seeing Criseyde for herself, rather than an ideal.

Towards the end of this extensive scene the narrator comments on how he wishes such bliss could be his: “Why nad I swich oon with my soule ybought,/ Ye, or the leeste joie that was there?” (III, 1319). Winthrop Wetherbee explains how this line reveals the manner in which “the narrator has invested all his hope of happiness in the love of Troilus and Criseyde, to the point at which, during the consummation scene of Book 3, he can imagine trading his very soul for a moment of such bliss as he imagines them to know” (35). The narrator also confesses that he might have elaborated on some parts, but he hopes to be pardoned for it since his source is limited in some respects, which in turn limits his own narration: “But sooth is, though I kan nat tellen al” (III, 1324).

After the lovers’ night is over, Pandarus interjects yet again and reminds Troilus that the hardest part is not the gaining of Criseyde’s love, but retaining it: “Thow art at ese, and hold the wel therinne;/ For also seur as reed is every fir,/ As gret a craft is kepe wel as wyne” (III, 1632-4). It is almost as if he is incapable of stopping his involvement with the lovers, which goes beyond the traditional role of the go-between—for love or for lust. Additionally, Troilus’ lovesickness is cured by the lovers consummation and the narrator comments on the positive change this has brought in Troilus: “In suffisaunce, in blisse, and in singynges,/ This Troilus gan al his lif to lede” (III, 1716-7). Such an observation gives weight to Pandarus’ self-assessment as Troilus’ physician and his approach in assigning Criseyde as the cure for his illness.

However, the biggest revelation throughout these two books is that Criseyde is more than Troilus’ ideal woman. She demonstrates self-awareness in that she recognizes her own beauty and the precarious social position she is in. Criseyde also thinks for herself and does not allow Pandarus’ rhetoric or Troilus’ beauty to be the deciding factors on whether she will risk her reputation for a tryst with Troilus. She also reveals how she sees herself as loyal to Troilus. All

of this evidences the power of the gaze to affect the characters' perceptions of themselves as well as how they wish to represent themselves to others.

CHAPTER IV

Act III: The Game Falls Apart

A particular role can be assigned to each book of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Book I is our introduction to the story of the love affair and displays Troilus falling in love at first sight. Book II demonstrates that Criseyde falls in love differently. She requires her uncle's rhetoric to teach her how to look at Troilus in order to fall in love or at the very least agree to the affair. Book III covers the consummation of the love affair. Collectively, these three books present how Troilus and Criseyde fall in love in different ways as well as presenting the first part of Troilus' journey—foreshadowed at the beginning of the narration—from “wo to wele.”¹³ Unfortunately for our protagonist, not all good things last. Books IV and V illustrate the other portion of the prediction (“Fro wo to wele *and after out of joie*,” my emphasis) and we witness Troilus' fall from happiness. In essence, Fortune's wheel has turned full circle, and Troilus will now face misfortune. Unfaithfulness will fuel this last portion of the narration, just as lovesickness drove the narration at the beginning.

As with the previous books of this poem, the narrator invokes figures that foreshadow future events in the narrative. In this case, all three Furies are invoked as well as cruel Mars: “Megera, Alete, and ek Tesiphone,/ Thow cruel Mars ek, fader to Quyryne” (IV, 24-5).¹⁴ Such an inclusion adds weight to the narrator's assertion—at the beginning of the prologue—that this book will present how Criseyde turns away from Troilus towards Diomedes. It pains the narrator to have to write these events: “And now my penne, alas, with which I write,/ Quaketh for drede of that I moste endite” (IV, 13-4). However, it is interesting to note that the narrator does not

¹³ (I, 4)

¹⁴Quyryne, i.e., Romulus the legendary founder of Rome

condemn Criseyde at this point—even knowing that she leaves Troilus: “For how Criseyde Troilus forsook—/ Or at the leeste, how that she was unkynde—” (IV, 5-6). The narrator seems to be presenting a possible argument for Criseyde’s behavior. At the very least, he tries to lessen the impact of Criseyde’s actions in the following narration. In a way, it is a paler echo of his more robust defense of her in Book II.¹⁵ Regardless of this, the point being made in this prologue is that Troilus will not have a happy end and in fact will perish: “This ilke ferthe book me helpeth fine,/ So that the losse of lyf and love yfeere/ Of Troilus be fully shewed heere.” (IV, 26-8).

Troilus’ Despair

Throughout the narration of *Troilus and Criseyde* we are presented with the image of Troilus as a lover, with all the connotations this implies. As David Benson explains, “Just as Pandarus never transcends his role of pander, so Troilus, once he sees Criseyde, always plays the lover” (96). Nonetheless, Troilus differs from other traditional representations of lovers in his continuous dependence on Pandarus’ intervention and guidance even though he has won Criseyde over. He seems to be a bit more independent once the consummation scene in Book III takes place; however, events in Book IV will have him turning to Pandarus’ guidance once again.

