'What Cressida Is': Development of a Character in Chaucer, Henryson and Shakespeare

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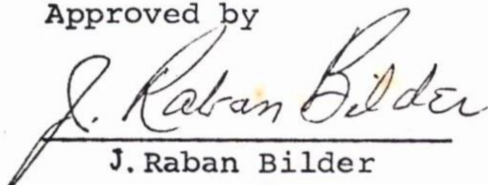

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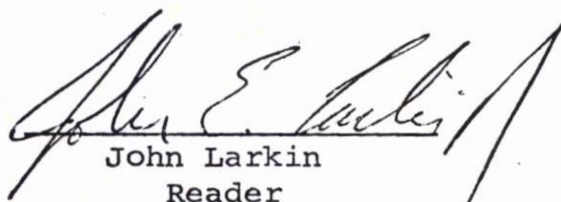

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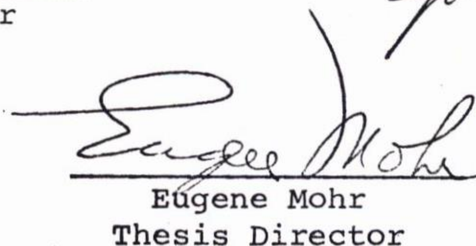

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Contents

Introduction.. 1

Chapter One
Origins of the Troilus and Criseyde Story 5

Chapter Two
Chaucer's Criseyde.............................. 24

Chapter Three
Henryson's Cresseid............................. 69

Chapter Four
Shakespeare's Cressida..........................103

Conclusions.....................................135

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Introduction

Criseyde, the woman made notorious by her betrayal of a lover's trust, has been one of the most written about female characters in English literature. At least five distinguished authors have made her the heroine of one of their poems or plays.[1] Three of these writers, each belonging to a different period in English literature, have had pivotal influence in shaping and reshaping her reputation: Geoffrey Chaucer, Robert Henryson, and William Shakespeare.

As one follows Criseyde from one of these authors to the next, there are two facts that stand out sharply: First, though all three are dealing with the same character, no two of them coincide in their approach to her characterization. As a result, we have three different women emerging from one character. Secondly, there is in Criseyde a gradual moral disintegration that converts her from the noble and decent woman of Chaucer's poem to a pitiful sinner in Henryson's version and, finally, into a degraded and amoral slut in Shakespeare's play.

The questions that arise are these: Why is it that Henryson did not accept Criseyde as Chaucer had conceived

Contents

Introduction.................................... 1

Chapter One
Origins of the Troilus and Criseyde Story 5

Chapter Two
Chaucer's Criseyde.............................. 24

Chapter Three
Henryson's Cresseid............................. 69

Chapter Four
Shakespeare's Cressida..........................103

Conclusions.....................................135

Introduction

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As one follows Criseyde from one of these authors to the next, there are two facts that stand out sharply: First, though all three are dealing with the same character, no two of them coincide in their approach to her characterization. As a result, we have three different women emerging from one character. Secondly, there is in Criseyde a gradual moral disintegration that converts her from the noble and decent woman of Chaucer's poem to a pitiful sinner in Henryson's version and, finally, into a degraded and amoral slut in Shakespeare's play.

The questions that arise are these: Why is it that Henryson did not accept Criseyde as Chaucer had conceived

her? And why was it that Shakespeare retold Chaucer's tale using an even more degraded Cressida as one of his main characters?

It is my contention that the answer to these questions lies in the difference in the intellectual and moral climate between Chaucer's time and that of Henryson's and Shakespeare's respectively, a difference which provided these last two poets with other sets of ethical standards with which to judge Criseyde's conduct. This resulted in an inability to see Criseyde as Chaucer had seen her, and each poet reacted by producing his own version of her character.

