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The Artistic Probability of Chaucer's Criseyde

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THE ARTISTIC PROBABILITY
OF CHAUCER'S CRISEYDE

by
Edward B. Smith, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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LIFE

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CHAPTER I

CONTROVERSY

Nowhere in Chaucer is one confronted with such a loveable character as the beautiful Criseyde. She wins us to herself from the very moment we approach her. Witty, good-humored, cheerful, she embodies the fullness of life itself. Completely effeminate, tender and affectionate, even overly-sympathetic, she draws to herself the hearts of all. Chaucer himself has fallen in love with her. The poet tells us that he intends to write about the double sorrow of Troilus, but in reality Criseyde holds the center of his attention. He depicts her as the object of Troilus's great love, of Pandarus's devoted care, of the whole of Troy's esteem and admiration. Criseyde is loved by one and all.

Criseyde is the daughter of Calkas, the traitor and fugitive of Troy. She has been left behind by her father in his flight, and though still young she is a widow and quite alone in the world. One day while she pays her observances to Pallas, the brave Troilus, Priam's son and scion of women and love, casts his eye upon her and falls deeply in love. Fearing that Criseyde will have no part of a wretch like him, Troilus hides his love.
But the prying, jovial Pandarus, friend of Troilus and uncle of Criseyde, ferrets out the secret of the lover and pledges himself as Troilus's advocate. After much persuasion, Pandarus finally induces Criseyde to look favoringly upon Troilus. But not satisfied with this small gain, Pandarus employs all the wiles he can bring to bear, and at last manipulates the lovers into one another's arms. The future appears to presage nothing but happiness for the lovers. But in reality their pleasure is short-lived. The fugitive, Calkas, takes it upon himself to arrange the exchange of the prisoner, Antenor, for his daughter, Criseyde. The lovers are sadly torn apart, but only after Criseyde has promised her lasting fidelity to Troilus. Convinced that she can outwit her father, she assures Troilus that she will return within ten days. But all does not fare as well as Criseyde hopes. Calkas has divined the fall of Troy, and in vain does Criseyde try to prevail upon him. Meanwhile, the artful Diomede endeavors to win her favor. With the arrival of the tenth day, Criseyde has despaired of ever seeing Troilus again, although she makes a noble velleity of sneaking from the camp that very night. In rapid succession Criseyde informs Diomede that she has no lover, that he may come to visit her on the following day, and that she does not know whether she will give him her love or not. Chaucer does not tell us how long it was before Criseyde yielded heart and soul to Diomede, but from
all indication it was within a short interval. Even so Chaucer will not condemn Criseyde. He feels sorry for her, just as Criseyde feels sorry for herself, for she has wronged the "gentlest" and "worthiest" that ever was. She will be true to Diomede at least. But the reader cannot help but feel that Diomede will hardly be true to her. All the while, Troilus, in bitter anguish, tries to believe that Criseyde will return to him. She does not. Troilus is killed by Achilles.

The complete story is hardly more than this, but the problem that it presents is an impressive one. How can one reconcile the action of Criseyde with her character? Is it possible that the charming and modest Criseyde, so much in love with Troilus, could so easily and so quickly betray him? Is she a probable character at all? If so, what is the real character of Criseyde? Is she an out-and-out wench? Is she an innocent but inexperienced girl, or a charming but terribly weak woman? These are questions that have been asked again and again down through the centuries.

These questions have a marked significance to the poem as a whole. If the character of Criseyde is artistically improbable, then the entire poem fails. Consistency of character and action is essential to the unity of any poem. Without this unity the very beauty of a literary work is impaired—rather, is non-existent—for beauty is only to be found
in order and unity. This is evident. If the change in Criseyde is an artistically improbable one, then Chaucer has created two Criseyde's, not one; and the reader cannot accept such a thing. Under such a supposition, Chaucer must be reprehended, and the artistic value of the entire poem called in question.

The problem is also important in so far as only a true analysis of Criseyde's character shows her as Chaucer meant her to be—an embodiment of the transitoriness and fallacy of human happiness. Criseyde is not merely the heroine of Chaucer's art. She is the personification of the irrational courtly code of love, and as such is the object of the poet's sympathetic irony. From the very first Troilus stands in contempt of all that love demands. "O veray foole!" he calls the lovers, "nyce and blynde be ye."\(^1\) Even when Troilus is won over to the courtly system, the reader is still left with the impression that all is not well. As Professor Kittredge has so well observed, "there are no happy lovers in the story."\(^2\) Pandarus never fared well in love, and as one may well believe, he himself is the one who "has served his lady for twenty years without so much as a kiss."\(^3\) OEnone has been deserted by Paris, Helen is the victim

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2 G. L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, Cambridge, 1939, 142.

of her own conscience and the cause of the Trojan turmoil. Criseyde betrays Troilus, and undoubtedly she will be forsaken by Diomede. But most significant of all is Chaucer's parting admonition:

O younge fresshe folkes, he or she,
In which that love up growth with youre age,
Repeyret hom fro worldly vanyte,
And of youre herte up casteth the visage
To thilke god that after his ymage
Yow made, and thynketh al nya but a faire
This world, that passeth soone as floures faire.4

As a result, the problem before us in a manifold one. It must be determined whether Criseyde is a probable character at all; and if she is, just what that character is in the light of her symbolic importance.

Numerous solutions have been offered, but it will suffice here to enumerate the four basic ones. The first is simply that Criseyde is a scheming adventuress from start to finish. Albert S. Cook5 holds this opinion. Howard Rollin Patch would approximate it in so far as he maintains that Criseyde sinned by loving Troilus. Moreover, Mr. Patch "can not help wondering whether in Troilus's lack of real stamina (to draw it mild), the lack of forthright masculinity, she [Criseyde] was left a little unsatisfied, readier perhaps to move elsewhere."

4 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, V, 1835-41.
5 "Character of Criseyde," PMLA, 22 (1907), 531.
6 On Rereading Chaucer, Cambridge, 1939, 89.
The second solution to the problem is that Criseyde is completely innocent of all guilt, basely tricked first by Pandarus and later by Diomede. She is a mere victim of circumstances, without fault of character. This opinion is held by Joseph S. Graydon. It is unique, and bears some mention here. According to Graydon, Troilus is to blame for Criseyde's desertion, for Troilus was betrayed only after he had divulged their secret love to Cassandra, a grievous fault against the courtly code. Under such circumstances, it was impossible for Criseyde to return to Troy. Had Troilus trusted Criseyde more and not exacted of her a promise of return within ten days, all would have gone well. "The purpose" of his study, says Graydon, "is to show that her desertion of Troilus is justified and that the comments on her conduct and appraisals of her character are generally unintelligent or unfair." 

The third solution is that Criseyde is artistically inconsistent, innocent and charming in the first four books but rapidly deteriorating in the last book beyond all reasonable expectation. This opinion is held explicitly by Emile Legouis


8 Ibid., J. Milton French has a penetrating criticism of Mr. Graydon's opinion in the same volume, 1246-51.
and Marchette Chute; implicitly by Arthur Mizener. 9

Unfortunately, the more modest Criseyde appears at the beginning of the poem, the more inexplicable is her treachery... Not only has he [Chaucer] failed to give her betrayal an appearance of truth, but he has bestowed on the young widow a maiden's candour, thus rendering the character at once charming and inconsistent. 10

Such is the opinion of Professor Lagouia. Marchette Chute would have us believe that as soon as Diomede "begins to press her a little... suddenly, Chaucer's exact and loving characterization of his heroine falls apart." 11 Arthur Mizener will not even start with the assumption "that Chaucer was doing his best to create a unified character in the modern sense of the phrase." 12 To him there is no causal connection between what Criseyde is and what she does. "Chaucer's poem... offers... no evidence that he intended Criseyde's unfaithfulness to appear either the cause of a change, or the consequence of an established vice, in the character he presents to us." 13 These three opinions, direct negations of the thesis that will be

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10 Emile Legouis, Geoffrey Chaucer, 127.


13 Ibid., 69.
proposed in these pages, will be treated in a later chapter.

The final solution to the problem is that there is no improbability in the character of Criseyde. She is "amorous, gentle, affectionate, and charming altogether, but fatally impressionable and yielding." This is the opinion of George L. Kittredge, Robert K. Root, and Percy Van Dyke Shelly. It is the opinion of the author of this thesis and may be stated thus: the character and action of Criseyde as presented in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde are artistically probable and consistently motivated throughout the poem.

"Character" is a word of many meanings. It's origin is from the Greek charakter signifying an instrument for marking, which in turn comes from the verb charassein meaning to make sharp or to engrave. It can easily be seen how it came to mean a sign or token placed upon an object as an indication of some special fact, as ownership or origin, and how from this it acquired its derived meanings of a quality or attribute. In this final sense "character" is the sum total "of distinctive

14 George L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, 135
mental and moral qualities belonging to an individual." To determine what these qualities are, it is necessary first of all to concentrate on what the individual does. It is not what a man says that indicates his true character, but what he does, for many "fail to act up to their declared principles." "Hence," continues Professor Allers, "one has always stressed the deeds of a man as an index of his disposition, his real thoughts—in fact what is ordinarily called his 'character.'" By "deeds" Allers includes "all movements, gestures, expressions, looks, postures, and lineaments, his behavior in various situations. In short, all the factors that go to make up the general term 'conduct'." He does not include involuntary forms of behavior as instincts and motor responses. However, even these do point to certain characteristics, although not with the certitude that voluntary actions do. With few exceptions,

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16 Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd ed., unabridged, Springfield, Mass., U.S.A., 1950. (Edited by W. A. Neilson, T. A. Knott., P. W. Carhart.) We have taken the liberty of changing the definition of Webster's New International, which reads: "the aggregate of distinctive..." As Professor Allers points out, character "is a unity and a whole, not a mere aggregate..." Cf. The Psychology of Character, 8.


18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.
voluntary actions, even a single act, is indicative of character. The few exceptions, the errors we make about persons are due to our own inability to grasp the sum total of traits that apply to a given individual. "An individual character, peculiar to one person and him alone, can hardly be physiognostically deduced. Furthermore, any number of individual traits do not make up character . . ."21 We have "rather been made aware of a type of character that contains something common to the characters of other men, and enables us to classify it and bring it into a group as if it were."22 Hence, there is a great difference between what is "characteristic" of a person and what is "individual."