Book IV begins narrating how the Greeks have requested an exchange of prisoners. Their request includes—at the insistence of Calkas—that Criseyde be part of the exchange. Once Troilus’ hears this, he begins to despair. He struggles with hiding his reaction from others, as he did throughout Book I and II:

This Troilus was present in the place

¹⁵ (II, 666-72)

Whan axed was for Antenor Criseyde,
For which ful soone chaungen gan his face,
As he that with tho wordes wel neigh deyde.
But natheles he no word to it seyde,
Lest men sholde his affeccoun espye;
With mannes herte he gan his sorwes drye (IV, 148-54)

Troilus has now reverted to his previous behavior of trying to control the way in which others see him. He does not want anyone else knowing of his renewed distress concerning Criseyde. Yet, in a sharp contrast to his previous behavior, he tries to think of ways to stop the exchange of Criseyde for the Trojan warrior Antenor: "First, how to save hire honour, and what weye/ He myghte best th'eschaunge of hire withstonde./ Ful faste he caste how al this myghte stonde" (IV 159-61). Troilus wishes to prevent the exchange but not at the expense of Criseyde's honor. We must keep in mind that he promised to safeguard her honor in Book III.¹⁶ Robert Costomiris explains how, "In the conflict between reason and love that takes place in Troilus's mind, reason initially overcomes his desire to keep Criseyde at any cost, and he decides to protect Criseyde's honor and obey her will as he did before their 'mutual surrender'" (Costomiris). That is to say, for the time being, it is more important to conserve Criseyde's honor and social standing than it is to go against social expectations in order to save her.

The Trojan parliament along with the King gather and discuss whether to exchange Criseyde for Antenor, since she is not a prisoner, but a citizen. At first glance, it would seem that the exchange should not happen due to Criseyde's standing. However, as Molly Murray explains, "The terms of such a proposed exchange would not have appeared particularly inhumane or unusual to late medieval readers merely because of Criseyde's gender" (341). Therefore, the parliament still considers exchanging her, a widow, for their prized warrior, Antenor. To Troilus' relief, Hector stands up for Criseyde: "But, on my part, ye may eftsone hem telle,/ We usen here

¹⁶ (III, 165-6)

no wommen for to selle” (IV, 181-2). However, it does not make a difference since the people forsake Criseyde: “That al oure vois is to forgon Criseyde” (IV, 195). This represents the dominance of mob rule over the authoritative voice of Hector, but it also reinforces the precariousness of Criseyde’s position in Troy ever since her father deserted them for the Greeks. Hearing this decision, Troilus returns to his previous behavior and despairs. Žižek explains that, “When we are worried, a small difficulty assumes giant proportions, the thing appears to us far worse than it really is” (*Looking Awry*, 11). Even though in this instance the situation is in fact serious, the same principal can be applied. Troilus is unable to assess the problem rationally since he immediately takes a pessimistic stance to the matter and makes it seem insurmountable. Instead of looking for a reasonable solution, Troilus looks for someone to blame, which leads him to question Fortune—believing the fates are against him: “Allas, how maistow in thyn herte fynde/ To ben to me thus cruwel and unkynde?” (IV, 265-6).

Troilus cannot figure out how to save Criseyde from her fate. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that most of his despair is centered on how the loss of Criseyde affects him and not so much on what fate awaits her in the Greek camp. His eyes were only meant to gaze at her and now they have lost their purpose:

O woful eyen two, syn youre disport
 Was al to sen Criseydes eyen brighte,
 What shal ye don but, for my discomfort,
 Stonden for naught, and wepen out youre sighte,
 Syn she is queynt that wont was yow to lighte? (IV, 309-13)

The trope may well suggest that the loss of Criseyde has left Troilus blind and alone in the dark. Additionally, he will no longer be able to exchange gazes with her. Now Troilus fashions himself a martyr of sorts and declares that lovers with Fortune’s blessing should learn from his epitaph that he loved truly: “But whan ye comen by my sepulture,/ Remembreth that youre felawe resteth

there;/ For I loved ek, though ich unworthi were” (IV, 327-9). This constitutes a complete shift in attitude from the beginning of this narrative when he mocked lovers. Troilus’ self-portrayal continues to shift with this contemplation.

Next, Pandarus reappears in the narrative and joins Troilus in his weeping for Criseyde: “And Pandare, that ful tendreliche wepte” (IV, 353), “Seyng his frend in wo, whos hevynesse/ His herte slough, as thoughte hym, for destresse” (IV, 363-4). Jennifer R. Goodman diligently observes how “His [Troilus’] subsequent conversation with Pandarus reveals that he sees no way to keep Criseyde that will not violate the integrity of his own being” (Goodman). Pandarus also questions Fortune’s cruelty in allowing Troilus such a brief respite from his love-sickness and earlier despair: “Who wolde have wend that in so litel a throwe/ Fortune oure joie wold han overthrowe?” (IV, 384-5). This reaction strengthens Pandarus’ self-representation as Troilus’ friend. However, he soon reveals that his worry is mostly for Troilus’ emotional state and not so much for his own kin. In a similar fashion to how he acted in Book I and II, Pandarus now proceeds to present Troilus with options on how to overcome his misery. His first move is to point out to Troilus that there are plenty more women apart from Criseyde, there is no need for him to suffer for her love:

“This town is ful of ladys al aboute;
And, to my doom, fairer than swiche twelve
As ever she was, shal I fynde in som route—
Yee, on or two, withouten any doute.” (IV, 401-4)

Before this moment, the audience could have classified Pandarus’ conduct towards Criseyde at the very least as negligent. However, this particular exchange with Troilus points out a coldness in Pandarus’ regard that is much more apparent than his previous behavior in the narrative. He truly does not seem to care for Criseyde’s plight. As Pandarus’ Ovidian role shifts from the arts of love to remedies for it, he starts to intensify his efforts to steer Troilus away from Criseyde:

“Absence of hire shal dryve hire out of herte” (IV, 427). Pandarus is retaking his role as Troilus’ physician. At present, his remedy for Troilus’ pain is for him to excise Criseyde from his heart.