Basic to my hypothesis is the idea that a man is the product of his age. As such, he is inevitably influenced by the customs and beliefs of the society in which he lives. His ideas on life, on death, on love, on anything that touches him closely, are conditioned by these constantly changing concepts which form the warp and woof of the intellectual, political or moral climate of his day. Rarely will these ideas be carried over intact from one age to another. Multiple factors will work on them to prevent this: The pressure of social or political upheavals, new interpretations of religious faith, different philosophical concepts, even new scientific discoveries, will refashion

or entirely reject inherited concepts, so that what was held as gospel truth by one generation may not be accepted by the next.

As the mouthpieces of their society, writers express in their work the concepts that prevail during their lifetime. Chaucer, Henryson, and Shakespeare were no exception to this rule. They were shaped by the ideas of their time, and in turn they shaped their characters in accordance with these ideas. Such was Criseyde's case; consequently, we must look at their respective conceptions of her character in terms of this fact if we desire to understand the reasons for her metamorphosis.

With this in mind, I have made a study of Criseyde's character in the three authors in question, trying to make clear the possible causes that made each author focus on her from a different angle. Each analysis is preceded by a short introduction which sets out the intellectual and moral climate that prevailed during the author's time. Thus I hope to prove that her characterizations respond, either in a positive or negative way, to ideals of conduct shaped by ethical standards current in the societies which produced her interpreters.

Footnotes

[1] Hyder E. Rollins, "The Troilus and Cressida Story from Chaucer to Shakespeare," _PMLA_, XXXII (1917), 383-429. Besides Chaucer, Henryson, and Shakespeare, Rollins mentions Lydgate and Thomas Heywood, as well as popular versifiers of the sixteenth century, as having dealt with the character of Criseyde.

Chapter One

Origins and Development of the Troilus and Criseyde Story

The names of Troilus, Criseyde and Diomede come to us from a distant literary past. It is in Homer's Iliad that the three characters appear for the first time, but except for Diomede they receive only passing mention from the poet.

Troilus appears only once, when Priam, king of Troy, bitterly bewails, "Miserable man that I am, I have had the bravest sons in all of Troy--noble Nestor, Troilus, the dauntless charioteer, and Hector ... yet there is not one of them left." [1] The beautiful and gentle Briseis,[2] daughter of Briseus, plays a fleeting but important role by becoming the bone of contention between Achilles and Agammemnon,[3] and Diomedes, "of the loud battle-cry,"[4] is one of the warriors that fight before the impregnable walls of Troy. Many things are said about his courage, nobility and manly beauty. His prowess in war is great. "He rushed across the plain like a winter torrent that has burst its barrier in full flood ... even so were the dense phalanxes of the Trojans driven in rout by the son of Tydeus."[5]

Yet he, as well as Troilus and Briseis, is only a small figure in the gigantic epic of the famous war. There is no link whatsoever between them, but in their descriptions we can already see some of the characteristics that were later to give life to the figures they were to become with the passing of time.

Centuries later we hear from them again in two small books of Latin prose of the fourth and sixth century respectively, supposedly written by eyewitnesses of the Trojan war. The first one, the _Ephemeris Belli Trojani_, by Dyctis Cretensis, tells the story from the Greek side.[6] The other, _De Excidio Trojae Historia_, takes the side of the Trojans. Both books, according to R. K. Gordon, became quite popular with medieval readers, and it is likely that they were shortened versions of Latin texts which in turn may have been descended from Greek originals.[7]

The two authors concentrate on the martial deeds of both Greek and Trojan heroes. There is nothing about the three characters in Dyctis, but in Dares, in a long list of famous names, we find them once again, brief word portraits and no more. Troilus is depicted as "magnum, pulcherrimum, pro aetate valentem, fortem, cupidum

virtutis."[8] Briseida, the former Briseis, is "formosam, non alta statura, candidam, capillo flavo e molli, supercillis juntis, oculis venustis, corpore aequali, blandam, affabilem."[9] Diomedes is described as "fortem, quadratum, corpore honesto, cerebro calido, impatientem, audacem."[10] In short, all the qualities that were to adorn them centuries later are already present, but still the characters remain isolated figures, and no story is told about them.