In art, however, there is no need to make this distinction. One has to deal only with what is characteristic. The artist does not portray the real, concrete individual. To him the living, changing panorama of nature is denied. His is the sphere of the ideal, limited as it is to his own conception of reality. Aristotle has said that the artist imitates nature. By this he "meant that the poet works like nature, bringing into existence beings which actualize the potentialities of

21 Ibid., 8.
22 Ibid. Italics not in the original.
matter according to a plan, an order, a logic." He refashions nature "by infusing a new form, making a second nature, so to speak." It can be said that art has the power to transcend nature. By means of a new conception the artist builds for himself a new world of reality, augmenting the good or bad which he has seen in the old. In a word, he assimilates the reality before him, selects from it, transforms and arranges it into his ideal conception.

Accordingly, the task of characterizing Criseyde is considerably simplified. There will be no question of exploring the individual qualities of a real person, but rather the characteristic traits of an artist's creation.

Character is of two kinds, artistic, and what for want of a better word, we shall call psychological. The distinction is that already made—the ideal versus the real. As early as the time of Aristotle, the two were differentiated. Psychological character was the sum total of qualities belonging to a real individual or to an historical character, whereas artistic character was that predicated of a literary figure. The latter is "more philosophical" and "a higher thing." In other words,


it is that creation of the artist's mind which transcends existing nature. It is that form which the artist has selected from the multifarious, changing realities of the world before him.

Now both psychological and artistic character have a consistency and probability peculiar to their own natures. The artistic character must adhere more rigidly to the principles of cause and effect. A certain order and logic must predominate. The character may not say or do just anything, no matter how true to life these particular words or actions may be. He is the artist's concept, and that concept is one that must remain consistent with itself. Hence, in this sense, the probable "denotes what is normal and regular in its occurrence, the rule, not the exception." 25

So if the artist undertakes to portray what is impossible in the real order of things, he must maintain his conception. He must make the impossible seem probable. He effects this by sustaining a consistent fiction. For example, "Br'er Rabbit must not lose his power of articulate speech, Obernon must not forget the rules of faerie, the Brobdingnagians must not dwindle into mere men." 26 The reader will accept these imaginative impossibilities, but he will not bear with a viola-

25 Ibid., 166.
26 Victor M. Hamm, The Pattern of Criticism, 55.
Artistic probability is, of course, that which is attributed to Criseyde in this thesis. "As Cressida is at the beginning, such is she to the end; amorous, gentle, affectionate, and charming altogether, but fatally impressionable and yielding."27

27 George L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, 135.
CHAPTER II

ARTISTIC AND AESTHETIC RE-CREATION BY CHAUCER
FROM BOCCACCIO'S GRSEIDA

To understand the character of Criseyde it will be of paramount importance to consider first what Chaucer had in mind as he began his re-creation of Boccaccio's Il Filostrato. As Arthur Quiller Couch says, "If we would be critics, our first task consists in discovering what the author is trying to do." This is true especially in the case of Troilus and Criseyde, for so many factors must be borne in mind as one studies the character of Criseyde. Apart from the Chaucerian background—its general lines, its emphasis on fate and courtly love—Criseyde is unintelligible and improbable. Viewed in conjunction with it, she is generally understandable and essentially probable.

Chaucer's purpose was essentially that of medievalization. A comparison of the two texts shows that Chaucer began his process from the very first page. Boccaccio had dedicated Il Filostrato to his lady—"nobilissima donna," usually con-

sidered the same Fiammeta named in other writings of his, and
who is identified as Maria, a natural daughter of King Robert of
Naples.² Chaucer, in due classical and medieval style, dedicates
his poem to Tisiphone, one of the Furies.³ A few lines further,
for the space of four stanzas Chaucer prays to all lovers. He
asks that they in turn pray for both the successful in love and
the unsuccessful, and also for himself, that he may be able to
tell his story.⁴ This is the customary religious treatment of
courtly love which medieval writers made so much use of.
Boccaccio had made use of it too, but not so extensively nor so
liturgically. His entreaty was merely that he himself might
find love.⁵

At times, in this process of medievalization Chaucer
drops matter from Boccaccio's text. It was not in accord with
the courtly code for the lover to make light of love, nor to
play the young gallant among the ladies. His was to be a single
devotion to one lady whom he must unerringly serve, even if she

² Boccaccio, Il Filostrato, I, (stanzas) 1-5. Cf.
William M. Rossetti, Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde Compared
with Boccaccio's Filostrato, London, 1873, I.

³ Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, I, 6-7.

⁴ Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, I, 22-49

⁵ Boccaccio, Il Filostrato, I, 6 (stanza), ed.
Vincenzo Pernicone, Bari, 1937. (Unless otherwise indicated,
all references to Boccaccio will be taken from this edition.)
should despise his love. So when Chaucer reads in Boccaccio that Troilo has suffered woefully from women but not without some amorous enjoyment as well, he decides that this would never do and deletes it from his copy.6

More to Chaucer's liking is the section immediately after this. Boccaccio portrays the scoffing Troilo as unaware of the approaching dart of love.7 Chaucer fastens upon these lines and sees in them another opportunity to play poet of love. He writes the god of love into his text and pictures him extremely angry with proud Troilus. The god shows Troilus that his bow is not broken and hits the warrior suddenly with a dart of love.8 The picture is not a new one. Chaucer probably found it in the Romance of the Rose, the prototype of medieval poetry.

In the second book of Troilus and Criseyde a good number of similar medieval additions are found: an invocation to Cleo, an apology, and a description of May. The Muse is petitioned to help the poet "ryme wel this book,"9 and the reader is asked to "thank ne blame"

... if any word be lame;
For as myn auctour seyde, so sey I.10

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7 Boccaccio, Il Filostrato, I, 25.
8 Troilus and Criseyde, I, 206-210.
9 Cf. Troilus and Criseyde, II, 8-10.
The description of May is an exceedingly beautiful one, notable for its color and imagery,

In May, that moder is of monthes glade,
That fresshe floures, blewe, white, and rede
Ben quike agayn, that wynter dede made,
And ful of bawme is fletyng every mede;
Whan Phebus doth his bryghte bemes sprede
Right in the white Bole, it so bitidde,
As I shal synge, on Mayes day the thrydde.11

These are all typical medievalizations; none are found in Boccaccio.

In the third book there are the exempla of Midas and Crassus, the amplification of the approaching dawn, and the address to Night. The allusions to Midas and Crassus, coveters of goäd, are related simply and briefly. They have no counterpart in Boccaccio. The amplification of the love scene at dawn is interesting. Boccaccio merely states that "when, near day, they heard the cocks crow because of the rising dawn, the desire to be in one another's arms was kindled again."12 Chaucer pens a picturesque but verbose similarity:

11 Chaucer, Troilus and Crissyde, II, 50-56. Cf. also 64-70.

12 Il Filostrato, III, 42. Cf. R. K. Gordon's translation, The Story of Troilus, 63. (Whenever a translation of Boccaccio is given, it is taken from Gordon's edition and is cited in parenthesis.)
When that the cock, comune astrologer,
Gan on his brest to bote, and after crowe,
And Lucifer, the dayes messager,
Gan for to rise, and outhe hire streemes throws,
And estward roos, to hym that koude it knowe,
Fortuna Major, that unoon Criseyde,
With herte soor, to Troilus thus seyde:13

Criseyde then expresses her sorrow at the thought of parting,
addressing night itself as a hasty fugitive that will not allow
them to rest.14 This entire fourteen line address has no parallel
in Boccaccio.

In the fourth and fifth books are found accounts,
histories, and learned doctrines. The story is related that
Neptune and Apollo built the walls around Troy and then were
refused payment by King Laomedon.15 The future betrayal of
Antenor is told.16 The story of vengeful Diana and her monstrous
boar is recited, along with several tales of the brave Tydeus.17
Perhaps the most noticeable diversion from the text is in the
fourth book where Chaucer has Troilus expound on the Boethian
doctrine of free will.

13 Troilus and Crisseyde, III, 1415-1421.
14 Cf. Troilus and Crisseyde, III, 1429-1442.
15 Ibid., IV, 120-126.
16 Ibid., IV, 204-205.
17 Ibid., V, 1464-1519.
"For al that comth, comth by necessitee; 
Thus to be lorn, it is my destinee."18

Troilus proceeds for the space of seventeen stanzas to develop a learned philosophy of fate.

All these additions and subtractions bear out the fact that Chaucer had in mind a process of medievalization.19 The readers of medieval times enjoyed these little digressions into the fields of learning and lore, and at the same time lost none of their interest in the main story at hand. Chaucer satisfies their craving by delving into the wealth of material that lay at his finger tips.

Chaucer's process of re-creation and medievalization did not stop here. These were mere incidentals. The main portion of his work still lay before him. In accord with the over-all end in view, Criseyde is changed. In a sense she is medievalized. She is made the personification of the courtly code and all its qualities: Bialacoi, Shame, Fear, Danger, Malebouche. But the inference is misleading. Criseyde is not an accumulation of abstractions. She is as artistically real and consistently individual a person as any poet has ever attempted. Better to say simply that Criseyde is re-made. She

18 Ibid., IV, 958-959. Cf. also 960-1078.

19 The writer is indebted to C. S. Lewis's masterful work "What Chaucer Really Did to Il Filostrato," in Essays and Studies, 17, (1931), 56-75. A fuller treatment of this whole subject may be found there.
is entirely different from the heroine of _Il Filostrato_. She is of a different rank in society than Griseida. She is of a different moral stature than Griseida. She is Chaucer's own recreation—personable, individual, charming.

The first divergence from Boccaccio's heroine that meets the eye is found in Criseyde's social setting. Unlike Griseida, she has attendants to wait upon her. She mingles among the high social circles of Troy along with Hector, Paris, and Helen. Hector speaks of Criseyde with praise. He even attempts to prevent her exchange for Antenor. These and many other similar incidents form the social setting into which Chaucer casts his heroine. None of them are found in _Il Filostrato_.

Criseyde is also of a higher moral caliber than Griseida. Criseyde does not yield to Troilus's desires so quickly. In _Il Filostrato_ the outcome of Pandaro's first visit to Griseida is her actual consent to all that pertains to love. This is apparent from the joyful words of Pandaro, if not from those of Griseida herself. Well pleased with himself, Pandaro says to Troilo: "Comfort thee, brother, for I think I have

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20 Chaucer, _Troilus and Criseyde_, II, 78-84.
21 Ibid., 1453.
22 Ibid., IV, 176-217.
achieved much of thy great desire." Criseyde does not come to such a quick decision. She understands the situation perfectly, but she will agree to little more than a few brief moments of solace to the sick Troilus, and this only under pressure from Pandarus and a real fear that otherwise Troilus will slay himself.