Nonetheless, in contrast to Book II, Troilus does not follow Pandarus’ every suggestion. In fact, he rejects Pandarus’ advice and tries to find a better solution: “But Troilus, that neigh for sorwe deyde,/ Took litel heede of al that evere he mente—/ Oon ere it herde, at tother out it wente—” (IV, 432-4). In Troilus’ mind, it is a straightforward decision. He sees himself as a noble and loyal man. His self-representation has no room for the type of betrayal and fickleness that Pandarus is suggesting. Nevertheless, Troilus still sees Pandarus as his physician; the difference is that in this instance he questions the medicine that Pandarus is prescribing:

But at the laste answerede, and seyde, “Frend,
This lechecraft, or heeled thus to be,
Were wel sitting, if that I were a fend—
To traysen a wight that trewe is unto me!
I pray God lat this conseil nevere ythe;
But do me rather sterve anon-right here,
Er I thus do as thow me woldest leere! (IV, 435-41)

Troilus prefers death to betraying the love he holds for Criseyde. In fact, he wishes for it. He again sinks into despondency as he did at the beginning of the narrative. Troilus is yet again incapable of being pro-active when it comes to solving his own problems. In a way, his characterization is cyclical. He began as a self-confidant character, and then he fell into despair. Afterwards, he regains some confidence with Pandarus’ guidance, becoming a more recognizable example of a lover, and now he succumbs again to his despair. Continuing this repetitiveness of events, Pandarus admonishes Troilus to do something pro-active to get what he wants. Pandarus’ advice is to let her leave or abduct her: “And other lat here out of towne fare,/ Or hold here stille, and leve thi nyce fare” (IV, 531-2). This admonishment motivates Troilus to give due consideration to his options. He rejects Pandarus’ suggestion because his public

intervention in the matter would affect Criseyde's honor and he promised her never to act in a way that would damage it¹⁷: "As nolde God but if I sholde have/ Hire honour levere than my lif to save!" (IV, 566-7).

Criseyde's Despair

In a similar fashion to Troilus, Criseyde also despairs once she hears of her fate. She also mirrors Troilus' narrative in that she sees herself as eternally faithful to Troilus: "That al this world ne myghte hire love unbynde,/ Ne Troilus out of hire herte caste,/ She wol ben his, while that hire lif may laste" (IV, 675-6). It is a confirmation that the conclusion of this narrative will rely heavily on the concept of faithfulness. Criseyde's assertion is ironic since the audience—thanks to the prologue—already knows that she will leave Troilus for another. Even though she believes herself to be faithful, the narrative contradicts her self-assessment. It is interesting to note that, "Whereas Pandarus always plays the pander and Troilus, after the first few lines, the lover, she moves from reluctant object of desire to false betrayer after the intermediate period of amorous fulfillment" (Benson 103). Regardless of how she characterizes herself, the audience possesses privileged information on future events. Therefore, the audience's gaze can become judgmental before the actual events.

Once the news has spread, the women of the town come to visit Criseyde and begin to expound on the topic. They have very little compassion for her plight and some are glad that the exchange will bring peace. Like Pandarus, the Trojan women seem unable to comprehend or at least fail to respect the kind of love Troilus and Criseyde have professed. Criseyde does not pay attention to their conversation, she is in fact thinking of the very real possibility that she will lose

¹⁷ (III, 165-6)

Troilus in this exchange. The realization brings her to tears. In this moment, when the other women look at her, they misinterpret her sorrow. They cannot understand that Criseyde cries for the imminent loss of Troilus, not for the loss of their company, as they seem to believe. Their gazes interpret her sorrow incorrectly. Furthermore, as a parallel to Troilus' actions, Criseyde also sinks into despondency and she contemplates death: "And on hire bed she gan for ded to falle,/ In purpos nevere thennes for to rise" (IV, 733-4); "And with the deth to doon boote on hire bale" (IV, 739). Her pain is so great that it affects her countenance since "Hire hewe, whilom bright, that tho was pale,/ Bar witnesse of hire wo and hire constreynte" (IV, 740-1).

At this point, the narrator relates Criseyde's complaint, which spans from line 744 to line 798 of Book IV. There are four main points being made by her through this portion of the narrative. The first is that Criseyde believes herself to be cursed by the stars: "And born in corsed constellacioun" (IV, 745). She is looking for someone to blame for her situation. Just as Troilus blames Fortune, Criseyde also looks to lay blame on a supernatural entity, in this case the stars.¹⁸ Secondly, Criseyde's independent nature and her sense of self are put in jeopardy. She no longer sees herself as an individual with all the freedoms and self-worth this entails: "What is Criseyde worth, from Troilus?" (IV, 766). This declaration represents a fulfillment of one of Criseyde's fears from Book II¹⁹—that she would lose her independence. The third point of interest in this complaint is that Criseyde declares she will be abstinent and forego all others if she is separated from Troilus: "The observance evere, in youre absence,/ Shal sorwe ben, compleynt, and abstinence" (IV, 783-5).²⁰ Lastly, unlike Troilus, Criseyde also considers how the exchange will affect Troilus, not just how it affects her: "How shal youre tendre herte this sustene?" (IV, 795).

¹⁸ Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* elaborates this theme considerably: (120-140).

¹⁹ (II, 771-3)

²⁰ This line is ironic since we already know that Criseyde will betray Troilus for Diomedes: (IV, 11).