Not until the poet Benoit de Sainte Maure undertook the writing of his Roman de Troie, around the year 1160, were the three characters linked together in a romantic triangle. Following the custom so common to medieval writers, the French poet chose the story of the seige of Troy as the theme of his epic poem.[11] His main interest lay in relating the deeds of war, but divided into several episodes fitted between the stories of the battles ran the continuous thread of a love story, which seemed, as Edward Griffin says, to obey the poet's desire to create "a diversion from the long and monotonous succession of encounters between the Greeks and Trojans."[12]

The story gives more importance to the growing affair between Briseida and Diomedes than to the love between

Troilus and Briseida, but the fact of her betrayal of Troilus' love is already there. It is a tale of faithlessness and deception in which Benọit seems to adhere to the classical and early medieval conception of carnal love as destructive and sorrow-bringing or as a source of selfish physical pleasure.[13] Love in his poem is not the elevating and sublime experience and source of all good that it became for courtly poets, but "a baneful, destructive influence, bringing about the ultimate undoing of those who allowed themselves to fall subject to its sway."[14]

Benọit develops Briseida and Diomedes more fully than he does Troilus. In his heroine we find the essence of the later Criseida. Joined to the physical attributes given to her by Dares, we now find other character elements that round out her personality and give depth to an up-to-now fleshless portrait. Besides being soft and affable, Benọit's Briseida is a cool level-headed young woman who has a realistic vision of life and who weighs carefully the pros and cons of her situation. The poet allows us glimpses of her inner feelings, and it is a very human Briseida who, in one of the few soliloquies in the story, debates between

her feelings of caution, loneliness and tortured conscience and comes to the conclusion that, reproachable though her conduct be, she must forget Troilus, for, "In this place I was without counsel and without a friend and without a loyal companion."[15] Though Benoit brands her as "false in love, treacherous, faithless, and untrue,"[16] and holds her as an example of woman's perfidious ways, there is a trace of sympathy in him that permits us to see into the workings of her mind and heart and allows her to present her case. Briseida is not all bad, and her inconstancy is born mainly from necessity and not from lust or fickleness.

Diomedes shares with Briseida the center of attention in the Roman de Troie. He is a character representative of two literary traditions: the epic and the courtly. As such, he is a curious blend of epic warrior and incipient courtly lover as he fights for honor and glory and at the same time displays the love-sickness that later on in the hands of Boccaccio and Chaucer, will become part and parcel of Troilus' personality.[17] He is a gentle and forthright warrior whose bravery in battle and ardent wooing of Briseida makes him stand out and dim Troilus' figure.

Troilus is the passive element of the love triangle.

His role is very brief, for he almost disappears from view after Briseida leaves Troy. According to Griffin, he has all the characteristics of the epic knight, a man who lives mainly to fight, and whose love remains separated from the mainstream of his interests.[18] Benoit relegates him to a secondary position in the story. The narrative begins the night before Briseida leaves for the Greek camp. Nothing is said about their love prior to that moment. This annuls his romantic importance and leaves him on the periphery of the action. Almost nothing is said about his sufferings for Briseida, and he comes to his end acrid and railing with scathing words against Briseida and women in general. He still retains traces of the "hardy truculent gallant of the earlier _chansons de geste_,"[19] and though Benoit provides him with the basic characteristics given to him by Dares, the short role he is assigned prevents him from becoming a truly interesting figure.

There is in Benoit a hard and cynical vision of love. His characters manifest very little tenderness, expediency wins the day, and his heroine considers her honor well lost in exchange for security. Yet, by giving full rein to his fancy, he managed to create flesh-and-blood

creatures out of a few lifeless portraits, and gave us a story "not hackneyed ... so fashioned and so wrought,"[20] that it became the basis for one of the world's great love stories.