Criseyde's soliloque scene after the departure of Pandarus is in many ways alike in both Boccaccio and Chaucer. Yet, Chaucer has analysed his own heroine well. Anything that departs from his conception of her character he drops or changes. It is enlightening to see how he does this. Whereas Boccaccio's Griseida starts with an appraisal of herself and her own beauty, Chaucer's Criseyde starts with the person of Troilus and his protective assets. Her appraisal of herself is not dropped, however, but relegated to a less conspicuous spot. Completely deleted are those passages in which Criseyde refers to any moral commandment, bringing Criseyde into complete accord with the courtly code. For instance, in *Il Filostrato* Griseida says:

"If perhaps virtue forbid this to me, yet, I shall be careful and shall keep my desire so secret that it will not be known that I have had love in my heart. . . . And to do as others do is no sin and can be blamed by none."  

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24 Ibid., 69-70 (47-48). Italics not in the original.
Chaucer rejects this passage. He will also pass over any reference that might characterize Criseyde as desperate for a man. In *Il Filostrato* Griseida says: "Each day my youth slips from me... Who will desire me if I grow old?" There is no such passage in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Most striking of all the changes that Chaucer has incorporated into Criseyde is the motivation upon which she bases first one decision, and then another. First, the two heroines are alike in wanting no part of a husband, but each has a different reason. Says Boccaccio's Griseida:

"Love that comes from such a friendship [one outside of marriage] is always more welcome to lovers... Water got by stealth is a far sweeter thing than wine possessed in abundance: so the hidden joy of love quite surpasses that of holding a husband in one's arms."26

We see here the out and out sensuousness of Boccaccio's heroine. On the other hand, the reason offered by Chaucer's Criseyde is merely utilitarian. No husband shall say to her "chek mat,"

"For either they ben ful of jalousie, Or maisterful, or loven novelrye."27

So it is that each heroine concludes that she will not marry, but neither one decides to renounce love altogether. Boccaccio's

26 Ibid., 73-74, (48).
heroine says: "Therefore welcome eagerly thy sweet lover, whose coming has assuredly been ordained for thee by God, and satisfy his hot desire."28 Again we see her sensuousness. She thinks only of satisfying "his hot desire." Chaucer will not have his Criseyde so absorbed in the sensual:

"Shal I nat love, in cas if that me lest? What pardieux! I am nat religious
And then that I myn herte sette at reste
Upon this knyght, that is the worthiaste,
And hope alway myn honour and my name,
Be alle right it may do me no shame."29

Chaucer has re-made Criseyde in many other ways too. The sensuous Griseida sees well that it is a deed "in itself wanton"30 that she is called upon to do. Chaucer passes this by completely. In similar manner, when Boccaccio's Griseida receives the letter from Troilo, she is entirely given over to the passion. "I must find time and place to quench this fire," she says. "Would that I were now in his sweet arms, held closely face to face."31 Chaucer's Criseyde reads the letter but says nothing. Chaucer does not allow her to play the wenches. Even in the final scenes of the poem he tempers the erring Criseyde. In Il Filostrato Diomede does not talk to Griseida on the way to the

28 Boccaccio, Il Filostrato, II, 74, (48).
29 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, II, 758-763.
30 Boccaccio, Il Filostrato, II, 75, (53).
31 Ibid., 117, (53-54).
Greek camp as he does in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Apparently, Chaucer wishes his Criseyde tempted more often before she falls. The first indications of the betrayal are put off. In Boccaccio Diomede makes his appearance on the fourth day after Griselda's departure from Troy; in Chaucer on the tenth. It is apparent from all this that Criseyde is not the same as Boccaccio's heroine. She is less sensuous, more a woman of moral character, but still fearful for her own security and good name.

Chaucer completely re-makes the hero of the poem too, but only in so far as he casts new light upon Criseyde. Only one point, however, will be mentioned here: Chaucer portrays his hero as much less trusting than his forerunner, Troilo. Undoubtedly, it is Chaucer's idea to win more sympathy for Criseyde in this way. In *Il Filostrato* it is Griseida who first mentions being true to one another. "And I pray thee," she says, "while I am far away, let not thyself be caught by delight in any lady or by strange desire."32 This did not satisfy Chaucer. He has Troilus broach the question of fidelity.

"Yet shal ek sen, youre fader shal yow glose To ben a wif . . ."33

And she will see so many lusty knights among the Greeks and all

32 Ibid., IV, 162, (53-54).

33 Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, IV, 1471-1472; 1485-1491.
so ready to please her that she will forget about Troilus. This is the atmosphere of the closing scene of the fourth book; Troilus beseeching Criseyde not to leave him, to be true to him; Criseyde promising that she will return in ten days. Chaucer's Criseyde trusts Troilus; Chaucer's Troilus does not trust Criseyde. Chaucer finds every excuse he can for Criseyde's betrayal. He wins all the sympathy he can for his tragic heroine.

With the character of his hero and heroine re-fashioned, Chaucer proceeds to the next factor in his process—the courtly code. The Amour Courtois was a code of love-principles adhered to by the knights and ladies of medieval times. Writers dispute whether it was a mere literary device or a real courtly standard, but this is of no significance to this paper.34 As a system, it is comparable to that of the feudal lords and vassals, the lady taking the place of the lord and her lover that of vassal. Hence, the entire ritual has been described as a "feudalization of love."35 The lover should be humble, courteous, and submissive to his lady. Her slightest wish is his command. But the lady, although she may not scorn her suitor, should nevertheless be cold, distant, even cruel. She bides her time, waiting to

34 Cf. George L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, 130.
35 Alfred Jeanroy, La Poesie lyrique des troubadours, Toulouse, 1936, I, 91.
see whether her knight possesses praiseworthy character, whether he is honorable and prudent.\textsuperscript{36} Once he has proved himself such, she may return his love. But not in marriage. Marriage has no place in the code. The affection between husband and wife is not that of love. Consequently, the lady, even if she be married, must look elsewhere for a lover. The first rule of the code reads: "Marriage is no real excuse for not loving."\textsuperscript{37} But if adultery is permitted by the code, infidelity is not. "No one can be bound by a double love."\textsuperscript{38} In fact, an "excess of passion is a bar to love . . ."\textsuperscript{39} The man who lusts after every woman he sees can in no way participate in true love. The lover who is unfaithful "renders himself wholly unworthy of his former love . . ."\textsuperscript{40} The lady is instructed to forbid him all future embraces and to have nothing further to do with him.

Quite naturally secrecy has a very definite part in the code. Rule thirteen tells the lover that "when made public love rarely endures."\textsuperscript{41} The reason alleged is the loss of the

\begin{verbatim}
\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}
37 Ibid., II, 8 (164).
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., I, 6 (33).
40 Ibid., II, 6 (159).
41 Ibid., II, 8 (185).
\end{verbatim}
lover's reputation. Even if the love should endure, "it cannot indulge in its former solaces, because when the girl's chaperone hears the rumors, she becomes suspicious and watches her more carefully and gives her no opportunities to talk ... " Caution is necessary if the lovers are to preserve their love.

As a result, the code is not reconcilable with Christian ethics and was never thought to be so. Yet, it would be true to say that although Chaucer and others of the period realized only too well that the courtly code was incompatible with Christianity, the characters portrayed did not. They, as it were, abstract from the whole question of morality. Typical are the words of Andreas Cappelanus: "Can that offend great Nature's God which Nature's self inspires?" And the lady's reply in the same conversation is also revealing: "Leaving the religious side of the question out for a moment ... " So in the whole of Troilus and Criseyde there is no mention by any of the characters of any Christian principles of morality. Honor, shame, and fear are factors throughout, that is true, but this is merely part of the courtly code. Not till Troilus has been killed and has winged his way heavenward, does Chaucer interject to speak of the follies of love and merits of following Christ. This is

42 Ibid., I, 6 (34).
43 Andreas Capellanus, De Arte Honeste Amandi, I, 6, b.
44 Troilus and Criseyde, V, 1807-1869.
following in the steps of true courtly fashion. Even Andreas Capellanus⁴⁵ in his authoritative book on love ends with a rejection of love and a plea to abide by the Christian commandments in these matters. How the medieval poets could advocate two irreconcilable doctrines of love seems unintelligible. However, Professor Denomy⁴⁶ points out that the doctrine of the Double Truth was prevalent in Chaucer's time. According to this doctrine, courtly love was virtuous and ennobling on the natural plane; but reprehensible and mortally sinful on the supernatural plane. It taught that both planes were expressive of truth.⁴⁷ False as the doctrine was, authors did make use of it in their writings.

Such was the courtly code as Chaucer knew it. But this was not the way he found it in Boccaccio. Il Filostrato clearly lacked many of the ornaments of the code. As already indicated, the invocation to his lady in Book I did not please Chaucer.⁴⁸ Nor did the absence of any invocation at all in the remaining books. The thought of Troilo's past loves was also abhorrent to

⁴⁵ Andreas Capellanus, De Arte Honeste Amandi, III, (187-212).


⁴⁷ For a fuller explanation see pages 38-39 of Denomy.

⁴⁸ See pages 14-15 of this thesis.
Chaucer, as was the meager treatment of Troilo being struck by the dart of love. Chaucer improved upon these matters, rewriting most of *Il Filostrato*. Troilus becomes more and more the devotee of the code. His advances toward Criseyde are more hesitant and fearful. Sickness of heart and the terrible thought of losing Criseyde devour the poor lover. His own unworthiness is the worst part of it all, and Troilus is convinced that Criseyde will have no pity on him. Troilo's hesitation appears to be only due to the relationship between Pandaro and Griseida. Similarly, Criseyde is much more the personification of the code than is Boccaccio's heroine. She accepts Troilus as her servant. She is much slower than Griseida in admitting Troilus to her love. She is much more concerned about the secrecy of their affair and her own honor. The rules of the code were uppermost in the minds of both Troilus and Criseyde.

The final element in Chaucer's process of re-creation and medievalization is fate. In medieval times fate and tragedy took a different form. The reader in modern times is accustomed

49 See page 15 of this thesis.
50 See pages 15-16 of this thesis.
to the character tragedies of Shakespeare and others. The hero, although predominately good and worthy of our sympathy, labors under some fault, which when combined with certain circumstances brings about his downfall. The emphasis lies on the hero himself and his fault, not on fate and the circumstances surrounding him. Through the course of the plot this fault grows and grows till it has such a grasp on the hero as to necessitate his doom. Witness Othello, so gullible on the one hand and so suspicious on the other. His mounting suspicion leads him to murder his faithful Desdemona. Macbeth is another example. His passion for power knows no bounds. He kills again and again, and finally brings about his own destruction.

But medieval tragedy is of a different vein. Here the emphasis lies in fate, not character. All men are subject to this fate, whether they be innocent or not. It is true that a man in medieval times "did not 'believe in' Fortune any more than one believed in the goddess Venus; but Fortune, like Venus, was used to express a kind of behavior to which almost everyone is subject."54 Like a great sea, fate carries the voyager to his destiny. Whereas in Elizabethan tragedy the fault of the hero predominates and fate is, as it were, the accomplice; in medieval tragedy fate is foremost and the fault of the hero is

secondary. The *hamartia* does not grow and develop in the course of the play; it is stationary. Fate grows.