Afterwards, Pandarus arrives at Criseyde's side, and, paralleling his encounter with Troilus, begins to weep when he finds her desperately crying: "For which Pandare myghte nat restreyne/ The teeris from his eighen for to reyne" (IV, 872-3). This, of course, leads us to question his sincerity, since when he spoke with Troilus he suggested among other things that the young man take a new lover. The narrator takes the time to explain the sight that Pandarus encounters. Due to her sorrow, Criseyde's beauty has momentarily left her; she becomes an image of death:

She was right swich to seen in hire visage
As is that wight that men on beere bynde;
Hire face, lik of Paradys the ymage,
Was al ychaunged in another kynde.
The pleye, the laughter, men was wont to fynde
On hire, and ek hire joies everichone,
Ben fled; and thus lith now Criseyde allone. (IV, 862-8)

Criseyde has lost another cornerstone of her identity,—no matter if it is only for just this moment—her beauty. Once Pandarus regains some control over himself, he informs Criseyde that Troilus wishes to see her. He proceeds to advise Criseyde and dry her tears. His reasoning is that if Troilus sees her suffering he will surely die: "So lef this sorwe, or platly he wol deye" (IV, 924). Pandarus returns to his old tricks and uses guilt to manipulate Criseyde into doing as he wishes for the benefit of Troilus. He is returning to his role as the go-between even though the love affair has been consummated.²¹ Pandarus understands that Troilus will not take the lead in resolving the problem; therefore, he shrewdly "places the responsibility of preserving the love affair entirely on Criseyde's 'wit' and 'wisdom'" (Costomiris).

²¹ For more details of the traditional role of the go-between, refer to: Mieszkowski, Gretchen. *Medieval Go-Betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006. Print.

Contemplation

Before meeting with Criseyde, Troilus proceeds to contemplate the nature of free will. According to Jennifer R. Goodman, “Troilus's speech considers whether we are free to act, or bound by fate” (Goodman). This entire portion of the narrative is an addition, inspired by Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*, not present in Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato*. His musings begin when he contemplates death as a preferable option to put an end to his despair: “He was so fallen in despair that day,/ That outrely he shop hym for to deye” (IV, 954-5). It could be said that, “The only honorable way out that he can imagine at this point is death, and he considers suicide” (Goodman). From this point forward Troilus moves to a contemplation of predestination and the nature of free will: “For al that comth, comth by necessitee:/ Thus to ben lorn, it is my destinee” (IV, 958-9). In a way, he continues to look for otherworldly causes for his pain—as he previously did by blaming Fortune. He tries to come to a conclusion on the manner, but does not know whom to believe. There are good arguments in favor and against predestination: “And som men seyn that nedely ther is noon,/ But that fre chois is yeven us everychon” (IV, 970-1). Troilus’ speech temporarily shifts his perspective from earthly matters to a much broader view of his existence. He concludes that there are certain events that are inevitable: “So mot it come; and thus the bifallyng/ Of thynges that ben wist bfore the tyde,/ They mowe nat ben eschued on no syde” (IV, 1076-8). Thus, Chaucer’s Troilus sees his personal crisis from a philosophical perspective denied to his counterpart in Boccaccio.

Taking Action

The lovers’ meeting finally arrives and they can do nothing but weep. The stress of the moment is too much and Criseyde faints. It is an interesting role reversal from Troilus’ faint in

Book III. However, Gretchen Mieszkowski notes that it is important to remember that “Neither passive loving nor fainting was identified with women more than with men in the literature of Chaucer's period” (*Revisiting* 44). In this instance, Criseyde’s faint as well as Troilus’ is due to a great surge of emotion. Troilus is so overwhelmed by the moment and her unresponsiveness that he believes her dead and wishes to follow her: “Syn Love and cruel Fortune it ne wolde/ That in this world he lenger lyven sholde” (IV, 1189-90) and “Ther shal no deth me fro my lady twynne” (IV, 1197). Troilus—just like Criseyde²²—no longer sees himself as a separate individual. His existence depends on Criseyde’s presence.

Once they compose themselves, Criseyde tells Troilus that they need to act if they are going to stop the exchange: “To fynde boote of wo that we ben inne,/ It were al tyme soone to bygynne” (IV, 1259-60). Troilus still needs outside stimulus to engage and react to his problems. Following Pandarus’ earlier advice, Criseyde takes action and starts developing a plan. She sees no other way out but to go along with the exchange. Priscilla Martin observes that this is the moment when “she [Criseyde] tries to calm Troilus with a display of her feminine intuition and practicality” (161) hoping that he will accept her plan: “I am a womman, as ful wel ye woot,/ And as I am avysed sodeynly,/ So wol I telle yow, whil it is hoot” (IV, 1261-3). She is confident that she can convince her father to let her return once he sees her and declares she will return within 10 days of her departure: “And whanne, allas? By God, lo, right anon,/ Er dayes ten, this dar I sauflly seyn” (IV, 1319-20). Troilus considers her proposal and reminds her that he will die without her, she must return to him: “I wol myselven sle if that ye drecche” (IV, 1446). However, he still doubts the veracity of her plan and expresses his concerns that she will not be able to convince her father to allow her return to Troy: “Youre syre is wys; and seyd is, out of

²² (IV, 766)

drede, / Men may the wise atrenne, and naught atrede” (IV, 1455-6). Troilus proceeds to dismantle her plans and show her how unlikely it is that they will work²³: “For which that wey, for aught I kan espie, / To trusten on nys but a fantasie” (IV, 1469-70).