A century later, in 1287, Guido de Colonna, a Sicilian judge, wrote still another account of the Trojan war. His Storia Trojana, while citing Dyctis and Dares as his main sources, is mainly based on Benoit's tale.[21] Guido goes even further than Benoit in his constant criticism of woman's treachery.[22] He shows tremendous prejudice against his heroine, suppressing any passages from Benoit that might excuse her behavior. Consequently, according to Herbert Wright, Briseida is presented in the worst possible light, and her conduct "is only what is to be expected, and invites no comment, unless it be to emphasize her evil ways."[23] The story follows Benoit's closely, but the deleting of introspective passages and the author's dislike of his heroine make it too flat and moralizing.[24]

In the early part of the fourteenth century, the Italian poet, Giovanni Boccaccio, wrote his great version of the Troilus and Criseyde story. In his hands it became a poem in itself, and not one more episode in the larger epic of the Trojan war, as it had been up to then.

True to the time in which it was written, Il Filostrato is essentially a courtly love poem. As Griffin comments, no poet writing during the Middle Ages "could afford to neglect certain well established rules of literary procedure which prescribed the nature of the relationship ... between his hero and his heroine, and the principles of conduct which should govern them therein."[25] This is seen in Boccaccio's poem. The most important conventions of the courtly code are present in it. Love at first sight, following the Provençal conceit that love passes on bright beams of light from the eyes of the lady to the heart of her future lover,[26] is paramount in the poem. The apparent indifference of the heroine towards her suitor in the initial moments of courtship, the worship from afar, the clandestine nature of the love relationship, love as a beneficial ennobling agency that transforms those who serve it, the role of Pandaro as go-between, the languishing for love of the hero and heroine, to mention just a few details, make it clear that Boccaccio developed the few elements of courtoisie found in Benoit's tale into a more complex plot, recasting the older story into the mold prescribed by the contemporaneous code of courtly love.

Besides being a milestone in the course of the development of the story, Il Filostrato is also important for the wealth of biographical material found in it, for it reflects the story of the love between Boccaccio and Maria D'Aquino, the young wife of a Neapolitan nobleman. Deeply in love with the beautiful girl, and suffering from her absence, the young poet decided to dedicate her a poem in which he would express all his longings. And so, he declares in a long poem, casting about to see which of the ancient stories would best express his feelings,

> Ne altro piu atto nella mente mi venne a tal bisogno, che il valoroso giovane Troilo, figiuolo di Priamo nobilissimo re di Troia, alla cui vita, in quanto per amore e per la lontananza della sua donna fu doloroso ... e stata la mia similissima dopo la vostra partita.[27]

What appealed to Boccaccio from the story was, most of all, the incident of the separation of the two lovers, which could be used to express his own grief at his lady's departure. The difficulty lay in the intention behind the French poet's tale, which was incompatible with Boccaccio's. Benoit had told a tale of deceit and betrayal where very little, if any, of the beauty of love's devotion had been expressed. Boccaccio needed a proper vehicle to express

his heartfelt love to his absent mistress, so, in order to fit the story to his own needs, he effected some substantial changes of his own.

First of all, he dismissed as unimportant and cumbersome all the battle scenes that had interrupted the smooth flow of the narrative, and relegated them to a secondary position. Secondly, he expanded the tale to include what interested him most: the beginning, growth and climax of the lovers' passion, incidentally imparting a strong biographical flavor to the poem, particularly in the first two parts of the book, where one can recognize his own experiences with Maria D'Aquino.[28]

Thirdly, he shifted the center of attraction to Troilo, and denied Diomedes and Criseida the importance they had previously had in Benoit's tale. It is now Troilo who holds the center of the stage, for Troilo is Boccaccio, and it is his own love sufferings which the poet wants to lay bare before his mistress' eyes.