None the less, freedom of choice remains. Not till one turns to the "uncertain and transitory rewards of the world," is he subject "to their fluctuations."⁵⁵ Not till the voyager sets his heart upon some inordinate affection, is he tossed and buffeted by the waves of fate. While "he remains confident in providence" and in the reasonableness of creation, he cannot be affected by adversity ('evil' fortune) nor by prosperity ('good' fortune)... Fortune can neither elevate nor cast down the virtuous man..."⁵⁶ But once the hero turns to wealth, power, or pleasure, he loses his former freedom—a freedom sustained only by reason—and now is bound by the whims of fate.⁵⁷ He rises and falls with raging fortune, rushing headlong to his doom. This is called the Boethian or medieval concept of tragedy.

*Troilus and Criseyde*, a real medieval tragedy, is true to form. Fate bears a preponderant position. The entire plot is taken from the fatalistic Greek mythology. As Robertson points out,

*Troilus* subjects himself to Fortune in Book I by submitting to the physical attractions of Criseyde, rises to the false heaven of Fortune's favor in Books II and III, and finally

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⁵⁵ Ibid., 5.


⁵⁷ Cf. Boethius, *De Consolatione*, V, Pr.2.
descends to a tropological Hell in Books IV and V. By the close of Book III, he has been distracted by 'good' fortune to the extent that he has no freedom left with which to avoid the ensuing adversities. He reaches a point where there is 'no remedie.' His doom thus becomes a matter of destiny, or providence, since he loses the power to transcend Fortune. Indeed, it is the function of the 'digression' on free will in Book IV to make this point clear and emphatic.\(^5^8\)

As usual, Chaucer has found the beginnings of all this in Boccaccio. Fate and fortune play a part in Il Filostrato, although a minor and more modern one than is found in Troilus and Criseyde. Chaucer has taken Boccaccio's fatalistic framework, developed it throughout the whole of his work, enlarging, inserting, and re-emphasizing according to the Boethian concept.

Once Troilus has allowed himself to be overcome by the attractions of Criseyde, he finds that it is his "destiny"\(^5^9\) to love, for the gods wish it. He finds that "Fortune" is his "foe,"\(^6^0\) and he prays to the "fatal sisters" to help him—the fatal sisters who have spun out "the thread of his fate before any earthly cloth had been shaped to cover his body."\(^6^1\) Yet, to no avail. Once "high upon the wheel . . . of Fortune,"\(^6^2\) now turned to the depths of woe.

\(^5^8\) Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," ELH, 19, 1, 13.
\(^5^9\) Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, I, 519-520.
\(^6^0\) Ibid., I, 837.
\(^6^1\) Ibid., III, 733-775. R. K. Root's edition of Troilus and Criseyde, 478, 733-735.
\(^6^2\) Ibid., IV., 323-324.
"Allas, Fortune, if that my lif in joie
Displeased hadde unto thi foule envye,
Why ne haddestow my fader, kyng of Troye,
Byraft the lif, or don my brethren dye,
Or slayn my self, that thus compleyne and crye,
I combre-world, that may of no thyng serve,
But alwey dye, and neve fulli sterve."63

From sorrow Troilus turns to despair.

"For al that comth, comth by necessitee;
Thus to be lorn, it is my destinee."64

There follows Troilus's famous discussion of fate and free will. His conclusion is one of extreme fatalism.

Crisseyde sees this foreboding fate too. "But swich is love, and ek myn aventure,"65 she says in her famous soliloquy.

Fortune brings her a lover, and fortune causes the storm which keeps her overnight at Pandarus's house. "Allas," says Crisseyde, "I woful wrecche and infortuned wight" am "born in corsed constellacioun."66

Chaucer, too, sees this terrible necessity of things. He tells us that Troilus's joy is short-lived, "Thanks be to Fortune." He pictures fortune laughing at us as she throws us from her ever-turning wheel:

63 Ibid., IV, 274-280.
64 Ibid., IV, 958-959. Cf. also 960-1078.
65 Ibid., II, 742.
66 Ibid., IV, 743-745.
But al to litel, weylawe the whyle,  
Lasteth swich joie, ythonked be Fortune,  
That semeth trewest whan she wol bygyle,  
And kan to fooles so hire song entune,  
That she hem hent and blent, traitour commune;  
And whan a wight is from hire whiel ythrowe,  
Than laugheth she, and maketh hym a mowe.67

He indicates that the Parcae are to be the executioners as the "fatal destiny"68 approaches. For Chaucer, the end of it all will be such as might be thought of "Jove, Appolo, of Mars, of swich rascaille!"69

Thus the reader sees that Chaucer's use of fate and fortune in Troilus and Criseyde is extensive, going far beyond the earlier work of Boccaccio. Moreover, it is of a nature all its own—Boethian and medieval to the core.

Chaucer's re-creation of Il Filostrato was extensive, including fate, courtly love, the character of Criseyde, and even the very style of the poem itself. His process was essentially that of medievalization. To the reader Chaucer's intentions are clear. He does not accept Il Filostrato as it is, but re-works it in his own mind till it becomes the work of Geoffrey Chaucer, English poet. He re-fashions the character of his

67 Ibid., IV, 1-7.
68 Ibid., V, 1-4.
69 Ibid., V, 1853.
heroine, but in doing so, he sees the necessity of adapting the background into which she is cast. Only when the circumstances surrounding her are proportionately stressed does Griseyde appear as artistically probable. With these concepts understood, an approach to the immediate problem can be made.
CHAPTER III

DETAILED ANALYSIS OF CRISEYDE IN CHAUCER

In any study of the character of Criseyde it is important to notice that the beautiful widow is a complex figure. She is no simple "type" as is found in much of medieval literature. Many are her seeming inconsistencies, yet she is not inconsistent. Paradoxical as it may seem, she is what every true to life portrayal of human nature is, a mingling of the good and the bad. As has been so aptly said, "There is one Cressida, not two; or rather, there are two in one,—not a type, but an individual, unified by the interplay of her very contradictions." Consequently, in analyzing her character one must be careful that in abstracting qualities from her he does not lose the integrated Criseyde.

One's first impression of Criseyde is that of a grave and dignified widow. She stands in the crowded temple of Pallas Athene paying her services to that deity. Her attire is black. She seems to stand alone, apart from the rest. Unknown to her, the roving eye of Troilus catches her in its orbit. It pauses;

1. G. L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, 135.

36
then stops. Criseyde's beauty has captured the heart of the warrior. She appears to him "so fair and goodly." 2 Undoubtedly, she enjoys "Honour, estat, and wommanly noblesse." 3 Even now as Troilus stands gazing upon this beauty, she turns and looks his way as if to say: "What? may I nat stonden here?" 4 No one may tell Criseyde where to stand. She may choose the last place of her own accord, but that is her doing.

Apparently Troilus is overwhelmed with Criseyde's stately presence. He returns to his home and throws himself upon his bed, quite despairing of ever winning her favor. Pandarus works upon him, trying to learn the cause of Troilus's affliction. At last Pandarus finds it is a woman. But her name? Troilus will not reveal it, for she "nyl to noon swich wrecche as I ben wonne." 5 Of course, much of this weeping and bashfulness is part of the courtly code for lovers, but still it does show that Troilus thought of Criseyde as "sobre" and "estatlich." 6

In Criseyde's first real scene we find her being read

2 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, I, 277.
3 Ibid., I, 287.
4 Ibid., I, 292.
5 Ibid., I, 777.
6 Ibid., Cf. V, 820 and 823.
to by her attendants. The book concerns the siege of Thebes. She is listening attentively when Pandaruras is ushered in. The boisterous and impetuous Pandaruras is immediately ordering her around.

"Do wey youre wympel, and shewe youre face bare; Do wey youre book, rys up and lat us daunce . . . ."7

But Criseyde exercises a restraining hand.

"I, god forbedel" quod she, "be ye mad? Is that a widewes life, so god yow save? By god, ye maken me ryght sore adrad, Ye ben so wylde; it semeth as ye rave. It satte me wel bet ay in a cave To bidde, and rede on holy seyntes lyves; Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves."8

Criseyde will have none of this youthful bustle. She is a grave and stately widow. Of course, we are not to believe that Criseyde is completely serious here; for instance, when she says it would become her more to bide her time in a cave and read the holy saints lives, she is evidently trying to be humorous. But the fact is that she does not dance with Pandaruras, and she does maintain a certain calmness and sobriety.

The careful way that Criseyde considers the pros and cons of Troilus's friendship also shows the serious side of her character.9 She realizes that he is an influential young man,

7 Ibid., II, 110-111.
8 Ibid., II, 113-119.
9 Ibid., Cf. II, 703-808.
that the whole future may depend on how she treats him. She reviews his virtues and her own beauty. She rules marriage out for she loves her own liberty. She can love him anyway. But then the thought comes to her of the loss of her liberty even if she is merely his friend. Besides, there are so many other disadvantages in the whole idea. At length, Criseyde gives up without coming to a conclusion, but her serious attack on the whole situation shows she is more than just a giddy young girl.

Criseyde maintains this serious air throughout the poem. When confronted with the reality of losing Troilus in the fourth book, she is at once sorrowful and yet composed. She alone has a plan. Impractical as it is, it is at least a plan. Troilus has nothing of the kind to offer, nor has Pandarus. Even after her plan has failed, Criseyde still approaches the problem with a serious vein. She weighs the prospects of slipping back to Troy at night. She considers the words of Diomede, his offer of friendship, and her need of someone to turn to. She reflects on the peril of Troy. She comes to a decision—at least, as much of a decision as she ever comes to. Certainly, no one can accuse Criseyde of being silly or undignified.

As serious as Criseyde is, she is never sombre or sullen. From the very first moment that we are introduced to her, she is joyful and gracious. "Ey, uncle, now welcome
iwys,\textsuperscript{10} are her first words, and she rises quickly to take him by the hand. Pandarus asks about the book:

"Is it of love? O, som good ye me leere!"
"Uncle," quod she, "youre maistresse is nat here."\textsuperscript{11}

Criseyde bandies fun for fun. The two of them have a hearty laugh. Pandarus then asks her to dance, and the reader has seen Criseyde's subtle humor at this. At Pandarus's second visit Criseyde greets him at the door. "What brings you here?" she asks.