Troilus counters her proposal with one of his own. He suggests that their best option is to run away together: “Wel stele away and ben togidere so” (IV, 1507). Criseyde is not convinced by Troilus’ alternative. To soothe him she declares that no matter what happens, she will remain faithful to him. She asserts this through an elaborate oath, which calls on different gods and creatures to bear witness:

Ber witnesse of this word that seyde is here;
That thilke day that ich untrewed be
To Troilus, myn owene herte fre,
That thou retourne backward to thi welle,
And I with body and soule synke in helle! (IV, 1550-4)

Criseyde continues to insist that she is faithful, even though the audience already knows that she will falter in this regard. Criseyde insists that Troilus’ plan is not the way to go since she would forever lose her good name: “My name sholde I nevere ayeynward wyne” (IV, 1581). It is clear that she is still concerned with appearances and what the Other’s gaze will make of her. Before they move forward with the plan, they both require further reassurance that the other will remain loyal to their love, since she must depart for the enemy’s camp. Criseyde swears upon her faithfulness again: “Mistrust me nought thus causeless, for routhe, / Syn to be trewe I have yow plight my trouthe” (IV, 1609-10). She requires an oath of Troilus’ faithfulness as well, for she would die if he were to betray her: “Me glade, as wys I nevere unto Criseyde, / Syn thilke day I saugh hire first with yē, / Was fals, ne nevere shal til that I dye” (IV, 1655-7). Troilus declares that he will gaze at no other; his eyes are only to look at her—a statement that supports his

²³ (IV, 1440-1526)

previous declaration that the only purpose of his eyes is to look at her.²⁴ It is safe to say that at this point Criseyde has gotten her way, as Pandarus implied. She will be exchanged for Antenor and after 10 days will return to Troilus. Concerning this, Faye Walker-Pelkey fittingly comments on how “Criseyde makes choices which make her life, her political and social situation, her priority” (27). She understands that their actions can have real repercussions for her reputation.

The Wheel Turns

Book V of *Troilus and Criseyde* presents the conclusion of the narrative. Molly Martin comments: “As Book 5 begins, the narration moves fervently against the romance current” (144). Its focus has become the tragedy of Troilus and Criseyde’s betrayal. The Narrator begins this Book with a reference to the divine, just as in previous Books. In this case, he uses the three Fates to illustrate that the fate of Troilus and Criseyde is in otherworldly hands:

Aprochen gan the fatal destyne
That Joves hath in disposicioun,
And to yow, angry Parcas, sustren thre,
Committeth to don execucioun;
For which Criseyde moste out of the town,
Troilus shal dwellen forth in pyne
Til Lachesis his thred no lenger twine. (V, 1-7)

Yet again, we have an instance where the Narrator’s plot choices affect the understanding of the audience. In this case, these lines foreshadow Troilus’ end—a notion that is touched on multiple times in the poem. Troilus will remain in pain until his death. Once this introduction is concluded we return to earthly concerns and Criseyde’s imminent departure. At this time in the narrative, Troilus and Criseyde have been lovers for three years and neither of them is particularly excited about the interchange of prisoners that will take place. On the morning of the exchange, the

²⁴ (IV, 309-13)

Narrator seems to foretell that Criseyde will never return to Troilus ever again: “But Troilus, now far-wel al thi joie,/ For shaltow nevere sen hire eft in Troie!” (V, 27-8). Just before the exchange is to take place, Troilus questions his choice to proceed with the exchange. He doubts his decision and wonders whether he should have run away with Criseyde or if he still should take her away. Only the thought of accidentally hurting Criseyde stops him. He sees no other choice but to accept their fate and hope that Criseyde’s plan works.

Echoing their conversation in Book IV, Troilus reminds Criseyde that she needs to keep her word since his life depends on it: “Now holde youre day, and do me nat to deye” (V, 84). Once the exchange is completed, Criseyde leaves with Diomedes. Upon seeing her face, Diomedes decides he will seduce Criseyde. Diomedes’s inclusion in the story inserts a bit of weight on Troilus’ fear that Criseyde will betray him. Diomedes, unlike Troilus, actively pursues Criseyde and she eventually accepts him.

Afterwards, the narrative returns us to Troy where Troilus is returning to past behaviors. He starts to despair and proceeds to curse the gods, his birth, himself, and his fate for his current condition. Mirroring events in Book I, Troilus lies on his bed and cries for Criseyde: “But tho bigan his herte a lite unswelle/ Thorough teris, which that gonnen up to welle,/ And pitously he cryde upon Criseyde” (V, 214-6). He still believes she will return. Troilus, while awaiting her return, contemplates Criseyde’s current state. He believes she must be suffering for him in a similar manner to how he suffers for her: “For tendernesse, how shal she sustene/ Swich wo for me?” (V, 242-3).

Book V seems to present various parallels to events in earlier Books; for instance, the aforementioned weeping, and laying the responsibility for Troilus’ survival at Criseyde’s feet. We are also presented with the physical manifestation of Troilus’ despair, just as in Book I his

appearance reflects his sorrow: “And eft bygynne his aspre sorwes newe,/ That every man myght on his sorwes rewe” (V, 265-6). Continuing this theme of parallels, Pandarus has yet again to intercede in his role of physician and attend to Troilus’ ailment. Furthermore, Pandarus chides Troilus for not following his advice: “But whoso wil nought trowen reed ne loore,/ I kan nat sen in hym no remedie,/ But lat hym worthen with his fantasie” (V, 327-9). Pandarus continues to advise Troilus and provides a dose of reality by reminding him that others have also suffered for love:

Ye, God woot, and fro many a worthi knyght
 Hath his lady gon a fourtenyght,
 And he nat yet made halvendel the fare.
 What need is the to maken al this care? (V, 333-6)

This indicates that Pandarus is aware Troilus believes himself unique in his suffering for love. Pandarus then proceeds, as he did in Book I, to calm Troilus down and insists that he worries for nothing: “She nyl hire heste breken for no wight./ For dred the nat that she nyl fynden weye/ To come ayein; my lif that dorste I leye” (V, 355-7). He is clearly playing up Criseyde’s faithfulness to soothe Troilus’ fears. At a later point Troilus stares intently at his counselor: “Therwith [...] caste on Pandarus his yē” (V, 554) and “Ay as he rood to Pandarus he tolde/ His newe sorwe and ek his joies olde” (V, 557-8). Pandarus, in his role as the physician, now listens to Troilus recounting his joys and sorrows. Among these recollections is the moment his eyes first crossed paths with Criseyde: “And in that temple, with hire eyen cleere,/ Me kaughte first my righte lady dere” (V, 566-7). Troilus is recalling the moment that Criseyde became the Woman for him, the object of his gaze. That *idolization* of Criseyde in the temple, however, is a framing fantasy from which the actual woman is beginning to depart.