Troilo's increased significance in the story makes Boccaccio introduce some needed changes in his hero's personality. Benoit's warrior was too much the epic hero. He did not exhibit the traits desired in an enraptured

servant of love. His passion did not ennoble him; at the end, it changed into hate for his mistress. Evidently he was not the type of lover Boccaccio wanted to present as his alter ego, so, to transform him into the desired kind of lover, he gave him the characteristics of the heroes of the love lyrics of southern France.[29] Troilo becomes the perfect courtly love gallant, a devoted swain who mixes bravery in battle with all the refined attributes of the preux chevalier. Love as an elevating and ennobling influence pervades every facet of his personality, and the impassioned expression of his love transforms him into a noble figure of imposing height. From a light-hearted youth who "in canti / Menava la sua vita e in allegrezza,"[30] he becomes an enraptured lover who acknowledges Love as his sweet and pleasing master, languishes for love of Criseida, and fights the enemy with renewed ardor and courage. Yet, for all his new importance, he is essentially a passive hero, a sufferer rather than an actor, all in accordance to the lyrical poetry of the fourteenth century, which demanded complete subservience to love and to a lady's whims.

Though Criseida is relegated to a secondary position, Boccaccio's descriptive genius brings her to life. The

physical attributes given to her by Dares and faithfully passed on by subsequent writers bloom into a riot of color and life that gives depth and perspective to the still somewhat stilted lady of Benoit's _chanson_. Boccaccio's interest in her is conditioned by the way her personality and actions may bring out the qualities of patience and forbearance he wants emphasized in Troilo. A gentle and modest heroine would obviously not do, so he patterned her upon a model even more fickle and frivolous than Benoit's lady. We have in Criseida, according to Griffin, the prototype of the light-hearted courtesan of the Naples of Boccaccio's time. Such a woman would show up Troilo's virtues as she acts true to type. She is "in no sense unconscious of the moral issue; she ... sins with her eyes open; she is not seduced but seduces herself."[31]

A tall, beautiful, and voluptuous widow,[32] Criseida moves easily through the story, gradually disclosing her virtues and defects. Hidden fires burn behind her apparent serene beauty, and the slight veneer of caution she exhibits at the beginning soon gives way to her innate sensuality as she surrenders to Troilo with ridiculous ease, offering only a token resistance to his impetuous wooing.

Less given to introspection than her predecessor, she also has the same instinct of survival which, coupled to her sensuality, spells disaster to Troilo's hopes. The helplessness of her condition is not the main reason for her inconstancy, as was Benoit's Briseida's; her selfishness and need to be loved and admired are more important. "Oime, quanta gioia / Quanto piacere et quanto di dolcezze / N'ebb'io gia dentro ed ora in trista noia / Consumo qui le mie care belleze,"[33] she weeps, looking at the distant walls of Troy and deploring the tedium and waste of beauty she has now to endure even more than Troilo's absence. Her surrender to Diomedes is swift and without the soul-searching thoughts and anguish we found in Benoit's Briseida. There are no regrets, no concern about what will be said of her in times to come. Boccaccio was not interested in building up Criseida's character, only in reinforcing the contrast between Troilo's constancy and her fickleness, so a pitiful and contrite heroine was the last thing he wanted. Consequently, he put more emphasis on her negative qualities, so as to arouse pity for Troilo and make her betrayal and its subsequent result serve as a warning against inconstancy in love.

As Boccaccio diverted attention from Criseida to Troilo, he also shifted Diomedes' troubles to him. It is no longer the Greek hero who knows "neither joy nor peace,"[34] but Troilo who weeps and sighs for his lady love. Diomedes is now a changed man, more aggressive and bold than Benoit's character. Shorn of the sufferings he endured in the French version of the story, he is the contrasting figure to Troilo's courtly lover characteristics. Straightforward and assured, his appearance is brief but effective,matching Criseida's perfidy with his own, thus helping to augment compassion for the betrayed Troilo.

Besides the three original characters inherited from antiquity, Boccaccio introduces one of his own creation. Pandaro, his greatest and most original contribution to the love story, is a completely new character, developed, according to Thomas Kirby, from a mixture of medieval literary tradition, courtly love theory, and actual life.[35] As the go-between so common to medieval romances, he plays an extremely important role in the Filostrato by serving to advance the action and bring out the character traits of the hero and heroine. Boccaccio's Pandaro is a handsome, affable youth who shares Troilo's adventures, and to whom the lovers confide their hopes and fears. With his

down-to-earth, slightly cynical approach to life's problems, he provides a touch of realism to the story. Whatever his origin, he is one of the great characters in literature.