"Tell us youre joly wo and youre penaunce;
How ferforth be ye put in loves daunce?"
Pandarus answers that he is not very far along at all in love's dance: "By god," quod he, "I hoppe alwey byhynde."\textsuperscript{12} Criseyde laughs at this. In fact, Criseyde seems to be continually laughing at Pandarus. Impetuous Pandarus insists that Criseyde write to Troilus. "I nyl no lettre write," Criseyde tells him. "No? than wol I," quod he, "so ye endite." At which Criseyde laughs and says merely, "go we dyne."\textsuperscript{13}

Pandarus now proceeds to drag out all his old jokes,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} Ibid., II, 87.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid., II, 97-98.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Ibid., II, 1105-1106; 1107.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., II, 1161-1163.
\end{itemize}
and before long, as Chaucer puts it, he has Criseyde dying of laughter.14 At this point Criseyde asks to be excused. The truth of it is that she wishes to read a letter from Troilus without Pandarus seeing her. As she comes back, Pandarus is standing with his back to her. Criseyde tip-toes up behind him and snatches his hand: "... ye were caught or that ye wiste." Pandarus makes an appropriate retort: "... do what yow liste."15 And their pleasant jocularity goes on.

Criseyde finally decides to write to Troilus. She will do so "as his suster."16 We see here her usual gracious manner. As long as Troilus abides by the courtly rules, Criseyde will be the picture of courtesy. This is her one question later when brought before the sick Troilus. What are his intentions? When Troilus avows that it is to serve her,

With that she gan hire eyen on hym caste
Ful esily, and ful debonairly.17

Later, when asked by Pandarus to stay over-night at his house, Criseyde decides that it is better

14 [Ibid., Cf. II, 1169.]
15 [Ibid., II, 1182; 1183.]
16 [Ibid., II, 1224.]
17 [Ibid., III, 156-157.]
... graunte it gladly with a frendes chere,  
And have a thonk, as grucohe and thanne abide. 18

Criseyde could have made a disturbance over staying, but instead she decides it is better to stay gladly than begrudgingly. Of course, Criseyde's manner—her hesitancy about staying—is all part of the courtly code. Criseyde knows that Troilus is probably near at hand, and she wishes to stay. Nevertheless, one cannot deny her a certain graciousness of character even amid this deceptive conventionality. The courtly rules call for the lady to be cold and distant, even cruel.

When Criseyde has left Troy, she is neither cold nor distant—certainly not to Diomede, nor to Troilus either. Towards Diomede Criseyde is gracious from the very beginning. She thanks him for his trouble and his good cheer. She accepts his friendship, and she tells him that she will trust and even try to please him. 19 On the tenth day after her departure from Troy when Diomede comes to see her, she offers him spices and wine, and she tells him he may come to see her on the next day or for that matter whenever he wishes. 20

Nor will she be ungracious to Troilus even now. Twice

18 Ibid., III, 642-643.
19 Ibid., Cf. V, 183-189.
20 Ibid., Cf. V, 852; 995-997.
She writes to him, and although the letters show that she is no longer enraptured in his love, they do maintain a friendly warmth. Criseyde asks for his friendship, and she assures him of hers.\(^\text{21}\) She need not have written these letters, but she will not treat him unkindly even though she has betrayed him.

In remarking on Criseyde's joyous graciousness, we have already had occasion to see her quick-witted, jesting character. She is every bit a match for the loquacious and plotting Pandar dus. At Pandar us's first quip about the book she is reading, Criseyde has a quick retort: "Uncle, you're maistresse is not here."\(^\text{22}\) Nor will she dance with Pandar us, for a widow can have none of this.\(^\text{23}\) The repartee continues through much of the second book, Criseyde all the while on her guard. Pandar us pretends he would tell her some bit of news, and Criseyde is extremely curious. Never before has she desired to know anything as she does now, but she will not be out-witted. She can play the game too:

"Now, uncle myn, I nyl yow nat displese, Nor axen moore that may do yow disese."\(^\text{24}\)

\(^{21}\) Ibid., Cf. V, 1622-1624.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., Cf. II, 97-98.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., Cf. II, 110-114.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., II, 146-147.
Crisseyde pretends she is uninterested, and the topic of conversation is changed. Later when the conversation returns to the same subject and Pandarus reveals to her that the King's son wishes her friendship, Crisseyde is on her guard:

"I shal felen what he mene, ywis."
"Now, em," quod she, "what wolde ye devise?
What is youre rede I sholde don of this?"

What Crisseyde suspects is true. Troilus would have her complete love.

In Crisseyde's soliloquy scene we have the most telling disclosure of her sagacity. She carefully weighs the prospects of Troilus's love—the advantages and the disadvantages. Crisseyde is not one who just falls in love. In this she differs from Troilus. She always ponders carefully just what will be the outcome of anything she involves herself in.

Evidently then Crisseyde is in no way fooled by Pandarus. She realizes just what the situation is and just what Pandarus and Troilus are seeking. Very likely she knows that Troilus will be at Deiphbeus's house despite what Chaucer tells us. Without a doubt she later knows that Troilus will be at Pandarus's house despite what Pandarus tells her. Crisseyde

26 Ibid., Cf. II, 703-808.
27 Ibid., II, 1562: Come ek Crisseyde, al innocent of this.
is not tricked into submission. She shows us from the very beginning that she is well aware of the issues at stake:

"What shal I doon? to what fyn lyve I thus? Shal I nat love, in cas if that me lestye?" 28

This is before she has ever met Troilus. Later when invited by Pandarus to have dinner at his house, Criseyde laughs, makes excuse, and finally asks whether Troilus will be there.

At which she laugh, and gan hire faste excuse, And seyde: "it reyneth; lo, how sholde I gon?"

... . . . . . . . .

And she agayne gan to hym for to rowne, And axed hym if Troilus were there. 29

Pandarus of course denies that Troilus will be there, alleging that he is out of town. But he further adds:

"nece, I pose that he were, Yow thruste nevere han the more fere; For rather than men sholde hym ther aspie, Me were levere a thousand fold to dy." 30

In other words, Troilus will be there, but even so Criseyde should not worry. No one will see them. It is all very clear to Criseyde. Later when Troilus calls upon her to yield to him, she tells him that she knew he would be at Pandarus's:

"Ne hadde I or now, my swete herte deer, Ben yolde, iwy, I were now nat here." 31

28 Ibid., II, 757-758.
29 Ibid., III, 561-562; 568-569.
30 Ibid., III, 571-574.
31 Ibid., III, 1210-1211.
It is now clear that Criseyde has been aware of the situation from the very start. According to the courtly rules she has been obliged to prove her lover. She has been obliged to protect her honor. But in the courtly code honor means nothing more than secrecy. Consequently, once Criseyde is assured of this she yields to Troilus.

Criseyde's forethought does not desert her when she leaves Troy. Despite her great sorrow and misery, she approaches the problem in the same thoughtful way that she has done before. Just as she once considered the advantages of Troilus's love, so now she considers the advantages of Diomede's love.32 The dangers of returning to Troy seem too great for her. The city may fall at any time. Criseyde decides to stay.

Besides being "wys" and "goodly of speche," Criseyde is also a very curious young woman. This is evident from her contest with Pandarus. Criseyde must find out what he is concealing from her.

For nevere, sith the tyme that she was born,
To knowe thyng desired she so faste.33
Again and again she asks Pandarus to say on.

32 Ibid., Cf. V, 1021-1029.
33 Ibid., II, 143-144.
"For, whether it be wel or be amys, 
Sey on; let me nat in this feere dwelle." 34

Later, when Pandarus brings her Troilus's letter, she slips away from Pandarus to get a glimpse of it. 35 Even when she is overwhelmed with sorrow at the loss of Troilus, she seems slightly curious about Diomede. Whether virtue or fault, Criseyde possesses this trait so common to her sex.

Criseyde shows her femininity in other ways too. She is tenderness itself; she is compassion personified. After much bickering back and forth over what Pandarus is going to tell her and then is not going to tell her, Criseyde fears she has offended him. "Say what you please," she says and she kisses him. 36 The first time she meets Troilus, she "hym in armes took, and gan hym kisse." 37 Of course, a long conversation has taken place first in which Troilus assures her that he means well, but Criseyde is certainly very affectionate no matter what the circumstances. This is also the scene in which she casts her eye on him "ful esily, and ful debonairly." 38 Apparently, Criseyde

34 Ibid., II, 313-314.
35 Ibid., II, 1174-1176.
36 Ibid., II, 249-250.
37 Ibid., III, 182.
38 Ibid., III, 156.
is giving her consent to all that follows.

The love scene itself is one unmatched in tenderness and compassion. No sooner is Troilus let in to Criseyde's bedroom than he faints. Criseyde is all affection.

"Iwys, my dere herte, I am nat wroth,
Have here my trouthe, and many another goth;
Now speke to me, for it am I Criseyde." 39

She kisses Troilus again and again, and finally brings him to. From this point on, Troilus and Criseyde are in each other's embrace.

The same is true at their first meeting after the agreement of exchange. Criseyde swoons in Troilus's arms, and Troilus believes her dead. He is about to kill himself when Criseyde regains consciousness. She sees Troilus's sword and learns of his intent. She avows that she too would have killed herself. The two then proceed to spend the night consoling and compassionating one another.

Criseyde displays the same tenderness and compassion after she has left Troy. If there is any Greek on whom she has pity, it is Diomede. She tells him this:

"If that I sholde of any Grek han routhe,
It sholde be youre selven, by my trouthe." 40

39 Ibid., III, 1110-1112.

40 Ibid., V, 1000-1001.
When she hears of Troilus's being wounded, she wept "many a teere."\textsuperscript{41} She is sorry that she has

"falsed oon, the gentileste
That evere was, and oon the worthieste."\textsuperscript{42}

She asks Troilus's friendship even though she has betrayed him.\textsuperscript{43} Criseyde will ever be "tendre-herted" and full of "pite."

Chaucer also tells us that Criseyde is "charitable" and "ek symple."\textsuperscript{44} By this we interpret him to mean that his heroine is amorous and natural in her feminine traits. We have treated of the former to some lengths already. At times Criseyde gives the impression that she is genuinely charitable, as for instance when she tells Pandarus she will try to restrain her tears in Troilus's sight and attempt to console him if possible.\textsuperscript{45}

As also when she discloses to Pandarus that Troilus's sorrow means more to her than her own, and that she loves him more than he does himself:

"But yit to me his sorwe is muche more,
That love hym bet than he hym self, I gesse."\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., V, 1056-1057.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., V, 1621-1622.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., V, 820-826.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., IV, 939-945.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., IV, 899-900.
But these are mere protestations, as also is her allegation to follow Troilus to death. The over-all impression that Criseyde leaves is one of self-interest. She has a strong emotional love for Troilus and Pandarus, but a very great love for herself too. As much as she may try, Criseyde can only love as her nature permits her—a nature that is affectionate but at the same time selfish. She considers the merits of Troilus's love before ever having met him. She takes him into her service at their first meeting. She yields to him but a short time after. She has found it to her advantage and her pleasure to love Troilus; so she does. Chaucer has a remark or two on this himself. He seems to think that he can avoid criticism on this point by a bit of name-calling:

Now myghte som envious jangle thus:
"This was a sodeyn love; how myghte it be
That she so lightly loved Troilus
Right for the first syghte, ye parde?"
Now whoso seith so, mot he nevere ythe;
For every thyng, a gymnyngh hath it nede
Or al be wrought, withouten any dred.\(^47\)

Or perhaps Chaucer has his tongue in his cheek at this point.