As Žižek explains the Woman “is ultimately just a fantasy figure filling out the void of our relation with a woman” (*Looking Awry* 83). Troilus continues to idealize Criseyde. At this

point in the narrative, Troilus' self-representation is entrenched in the idea that without her, he is nothing. This is why he is so concerned with Criseyde's return. If he cannot be her lover, then who is he? This worry is so pervasive that through his ride with Pandarus, Troilus keeps seeing the specter of Criseyde everywhere. This distresses him greatly and he proceeds to address Cupid, believing himself accursed. This is a complete reversal from when we first met Troilus. In Book I he saw himself above love, now he begs for mercy from the god of love. He feels so pained that he believes his tale will be written down and passed on: "Men myght a book make of it, lik a storie" (V, 585). Rosemarie McGerr comments on how in this line "Troilus portrays his experience of love in even more explicitly textual terms in Book 5" (186), which he will touch on again in later points in the story.²⁵ He reasserts that all his happiness rests upon her return: "And here I dwelle out cast from alle joie,/ And shall, til I may sen hire eft in Troie" (V, 615-6). This gives further weight to the idea that Troilus' identity depends on the presence of Criseyde. He cannot see himself as an independent being.

Criseyde's Fall

In line 689, the narrative changes to Criseyde's point-of-view and we are presented with her situation in the Greek camp. Nine days have passed since she left Troy and she is starting to worry that she will not be able to return by the tenth day as promised. This realization fills her with worry; she does not want Troilus to see her as false: "My Troilus shal in his herte deme/ That I am fals, and so it may wel seme" (V, 697-8). His perception of her is important to Criseyde. She wishes to live up to his ideal, of her being faithful. As time passes, Criseyde's self-confidence begins to crumble and she starts to doubt her plan. She thinks that Troilus might have

²⁵ Criseyde will also comment on the textual longevity of her situation in various points throughout Book V, such as lines 1058-60.

been right in his assessment of her strategy: “Allas, I ne hadde trowed on youre loore/ And went with yow, as ye me redde er this!” (V, 736-7). Outside events have changed Criseyde’s inner world; her perspective of the situation is starting to shift. She is no longer the same confident woman that convinced Troilus, albeit reluctantly, to follow her plan.²⁶

Her confidence is shaken, but she resolves to be proactive; she thinks of leaving the Greek camp and returning to Troilus. She previously was concerned with what the town would think of her if she were to leave with him.²⁷ However, by this point in the narrative she decides that she is no longer concerned about what others may think of her actions: “No fors of wikked tonges janglerie,/ For evere on love han wrecches had envye” (V, 755-6). For now, the opinion of the Other is of no concern to her. This is an important shift in perspective, since in early Books, much of Criseyde’s actions were influenced by her perception of how the Other sees her.²⁸ She has come to a point of self-reflection and now believes that those who give too much credence to others’ opinions never prosper: “For whoso wol of every word take hede,/ Or reulen hym by every wightes wit,/ Ne shal he nevere thryven, out of drede” (V, 757-9).

This change in perspective comes just before Diomedes begins to pursue her in earnest. Subsequently, the narrator brings back the reader’s attention to the power of Criseyde’s eyes, which Troilus had remarked on various times: “That Paradis stood formed in hire yēn” (V, 817). Diomedes falls for Criseyde and tries to convince her that Troy is doomed and she should find a Greek man to protect her, thereby countering the idealizations of Troilus with *realpolitik*. He puts himself forth as a good candidate. Criseyde, however, is still not prepared to shatter completely her self-representation as a loyal woman. She neither declines nor accepts Diomedes’s

²⁶ IV, 1261-3

²⁷ (IV, 1581)

²⁸ Boo II

suit at this time.²⁹ Nonetheless, Diomedes continues in his quest and through his discourse convinces Criseyde of her vulnerability and the precariousness of her position. As Jill Mann aptly asserts, it is “The external change, not her own fickleness, precipitates her betrayal (24). She is coming to understand that she requires a male figure, possibly Diomedes, to protect her:

And that she was allone and hadde nede
Of frendes help; and thus began to brede
The cause whi, the sothe for to telle,
That she took fully purpos for to dwelle. (V, 1026-9)

This notable shift in perspective solidifies the downfall of Troilus’ idealized vision of her. It also marks the point at which she goes against her self-representation as being faithful, since her loyalty for Troilus is shattered; regardless of the circumstances that bring this about. Robbed of his adoring gaze, she can no longer maintain the image of herself that he inspired. Her betrayal is complete when she bestows Troilus’ brooch upon Diomedes, replacing Troilus in her affections: “And ek a broche—and that was litel nede—/ That Troilus was, she yaf this Diomedes” (V, 1040-1). The Narrator further cements her acceptance of Diomedes and betrayal of Troilus by commenting on how her behavior has made others think she now loves Diomedes: “Men seyn—I not—that she yaf hym hire herte” (V, 1050). It is also of note that the narrator specifies how it is others that speak of this. In a way, he is distancing himself from accusing her of unfaithfulness, or holding out some hope that she does not give away her heart with Troilus’ brooch.