The importance of _Il Filostrato_ cannot be overstated. With it closes the long process of evolution of three characters from an ancient epic poem. The love story is now complete. Half a century later, Geoffrey Chaucer of England will pick it up, and making a change here and there, improvising new situations and enriching the plot, write his own version of the lovers' story for the delight of generations to come.

Footnotes

[1] Homer, The Iliad, trans. Samuel Butler Great Books of the Western World, vol.4,ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1952), pp.173-174.

[2] The name of our heroine evolved as the character did. From the original Greek Briseis, it changed into Briseida in Dares and Benoit; Boccaccio converted it into Criseida, and Chaucer to Criseyde. In the fifteenth century Henryson used the form Cresseid, and finally, Shakespeare transformed her into Cressida. In order to follow the original more closely, I use the name given to her by the author that happens to be under discussion at the moment.

[3] Homer, p.60.

[4] Homer, p.57.

[5] Homer, p.31.

[6] R. K. Gordon, ed., The Story of Troilus as told by Benoit de Sainte Maure, Geoffrey Chaucer, Robert Henryson (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1964), p.xi. N. E. Griffin, in his book The Filostrato of Boccaccio (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1967), pp.26-27, offers the theory that an enlarged version of Dares existed that probably contained a preparatory story of the two lovers.

[7] Gordon, p.xii.

[8] Gordon, p.xii, "Great, handsome, fearless for one so young, strong, anxious for glory."

9
Gordon, p.xii. "beautiful, not tall, sincere, soft golden hair, joined eyebrows, well-proportioned, soft, affable."

10
Gordon, p.xii. "strong, noble-bodied, stern-faced, brave in war, loud-voiced, hot-blooded, impatient, daring."

11
A tradition dating from Roman times claimed that Aeneas, Prince of Troy, and his band of companions settled in Italy after their flight from burning Troy and became the ancestors of the Romans, and, by derivation, of the peoples of Western Europe.

12
Nathaniel Edward Griffin, trans., _The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio: A Translation with Parallel Text_ (New York: Biblio & Tannen, 1967), p.29.

13
Denis de Rougemont, _Passion and Society_ (London: Faber & Faber, 1940), p.71.

14
Griffin, p.33.

15
Gordon, p.20.

16
Gordon, p.4.

17
Gordon, p.15. We find Diomedes suffering great torments because of love. The poet relates that "He suffered from such anxiety that sleep came not to him in his bed, he could not sleep, he did not close his eye, he was at rest neither night nor day ... he who is in the power of love has no rest at all."

18
Griffin, p.34.

19
Griffin, p.34.

20
Gordon, p.4.

21
Griffin, (p.25,n.3), points out that it was common practice of medieval writers to refer carefully to their ultimate sources and refrain from naming their most proximate.

22
Herbert Wright, Boccaccio in England from Chaucer to Tennyson (London: The Athlone Press, 1957), p.83.

23
Wright, p.84.

24
Gordon, Wright and Griffin all agree on this point. Gordon calls Guido's version "heavy and moralizing" (p.xiii); Wright considers Guido "a prosaic individual with a strong moralizing bent" (p.83); and Griffin talks of "the somewhat dull and pedestrian translation of the Sicilian judge." (p.27).

25
Griffin, pp.70-71.

26
Griffin,p.76,n2.

27
Griffin, p.126. "Nor did other more apt for such a need occur to me than the valiant young Troilus, son of Priam, most noble king of Troy, to whose life, in so far it was filled with sorrow by Love and by the distance of his lady ... mine, after your departure, hath been very similar."

28
Griffin, pp.14-16. The description of Troilo's meeting with Criseida at the Palladium resembles Boccaccio's own meeting with Maria D'Aquino at the Church of St. Lorenzo at Naples. Also, Griffin points out on page 56 that Boccaccio's allusion to the dress worn by Criseida in the temple as "soto candido velo in bruma vesta" (Il Filostrato, I, l.38), refers to the nun's garb Maria D'Aquino wore at the convent of Baia when the poet went there for a visit.