Certainly Criseyde merits this criticism after she has left Troy. As she considers whether she will return or not, the center of her deliberation is Criseyde.

Retorryng in hire soule ay up and down
The wordes of this sodeyn Diomede,
His grete estat, and peril of the town,

\(^{47}\) Ibid., II, 666-672.
And that she was allone and hadde nede
Of frendes help. And thus bygan to brede
The cause whi, the sothe for to telle,
That she took fully purpos for to dwelle.\textsuperscript{48}

How Troilus will feel about her decision is secondary.

Understanding "charitable" then in the sense of loving and affectionate, what are we to make of Chaucer's statement that Criseyde is "symple"? Certainly, if there is any character in all of literature that is complex, it is Criseyde. The many diverse opinions of her through the years attest to this. Chaucer can only mean then that Criseyde is natural and unadorned. She lets Pandarus take care of her affairs. She blushes naturally when she sees Troilus from the window; as also when Pandarus asks what she thinks of Troilus's letter. She is quite embarrassed at Troilus's sudden appearance in her bedroom. She weeps when Troilus is hurt. She is sorry she has betrayed him. The natural emotions of a highly sensitive woman appear through the complex Criseyde.\textsuperscript{49}

Besides being self-interested, Criseyde has other faults too. The most glaring is her lack of courage. As Chaucer says, she is "slydyng of corage." She fears for her life and her honor in the city which her father has betrayed and

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., V, 1023-1029.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., II, 219, 652, 1198; III, 953-958; V, 1046; V, 1054-1057.
fled. She fears the fall of the city and death at the hands of the Greeks. When Pandaralus mentions that he has some good news for her, Criseyde immediately thinks the Greeks have given up the siege. She tells Pandaralus that she is so afraid of the Greeks that she could die: "I am of Greeks feared so that I dye." Strangely enough this same fear of the Greeks persuades her to remain among them and not attempt a return to Troy. After having failed to win over her father to her plan, Criseyde is in a quandary. She has nowhere to turn, no friends; she is lost. She fears to attempt a return to Troy, for if she is caught she may be held as a spy. Worse yet she may fall into the hands of some wretch who will rob her of all honor. At her wits' end, Criseyde is suddenly confronted with the friendship of Diomede. With no where else to seek aid, Criseyde realizes that she must accept Diomede's offer.

Returnyng in hire soule ay up and down
The wordes of this sodeyn Diomede,

And that she was al lone and hadde rede
Of frendes help.52

Criseyde is slowly coming to a decision. Fear prompts that decision. Chaucer tells us that the cause of Criseyde's determination to stay began to grow:

50 Ibid., II, 123-124.
51 Ibid., V, 701-707.
52 Ibid., V, 1026-1027, 1023-1024.
And thus bygan to brede
The cause whi, the sothe for to telle,
That she took fully purpos for to dwelle.53

Such was the effect of Criseyde's major fault.

Criseyde's fear also manifests itself in an excessive concern for her good name. She fears for her reputation among the people of Troy. What if her love affair with Troilus should become known? At Pandarus's first mention of love, she is extremely provoked, yet she fears to say yes or no. As Chaucer tells us, Criseyde is "the ferfullest yeight."54 When she finally brings herself to consider this affair, she still sees the need of preserving her honor. It may do her no harm to set her heart upon the worthy knight if only she keep her honor and good name; in other words, if only she keep it secret.

"And though that I myn herte sette at reste
Upon this knyght, that is the worthiaste,
And kepe alwey myn honour and my name
Be alle right it may do me no shame."55

But not till Criseyde is assured of Troilus's discretion will she hear of anything between them. Only then is she "no more afered."56 Caution now takes the place of fear. Pandarus must

53 Ibid., V, 1027-1029.
54 Ibid., II, 409-427; 450.
55 Ibid., II, 760-763.
56 Ibid., III, 482.
arrange things carefully. He must beware of the gossip of silly people.

"For te be war of goosish peoples speche, That dremen thynges whiche that nevere were And wel avyse hym whom he brought there."57

Not even her maids may know the truth. Unawares they sleep at Crisyde's door, while inside Crisyde takes pains that all may go unnoticed. If Troilus is to have his pleasure and she her honor, Pandarus must be discreet. Crisyde puts herself under her uncle's care.

"So werketh now in so discret a wise, That ich honour may have and he plesaunge; For I am here as in youre governaunce."58

Pandarus does not have to be urged to take charge. Troilus is admitted and the lovers are together. For some time Crisyde forgets her fears, but as dawn approaches they are reawakened. Troilus must leave before daylight or else Crisyde is lost for ever more.

"For tyme it is to ryse and hennes go, Or ellis I am lost for evere mo."59

Would that the night might last, but it will not. Only Crisyde's fear lasts. Even after her departure from Troy she cannot rid

57 Ibid., III, 584-586.
58 Ibid., III, 943-945.
59 Ibid., III, 1425-1426.
herself of this passion. She fears to attempt a return to Troy lest she fall into the hands of some wretch and lose her good name. She even admits that this was the reason she would not run off with Troilus—her good name. She wishes now that she had done so, for who would have said she did wrong?

"Allas, I ne hadde trowed on youre loore,  
And went with yow, as ye me redde or this.  
Than hadde I now nat aiked half so soore,  
Who myghte have seyd that I hadde don anys,  
To stele awey with swich oon as he is?"60

At last Criseyde sees the vanity of pursuing honor. Only tragedy can come of it.

"For whoso wol of every word take hede,  
Or reulen hym by every wightes wit,  
Ne shal he nevers thryven, out of drede."61

Woe to Criseyde for ever more, for she has betrayed "the gentlest and worthiest that ever was."

This completes the traits of Criseyde's character. We do not mean to say that someone could not bring forward another, but merely that these are an adequate summation of her main qualities. Criseyde is grave and dignified. She is joyful, gracious, prudent and quick-witted. She is tender, compassionate, charitable, simple.62 She is curious and fearful.

60 Ibid., V, 736-740.
61 Ibid., V, 757-759.
62 "charitable and simple" as understood in the previous pages.
She sobre was, ek symple, and wys withal,
The best ynorisshed ek that myghte be,
And goodly of hire speche in general,
Charitable, estatlich, lusty, and fre;
Ne neve me ne lakkedz hire pite;
Tendre herted, slydynge of corage;
But, trewely, I can nat telle hire age.63

Already then we have shown that Criseyde is an artistically probable character; that she remains essentially the same throughout. Each one of the qualities ascribed to her above is found not only before the betrayal but after as well. But the ultimate explanation of the problem still remains.

The question occurs: Can a character change and yet remain artistically probable? The artist is denied that freedom of creation which nature itself enjoys. "In art, if not else­where, the demands of the intellect must be met; there, or our proper satisfaction is denied us, we require situations the logic of which is apparent."64 Professor Dixon's point is that meaningless events, occurrences foreign to the limited focus of the plot, and uncaused and uncalled for changes, although they are found in nature, have no place in art. Is change of character one of these? The answer is twofold: substantially, the character may not change; accidentally, it may. In other words,

63 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, V, 820-826.
the change in character must be in proportion to and simultaneous with the causes instigating the transformation, but in no case may they change the character so completely that it becomes a new and different person. Moreover, the portrayal of that change must be so presented, the circumstances around it so enumerated, that it appears to the reader as plausible. Aristotle expressed himself as preferring "probable impossibilities to improbable possibilities."65 Once again the reader is confronted with the question of the real and the ideal. Whether or not the character and action of the poet's imagination are directly applicable to reality is unimportant. Whether his fiction once conceived remains artistically consistent is important. Much depends upon the circumstances and motivation presented and the manner in which a given plot is developed. Consequently, such factors as the courtly code, fate, and the medieval concept of tragedy are very important in our study of Criseyde's character. They are those aspects of the total plot that Chaucer has so emphasized as to make the poem probable.

Therefore, the ideas the reader must gather together and hold as inseparably connected are three: fate, the courtly code, and the fatal flaws of Criseyde's character. This latter is again divided into three: she is overly-tender; she is

65 Poetics, XXIV, 10.
timorous; she is self-interested. These encompass the solution to the probability of Criseyde's character.

How can the loving Criseyde betray Troilus? Fortune is the answer. Fortune demands the fall of Troy. It informs Calkas of this inevitable doom, and it prompts him to flee the city. It arranges the capture of Antenor, and the exchange for Criseyde. Fortune settles upon Diomede to act as mediator, and Fortune argues for Diomede in Criseyde's mind. The city will soon fall and all will be lost. Troy's fate makes Calkas adamant in his rejection of Criseyde's plan. She must remain with Diomede. The Fates are against her, for she has been "born in corsed constellacioun."66

Such is the effect of fate on the character of Criseyde. The courtly code also plays its part in maintaining the artistic consistency of her character. Perhaps no other aspect is so misunderstood. The reader who is unacquainted with the conventions of the code finds himself unable to come to any rational opinion of Criseyde. For Chaucer, Criseyde is at once the personification and the satiric embodiment of the code. "Andreas Capellanus had given instructions to lovers; Guillaume de Lorris had given instructions veiled and decorated by allegory; Chaucer

66 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, IV, 745.
carries the process a stage further and gives instruction by example in the course of a concrete story."67 Criseyde incorporates within herself the principles and rules of love. The reader must not look upon her as an innocent and inexperienced maiden. She knows full well what Troilus and Pandarus intend. Consequently, when her betrayal comes, the reader should not be overwhelmed. He has seen in the code an artificial morality, and therefore a flimsy morality. Criseyde betrays the code and betrays Troilus, for she has no other motivation than a man-made catalogue of silly postulates. Chaucer's attitude "is at once sympathetic and ironical."68 As courtly poet he exalts her; as Christian poet he renounces her.