Concerning Criseyde’s change of heart, Winthrop Wetherbee interestingly comments that even “Though Chaucer makes plain the limitations of her character, he also makes plain the social constraints and precarious circumstances that have compelled her to meet the world on its own terms and to rely so largely on her sexual attractiveness to make her way” (192). Criseyde’s acceptance of Diomedes illustrates her understanding of the vulnerable position she occupies in

²⁹ (V, 1002)

the Greek camp. She requires a male to protect her in accordance with the social constructs of her time. Her father does not protect her, Troilus is not there, and therefore, she compromises her self-image as a faithful lover to protect herself. She understands that her actions will now affect how others see her:

“Allas, for now is clene ago
My name of trouthe in love, for everemo!
For I have falsed oon the gentileste
That evere was, and oon the worthieste! (V, 1054-7)

Criseyde, through retrospection, has come to understand how her actions will paint her as a traitor in the eyes of others. As Mann remarks:

Just as she never formally decides to yield to Troilus, but comes to realize that she has yielded ('Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere,/Ben yolde, ywis, I were now nought heere!': III 1210-11), so her betrayal too is a matter of retrospective acknowledgement ('I have falsed oon the gentileste/That evere was': V 1056-7) rather than present decision.
(23)

Criseyde is completely aware that now she will be seen and remembered as unfaithful, a traitor. She acknowledges that books will remember her in this negative light³⁰:

“Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,
Shal neyther ben ywritten nor ysonge
No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!
Thorughout the world my belle shal be ronge!
And wommen moost wol haten me of alle.
Allas, that swich a cas me sholde falle! (V, 1058-1064)

These prospective “books” constitute yet another perspective, one which turns a withering gaze upon Criseyde’s compromises with reality and sees her through a nakedly misogynistic point of view. Concerning the topic of these lines, C. David Benson eloquently comments on how

³⁰ (V, 583-5)

“whereas Troilus proudly declares that his amorous sufferings are worthy of being enshrined in writing, Criseyde is terrified of what books will do to her” (111). Consequently, Criseyde believes that other women will see her actions as a dishonor: “Thei wol seyn, in as muche as in me is,/ I have hem don dishonour, weylaway!” (V, 1065-6). Carolyn Dinshaw aptly notes that Criseyde “knows that her literary reputation as a traitor is in fact set, that she’ll be interpreted only one way, by male *auctores* who write ‘thise bokes’ and by ‘wommen’ who will believe them” (53).

Her reaction to this realization is to shift her attentions to Diomedes; she believes she can remain faithful to him, even if that was not the case with Troilus. In a way, she is trying to salvage her self-representation as a faithful woman: “To Diomedes algate I wol be trewe” (V, 1071). Criseyde intends to begin from scratch. Her relationship with Troilus is ruined and she is no longer safe in Troy; therefore, she changes her circumstances to survive and to redefine her reality in a way that she can accept who she has become. Thus, she accepts Diomedes’s protection and resolves to be faithful to him. This change in her stance towards her circumstances may be interpreted as fickleness on her part. Concerning this event, Mann appropriately comments on how:

The pressure towards change in Criseyde comes from without – from Pandarus's revelation of Troilus's love in the first case, and from the exchange with Antenor and Diomedes's wooing in the second – but these external stimuli would fail of their effect were it not for the internal mutability they find to work on – the capacity of the mind to adapt, to absorb the overturning of the status quo into its own processes until it becomes a new status quo, a point of new departure. (19)

That is to say, Criseyde’s mutability is a direct result of her will to survive and adapt to new circumstances in the same manner she did at the beginning when she sought Hector’s protection and accepted Troilus’ suit.

However, the Narrator cautions the audience that there is no written account of how long it took Diomedes to sway Criseyde to his side. We might then infer that the author is trying to lessen the fallout of Criseyde's actions and the consequent change in perspective that this will create in the reader: "Ther is non auctour telleth it, I wene" (V, 1088). Rosemarie McGerr fascinatingly suggests that "the narrator's reluctance to condemn Criseyde for her unfaithfulness (5.1050, 1098-99) reminds us of the power he has to question the texts he reads and the power we have to keep an open mind about all of the issues raised by the poem" (196). The Narrator exerts his power to steer the reader's opinion by suggesting that we should pity Criseyde for she will now be seen as an example of fickleness and betrayal. McGerr points out that the narrator "adds that the wide 'publishing' of Criseyde's story is punishment enough for her guilt" (187).³¹

The narration shifts its attention once again to Troilus as he loses faith in the possibility of Criseyde's return, particularly since twelve days have passed since her departure.³² His physical state reflects his growing despair over her absence.³³ During his lamentation over his current condition and Criseyde's absence, he has a dream about a boar. He interprets it as a message that Criseyde has betrayed him for another: "My lady bryght, Criseyde, hath me bytrayed,/ In whom I trusted most of ony wight./ She elliswhere hath now here herte apayed" (V, 1247-9). Troilus confides his worries to Pandarus. Pandarus suggests Troilus should write to Criseyde.³⁴ If Criseyde answers, she is faithful. Eventually she does, though her answer leaves Troilus unsatisfied: "And fynaly she wroot and seyde hym thenne,/ She wolde come, ye, but she nyste whenne" (V, 1427-8). Criseyde still doesn't return and regardless of the increasing

³¹ (V, 1095-96)

³² (V, 1205-8)

³³ (V, 1219-25)

³⁴ (V, 1293)

evidence that she will not return to him, Troilus convinces himself that Calkas is at fault: “And in his herte he wente hire excusynge,/ That Calkas caused al hire tarynge” (V, 1574-5).