Criseyde's character also offers adequate explanation for her action. As we have already seen, Criseyde is the embodiment of tenderness. She treats Pandarus with all the affection possible of a young and charming niece. She is often seen walking arm in arm with him, speaking devotedly, and even kissing him.69 Troilus is also the object of her intense affection. At their first meeting she lays her soft hands upon him

68 G. L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, 125.
69 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, II, 246-251, 1116-1117.
and entreats his protection. She looks upon him kindly and graciously, and after pledging him joy and friendship, she takes him in her arms and kisses him.\textsuperscript{70} From then on through the many love scenes, Criseyde is every bit the Queen of Affection. So when she meets Diomede it is not surprising that she treats him the very same way. She thanks him for his trouble, his good cheer, and his proffered friendship. She accepts his friendship, and places her trust in him. She will try to be pleasing and acceptable to him.

\begin{verbatim}
But natheles she thanked Diomede
Of al his travaile, and his goode cheere,
And that hym liste his frendshiphe hire to bede;
And she accepteth it in good manere,
And wol do fayn that is hym lief and dere;
And trusten hym she wolde, and wel she myghte,
As seyde she, and from hire hors shalghte.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{verbatim}

When Diomede comes to visit her, she welcomes him, invites him in, and has him sit beside her. She serves him spices and wine, and the two talk as friends. The visit comes to a close with Criseyde inviting Diomede to return on the next day, or whenever he wishes to come. She further tells him that if she will have pity on any Greek, it will be on him.\textsuperscript{72} She does not say that she will love him, but at the same time she does not say she will

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{70} Ibid., III, 71-72, 155-156, 182.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Ibid., V, 183-189.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Ibid., V, 848-854, 995-1001.
\end{itemize}
not. In conclusion, she means well.

"I sey nat therefore that I wol yow love,
Ny sey nat nay; but in conclusioun,
I mene wel, by god that sit above."73

Criseyde's tenderness cannot be checked even when she would be faithful to Troilus! It leads her on till she has committed herself to staying, for the day on which Criseyde invited Diomede back was the eleventh day after her departure from Troy. She has promised Troilus to be back within ten days.

Although Criseyde stays, apparently she does not yield to Diomede for some time. She first gives him a token of her sleeve and the brooch that Troilus has given her. But finally Diomede is wounded in battle with the fierce Troilus. Criseyde looks upon his wounds and weeps many a tear. Chaucer says that it was on this occasion that to heal him of his intense sorrow, Criseyde gave him her heart.

I fynde ek in stories elleswhere,
Whan thorugh the body hurt was Diomede
Of Troilus, tho wepte she many a teere,
Whan that she saugh his wyde wounded blide;
And that she took to kepen hym good hede,
And for to hele hym of his sorwes smerte
Men seyn, I not, that she yaf hym hire herte.74

Criseyde's tenderness brings her to her fatal betrayal.

73 Ibid., V, 1002-1004.

74 Ibid., V, 1044-1050.
Criseyde is also "the ferfulleste wight." She fears for her life and for her reputation. If there is one thing that she is constantly repeating, it is that she must preserve her honor. No one must know of her and Troilus. This fear is one of her most dominant passions. Consequently, when Troilus proposes that they run off together rather than be party to the exchange for Antenor, Criseyde realizes that all Troy would then learn of their love. Her good name would be ruined. No, she will not run off. She has another plan—one that will save her honor. She will try to talk her father into letting her return. Criseyde goes through with this plan, but finds that it is impractical. Her father will not hear of her returning to Troy for any purpose. Criseyde is now beset with fear. She fears what Troilus will think of her if she delays. She fears even more to chance a return to Troy. If she is caught, she will be held as a spy. Even worse, she may fall into the hands of some wretch who will despoil her of her honor. In short, she fears to act at all. So she does not act; she merely lets things take their course. She remains on among the Greeks, and Diomede visits her frequently. Finally, she gives him her heart.

75 Ibid., II, 468, 472, 485, 762, 1130-1134; III, 584, 944.
76 Ibid., V, 736-742.
77 Ibid., V, 696-698, 701-707.
Besides being overly-tender and extremely timorous, Criseyde is also quite self-interested. From the very beginning she does nothing that does not accrue to her own advantage. Before accepting Troilus as her lover, she reasons with herself that he will be a great protection to her, that he is the king's son, that it will be no dishonor to her. But she also considers the loss of her freedom and the possibility of betrayal. The entire meditation centers around one person—Criseyde. So, too, after Criseyde has left Troy and is contemplating the return, she considers all her own woes, all the advantages of staying with Diomede. Some thought is given to Troilus, but he is secondary. Criseyde's first interest is herself. As a result, she decides to stay, to abandon Troilus forever.

Enough has been said of Criseyde's character and its artistic probability. A tender, timorous, self-interested Criseyde—a Criseyde directed and influenced by Fortune and the code of courtly love—is what Chaucer brings forth from his imagination to place in the world of fictional celebrities. She is certainly one of the most fascinating characters in all of English literature. Many and various are her qualities—so much so that some authors have judged Criseyde quite differently.

78 Ibid., II, 703-808.
Some have imputed to her faults which this present author finds difficult to understand. Yet, these men are critics, and their opinions must be weighed carefully before this paper is brought to a close.
CHAPTER IV

REVIEW AND ANSWER TO CRITICS AGAINST THE PERSPECTIVE
OF FOREGOING CONCLUSIONS

Chaucer's re-creation of *Il Filostrato* was twofold. He re-fashioned the character of the beautiful Griseida, and he further medievalized the entire poem. His own Griseyde he made more loving and more loveable. Her amorous display of emotion is practiced upon everyone she comes in contact with—Pandarus, Troilus, Diomede. Perhaps her tenderness, more than anything else, attracts everyone to her. In this Griseyde is unique. Her counterpart, Griseida, has none of the depths of affection found in Chaucer's heroine. Nor is Griseida as affable, as personable, or as masterful as Chaucer's Griseyde. The one trait in which Griseida exceeds her replica is sensuousness. The thesis has gone to some lengths on this point already, so it will suffice here merely to mention it.\(^1\) Griseida will not think of marriage with Troilo for "the hidden joy of love quite surpasses that of holding a husband in one's arms."\(^2\) Griseyde's reason is merely that she prefers her liberty and freedom.

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1 See pages 19-24 of this paper.

Chaucer takes great pains to spare Criseyde the criticism of "wench." We do not see Chaucer's Criseyde sneaking down the stairs with lantern in hand to meet her waiting lover.

Therefore, it will not do to say Criseyde is the same scheming adventuress that we find in Boccaccio—the opinion of Mr. Cook and Mr. Patch. Nowhere in Criseyde do we find this extreme sensuality that is found in Boccaccio's heroine. Nor does Criseyde give any indication of being dissatisfied with Troilus and ready to move elsewhere. Her deep passion and intense grief over the prospect of leaving Troilus attest to this. Criseyde, fainting in Troilus's arms, is not the picture of a dissatisfied, fickle woman.

Since Chaucer makes his heroine much more loveable, much more tender and personable than Boccaccio's Griseida, he takes greater pains to explain away her seemingly illicit love for Troilus and her subsequent betrayal. For the former, Chaucer employs the courtly code. According to the code there is no sin involved in the love of Troilus and Criseyde. Nor should any guilt be attributed to Criseyde for her part of this love. She does not cease to be just as loveable, just as attractive, just as virtuous as before. For Criseyde's betrayal, Chaucer invokes fate, the courtly code, and Criseyde's character itself. Criseyde could do nothing else but betray Troilus, for the Fates had decreed that Troy was to fall and that she was not to return
to that doomed city. The Code personified, Criseyde weakens with the weakening of the convention. Fear, self-love, and her own tenderness play her false.

Such is Chaucer's twofold re-creation of *Il Filostrato*—a re-creation in which Criseyde's character shines forth brilliantly. She is anything but a scheming adventuress.

But some other critics take an opposite view—that Criseyde is the innocent victim of adverse circumstances. She never realizes that Troilus and Pandarus mean any more than her simple friendship. She makes frequent protests about her honor and she trusts Pandarus to safeguard it. When her uncle enters her bedroom with the fictitious story of Horaste, Criseyde believes him and allows Troilus to enter without thought of yielding to him. Furthermore, as J. S. Graydon maintains, the full responsibility for Criseyde's betrayal lies with Troilus. He should not have demanded a time limit upon Criseyde's return, for it showed he did not trust her. Troilus believes a dream he has of Criseyde betraying him for Diomede, but he does not believe Criseyde's first letter which assures him of her love and loyalty. He then betrays the secret of their love to Cassandra and attempts to have Criseyde spied upon. Criseyde learns that Cassandra has accused her of being Diomede's mistress and so cannot return to Troy without probable death at the hands of the people. She writes to Troilus informing him of this. Up to now
she has not given in to Diomede, and it is not till a year or so later that she does. Consequently, Criseyde is completely innocent. Troilus is the guilty person. 3

This opinion is difficult to accept. Already in this paper it has been shown that Criseyde is a very intelligent, a very sagacious person. Numerous texts establish that Criseyde understood fully what Troilus and Pandarus expected of her. 4 From the very first she intends "ful sleighly for to pleie." 5

Obvious, too, is the fact that in spite of all Criseyde's tears, she is quite curious about her lover.

"Kan he wel speke of love," quod she, "I preye? Tel me, for I the bet me shal purveye." 6

She wants to know all about Troilus, so as to better prepare for him. Can there be any doubt that she is fully aware of the situation? She knows that, "Men loven wommen al biside hire leve," and "to love, a wonder is though he of me have joye?" 7

But what will the life of a widow bring her?

3 Joseph S. Graydon, "Defense of Criseyde," PMLA, 44.
5 Ibid., II, 462.
6 Ibid., II, 503-504.
7 Ibid., II, 734, 743, 749.
"Shal I nat love, in cas if that me lest?  
What, pardieux! I am nat religious."8

Criseyde goes forward with her eyes wide open. Never for a moment does she lose sight of the fact that Troilus is a courtly lover, and courtly love is not platonic.

Criseyde's frequent protestations about her honor are explainable. According to the courtly code, honor means nothing more than secrecy. Criseyde is still thinking of her honor even after she has given in to Troilus:

"For tyme it is to ryse and hennes go,  
Or ellis I am lost for evere mo."9

Significant too is Criseyde's visit to Deiphbus's house. Can she not wonder what Troilus is doing there, and especially sick in bed? The only explanation is that she understands the reason for his presence completely. He is there to meet her. He is there to pledge his service to her as a courtly lover, and she is there to accept his service. This is just what she does. With Troilus lying in bed before them, she says to Pandarus:

"I wol wel trewely,  
And in swich forme as he gan devyse  
Receyven hym fully to my servyse."10

8 Ibid., II, 758-759.
9 Ibid., III, 1425-1426.
10 Ibid., III, 159-161.
Root says that this is the "complete surrender." He notes that "Criseyde has . . . stipulated that her honor must not be compromised," but with an even shrewder glance he points out that "she acquiesces by her silence in Pandar's promise that he will shortly devise a secret meeting of the lovers at his house where they shall have full leisure 'to speake of love aright.'"\(^{11}\)

The scene at Deiphbus's house is important, for it is the prelude to the love scene which follows soon after. Criseyde knows that Pandar is to arrange a secret meeting. True, Criseyde sees and talks to Troilus a number of times in the interval, but for no long period. All is done with dispatch lest anyone learn of their love. Yes, even Criseyde now admits that she is in love, and although it has come late, "Of alle joie hadde opened hire the yate."\(^{12}\) She thanks the gods that she has met Troilus, and she sees in him a wall of steel. It is not in the least surprising, then, that at Pandar's invitation to his own house, Criseyde guesses immediately what he means.\(^ {13}\) At this point Chaucer steps in to give the reader one of his usual ironic hints. He says that his author does not fully

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12 Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III, 469.
13 See page 44 of this paper. *Troilus and Criseyde*, III, 561-574.
declare what Crisseyde thought when Pandarus said Troilus was out of town. Of course his author does not say what Crisseyde thought! Griseida is not even invited to the house of Pandaro in *Il Filostrato.* Chaucer chuckles again when he thinks up a reason why Crisseyde will finally give in to Pandarus and accept his invitation. Obedience impells her; obedience to her uncle! She will leave at once.

But that she graunted with hym for to go
Withoute await, syn that he hire besoughte,
And, as his nece, obeyed as hire oughte.15

Crisseyde is obedient! The same Crisseyde who said, "Shal noon housbonde seyn to me 'chek mat.'" Then, too, it is for no reason at all that she admonishes Pandarus to be careful whom he invites and "to be war of goosiassh poeplez speche." So with no thought at all that Troilus might be there, Crisseyde sets out with "alle joie" for Pandarus's house.

According to this opinion Crisseyde accepts the story of Horaste as true, and only for fear that Troilus will kill himself that very night does she allow him to enter. Yet, the

14 Cf. R. K. Gordon, *The Story of Troilus,* 60
truth of the matter could not be more diametrically opposed. Crisseyde has decided to stay over night at Pandarus's house knowing full well that Troilus must be at hand. She makes no protest to staying, except in her own mind. It is raining outside, and Crisseyde reasons that it is better to stay with a smile than to begrudge it and stay anyway. She tells Pandarus that she is "right glad"19 to stay. Does it never enter her mind that the other guests are leaving, rain or no rain? Does it never enter her mind that letting Troilus into her bed may in any way endanger her? She kisses him, assuring him that she is not angry. Chaucer tells us

hire thoughte tho no fere,
   Ne cause ek non, to bidde hym thannes rise.20

But as much as Chaucer would fool us, in the end he will leave no doubt in our minds. He will have Crisseyde herself confirm all that we have already suspected—that, as has been so well said, "the apparent victim is at least an acquiescent accomplice."21 As Troilus suddenly seizes her and demands that she yield to him, Crisseyde answers:

19 Ibid., III, 647.
20 Ibid., III, 1144-1145.
"Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere,
Ben yolde, iwy, I were now nat here."  

The words are emphatic. Any attempt to explain them away as humor is fruitless.

As regards Mr. Graydon's opinion, that the fault for Criseyde's betrayal lies with Troilus, J. Milton French has already given a rather thorough answer. Mr. French points out that Troilus did not reveal their love affair to Cassandra but merely his dream about Criseyde and the boar. Nor is Cassandra the scandal monger that Mr. Graydon would have her be. The most Chaucer tells us about her attitude on the matter (and the text Graydon apparently bases his conclusion on) is that "She gan first smile, and seyde: 'O brother deere . . .'" The text that Graydon bases his "spying upon" is equally weak. All that Chaucer tells us is that

And day by day he gan enquere and seche
A sooth of this, with al his fulle cure.

Mr. Graydon's interpretation seems untenable after one tries to verify it in the poem, and in general, his entire opinion appears

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22 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, III, 1210-1211.
24 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, V, 1450-1456.
25 Ibid., V, 1457.
26 Ibid., V, 1538-1539.
contrary to the text and spirit of Chaucer's tragedy.

Emile Legouis, Marchette Chute, and Arthur Mizener also hold opinions contrary to this thesis. Professor Legouis holds that Criseyde's betrayal is "inexplicable," that Chaucer has failed to give it the "appearance of truth," and that her character is "at once charming and inconsistent."\(^{27}\) He further holds that in contemplating Troilus's love Criseyde is "torn between duty and love, between her desire for a virtuous life and the call of passions."\(^{28}\)

Professor Legouis's opinions certainly should be considered by anyone who would oppose him. Yet, in his comments on *Troilus and Criseyde*, Professor Legouis is mainly treating of the poem as a unit; he does not concern himself with the subject of Criseyde's probability to any length, nor does he offer textual proof for his theory. Consequently, a direct refutation seems unnecessary, for sufficient has already been said of the consistency and probability of Criseyde's character.

Similarly, Marchette Chute calls in question the artistic probability of Criseyde's character. Miss Chute states a number of things about the character of Criseyde—that her betrayal is not a "believable one," that "Chaucer's exact and loving characterization of his heroine falls apart. In five

\(^{27}\) Emile Legouis, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, 127.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.,
lines she betrays Troilus and takes Diomede for her lover."29 Evidently, the authoress refers to the following lines:

(The morwen com, and, gostly for to speke, 
This diomede is come unto Criseyde;) 
And shortly, lest that ye my tale breke, 
So wel he for hym selven spak and seyde, 
That alle hire sikes soore adown he leyde. 
And finally, the sothe for to sayne, 
He refte hire of the grete of al hire peyne.30

As a matter of fact, from these lines it might appear that Criseyde yielded to Diomede on the eleventh day after she left Troy. But this is not true at all. In deed, one cannot be exactly sure how long it was till Criseyde gave in to Diomede, but the over-all impression that Chaucer leaves with us is that it was not for some time—months to even years. He says explicitly that it was not till one time when Diomede was injured in battle and Criseyde tried to console him. Professor Root says that "if one takes careful heed of the time-indications in the book of Benoit, one finds that between the arrival of Briseida at the Grecian camp and her final acceptance of Diomede there is an interval of at least twenty-one months."31 There is no reason to believe that Chaucer shortened the time. If anything, he would lengthen it, for he "wolde excuse hire yet

30 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, V, 1030-1036. 
Arthur Mizener holds a unique opinion on Criseyde. He does not believe that she is a unified character at all, or that Chaucer intended her to be so. Mizener claims that for Chaucer a character consisted in a group of unchanging fundamental qualities, and that the relation between such a character and the events of the narrative was one of congruence rather than of cause and effect. In other words, Mizener believes that Chaucer did not intend "Criseyde's unfaithfulness to appear either the cause of a change, or the consequence of an established vice, in the character he presents to us."

Mizener explains that this "hypothesis is the outgrowth of a conviction that Chaucer's chief interest was in the action rather than in the characters." As a result, "Criseyde is unfaithful because the story makes her so . . . ." Mizener seems to see the weakness of his own argument when he states in a footnote that his opinion is not necessarily fatalistic nor does it necessarily make Chaucer such. But he does admit that

34 Ibid., 69.
36 Ibid.
"some kind of connection no doubt always exists," and he does refer the reader to the theory of complete determinism held by W. C. Curry. Considering it from this standpoint, and in spite of his denial of fatalism, Mizener's entire hypothesis rests on a false theory, for whether Mizener would have it so or not, in any narrative where there is no "interplay of free motivation" one necessarily encounters "the spectacle of the action of irresponsible puppets." Otherwise, what is the outcome? Certainly it is that the poet has gone beyond the bounds of art, for in the realm of ideas we require a certain logic, to be exact, a certain causality. In a tragedy such as Troilus and Criseyde if the causality be not with the characters themselves—and Mizener states the characters are in no way causes of the action—then the causality must find its total source in fate. Consequently, under Mizener's hypothesis Troilus and Criseyde becomes a tragedy of determinism in the strictest sense.

As such, Mizener's theory is unacceptable. Although Chaucerian tragedy does lay great emphasis on fate, it does not deny to its characters freedom of choice. It is not till one

37 Ibid.
turns to the "uncertain and transitory rewards of the world," that he is subject "to their fluctuations." Bound as he is by fate, Troilus is not dominated by its whims till he has proudly disdained love in the temple of Pallas Athene.

It is evident, too, from the very spirit and compass of Troilus and Criseyde that Chaucer is entirely taken up with the characters he presents. They are by no means secondary to the plot. Troilus and Criseyde is a character study of Criseyde, Troilus, and Pandarus. The plot is one Chaucer has received and is reluctant to change—a plot that tells the fatal story of the betrayal of his tender Criseyde.

Nor is the relationship between Chaucer's characters and the action merely that of congruence. Before Troilus proudly despises love in the temple of Pallas Athene, there is a definite relationship of cause and effect between the characters and the action. It is due to Troilus's lordly disdain that he and Criseyde become subject to the whims of fate. It is due to Troilus's foolish submission to Criseyde's physical attractions that he and Criseyde are forever more bound to the fluctuating waves of fortune. Their actions do affect their characters.

40 See page 31 of this thesis. Cf. also D. W. Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," ELH, 19, 1, 5; Boethius, De Consolatione Philosophiae, London, 1823, IV, Pr.6; V, Pr.2; I, Met.4.

41 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, I, 183-203.
Moreover, if there is "no causal interaction between what Criseyde does and what she is," how is anyone—Mizener himself—to decide what the character of Criseyde is? From the very first, this paper has emphasized the point that character is only ascertained from what a person does. "Hence, one has always stressed the deeds of a man as an index of his disposition, his real thoughts—in fact, what is ordinarily called his character."

None of these extreme views of Criseyde's character seems to concur with the text of the poem. Criseyde is not a scheming adventuress; she is not an innocent maiden. Nor does her character deteriorate beyond probability. Therefore, Criseyde is an artistically probable character who is consistently motivated throughout the poem. She is so because of a number of extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Extrinsic to Criseyde are the courtly code and fate; intrinsic, her overly-tender, timorous, and self-interested nature. In spite of these faults she enjoys a winning personality: she is "amorous, gentle, affectionate, and charming altogether..." She is what

44 G. L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, 135.
Chaucer has made her to be—the personification of the courtly code, with all its conventional intricacies of love and secrecy, with all its fears and griefs. She comes to a tragic end so that Chaucer might warn the reader of the deceits of the code, and of the transitoriness and fallacy of human happiness.
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The thesis submitted by Mr. Edward B. Smith, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

7/3/1955
Date

H. S. Hughes
Signature of Adviser