Troilus decides to write another letter to Criseyde. Her answer is not what Troilus wishes to hear. Criseyde tells him that she believes he was not truthful with her that he has led her on with false promises: “And beth nat wroth, I have ek understonde/ How ye ne do but holden me in honde” (V, 1614-5). She does not know when she will return and believes that the only thing she can offer him anymore is her friendship: “For trewely, while that my lif may dure,/ As for a frend ye may in me assure” (V, 1623-4). At first Troilus cannot believe she would not keep her promise to return to him: “But fynaly, he ful ne trowen myghte/ That she ne wolde hym holden that she hyghte” (V, 1635-6). He is finally forced to acknowledge that Criseyde was not who he believed her to be: “That Troilus well understod that she/ Nas nought so kynde as that hire oughte be” (V, 1642). This is confirmed when on the field of battle Troilus faces Diomedes and he spots the brooch he gave to Criseyde on the Greek warrior’s collar: “As he that on the coler fond withinne/ A broch that he Criseyde yaf that morwe/ That she from Troie moste nedes twynne” (V, 1660-2). The brooch is the final proof he requires to understand that Criseyde is no longer to be trusted and that he has lost her: “His lady nas no lenger to be triste” (V, 1666).

As is to be expected with Troilus, he goes to Pandarus with this new woe. In his lamentations of this event he parallels Criseyde’s answer to his letter: “That syn ye nolde in trouthe to me stonde,/ That ye thus nolde han holden me in honde!” (V, 1679-8). It is now Troilus who accuses Criseyde of issuing false promises. Troilus now comes to the conclusion that her good name is lost: “Allas, youre name of trouthe/ Is now fordon, and that is al my routh” (V, 1686-7). Now Troilus and the books that will retell her story condemn Criseyde. This then circles back to how Criseyde comes to represent the Woman, rather than herself, in Troilus’

eyes. As Žižek explains “The elevation of an ordinary, earthly woman to the sublime object always entails mortal danger for the miserable creature charged with embodying the Thing, since ‘Woman does not exist’” (*Looking Awry*, 84). Consequently, Troilus has a difficult time understanding how he could have misjudged her so completely. Criseyde was unable to live up to the idealized image Troilus constructed of her. He never truly saw Criseyde for who she was and this is the main reason why her betrayal affects him so. Compounding his devastation over the betrayal of his love, this event also shatters one of the cornerstones of Troilus’ personality, his self-representation as Criseyde’s protector and lover. Troilus is so devastated by the shattering of his perceptions that he decides to seek his death in battle: “Myn owen deth in armes wol I seche;/ I recche nat how soone be the day!” (V, 1718-9). To achieve this end he fights recklessly against the Greeks and seeks Diomedes out in battle.³⁵ However, Fortune denied them the chance to kill each other in battle.³⁶

The Narrator proceeds to implore female readers not to be angry with him for retelling Criseyde’s betrayal.³⁷ Wetherbee emphasizes that “Other books have told of Criseyde’s infidelity (1776), and for his part the narrator finds the falseness of men a more serious issue” (225). In gendered terms, this represents one of the most radical shifts in perspective in the whole poem. The Narrator directly warns women of men’s treachery: “Beth war of men, and herketh what I seye!” (V, 1785). In this section the implication is that the Narrator has recounted the poem not to say that women are treacherous, but to let them know that men are deceitful. Consequently, Benson asserts that, “In addition to stirring our emotions, the narrative voice also tests our

³⁵ (V, 1755-7)

³⁶ (V, 1763-4)

³⁷ (V, 1775)

judgement. Its comments force us to question not only the ultimate meaning of the story but also its very telling” (116).

Troilus’ End

Troilus finally reaches his goal of dying in battle at Achilles’ hand. Once he dies, his soul ascends through the heavens to the eighth sphere. This transition from life to death puts in motion the biggest shift in perspective for Troilus in this narrative. As his soul reaches a point beyond earth and the erratic planets, Troilus’ perspective shifts from a preoccupation with earthly matters to a detached contemplation of events from a god-like viewpoint. This otherworldly perspective leads Troilus to scorn his earthly concerns: “and fully gan despise/ This wrecched world” (V, 1816-7). He now views his preoccupation with love and Criseyde as foolish and laughs at all the others he observes weeping over his corpse: “And in himself he lough right at the wo/ Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste” (V, 1821-2). He also rejects lust and, consequently, sexual love: “And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so/ The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste/ And sholden al oure herte on heven caste” (V, 1823-5). Karen Elaine Smyth notes that, “It is certainly in this space where Troilus achieves a more profound insight into spiritual mysteries by reaching an enlightenment of sorts about the triviality of mortal life and of blind lust” (Smyth). Troilus concludes that it is religious love that we should all strive for and not physical love. Consequently, John M. Steadman comments that, “as for Chaucer, the ascent represents a return to true knowledge—to pure cognition un-darkened by the passions and appetites of the body—and to the soul’s native region or *patria*” (165).

Troilus’ apotheosis raises questions of the ultimate meaning of the poem. Does this final shift in perspectives—so abrupt and brief—serve to cancel completely the secular and erotic

ways of seeing that most of the poem seems to celebrate? It ultimately depends on the influence of the amalgamation of perspectives within the narration and the reader. Do the love affair and preoccupation with sexual love weigh more on the reader's interpretation than the final commentary of the Narrator exulting the virtues of religious love? The varying perspectives within the narrative serve to complicate the process of reaching a clear conclusion of what the ultimate meaning and message of the poem is. Within this, we also need to pay attention to the differing perspectives offered by each character. In the end, it is the reader's choice, since this amalgamation of perspectives allows for the possibility of more than one conclusion.

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