29
Griffin, p.60.

30
Griffin, p.272. "in song and gaiety he led his life."

31
Griffin, p.106.

32
Griffin, pp.86-87. According to Griffin, a possible reason for Criseida's widowed status is that the change from unmarried maiden to a widow helps to advance the plot in the direction he wishes. At the same time, it conforms more to Boccaccio's desire of not mirroring his Maria in faithless Criseida.

33
Griffin, p.410. "Alas, what a deal of joy, pleasure and sweetness had I once within them! And now here in sad distress do I consume my precious beauty."

34
Gordon, p.16.

35
Thomas Kirby, in his book Chaucer's Troilus: A Study in Courtly Love (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: U. of Louisiana Press, 1940), pp.107-118, covers quite effectively the topic of Pandarus's role in Boccaccio's Il Filostrato.

Chapter Two

Chaucer's Criseyde

Before attempting an analysis of Chaucer's heroine, it is advisable to present a brief summary of the development of the ideas on love which play such a prominent role in his *Troilus*. Only if we fully understand the philosophy that lies behind his interpretation of the lovers' tale, can we appreciate his conception of Criseyde's character.

When Troilus in his rapture speaks of Criseyde as "of my wele or wo/ The welle and roote,"[1] or considers that God has given her to him to cherish and serve above all things, he is expressing an attitude that would have been difficult to find in European thought previous to the twelfth century, for human love was not always seen as the sublime and noble passion it was to Troilus and Criseyde.

Ancient and early medieval societies had a completely different concept of the nature of earthly passions. Though they regarded love in its universal sense as the prime mover of the universe and fountain of eternal joy, they saw its carnal aspect as an inferior and sometimes even degrading feeling.[2] Other aspects of love received priority in their scale of values. The Greeks and Romans, for instance,

considered friendship as the ultimate form of love and regarded sexual relationships only as a means of perpetuating the species, but incapable of producing spiritual uplift;[3] either a comfortable and domestic feeling or an emotion to be feared, because in excess it could lead to degradation or into a wild and furious state that swept the individual to destruction.[4]

Christianity was the direct inheritor of these concepts and it incorporated them to its own philosophical and religious ideas. A supreme and all-powerful God became synonymous with love, and man's constant search for virtue and happiness was made to lead to Him, not through friendship, as in the ancients' case, but through caritas: the selfless love of a human being for another through which man tries to achieve union with God.[5] Christianity also inherited the ancients' distrust of carnal relationships and through most of the Middle Ages considered them as invariably sinful emotions which diverted into unworthy channels that feeling which should belong only to God.[6]

This narrow view of the human condition prevailed until the twelfth century intellectual, social and religious ferment caused man to question the unshaken faith of previous times.[7] Man felt freer to search for new solutions and

demand a re-evaluation of traditional concepts. Manifesting this attitude, a new love religion which sang in highly lyrical terms about the beauties of earthly love emerged in the southern provinces of France towards the end of the twelfth century. Taking Europe by storm, it urged a more lenient religious attitude towards matters of love. Courtly love, as it came to be called, was carried into the rest of Europe by the wandering minstrels of Languedoc. It proved to be a formidable opponent to orthodox religion. To the worship of God it opposed the worship of the god Amor; it laughed at the venerable institution of marriage and exalted adultery; it put woman upon a pedestal and worshipped her as only God had been worshipped until then;[8] sometimes it even mocked at the time-hallowed concept of heavenly bliss as the longed-for reward for a just and virtuous life.[9] In short, courtoisie played havoc with the established order of things and caused widespread consternation in Church circles, for a system that gave such priority to the pleasures of the flesh ran counter to every teaching of the Christian faith.

A pressing need arose to find a way to harmonize eros and caritas, and a new theology of love was elaborated by

St. Bernard, the great Cysternian mystic, that, without relinquishing God's supremacy, allowed greater latitude to the human condition.[10] According to this interpretation of love, because man is born of the flesh he must yield to his instinct if the species is to subsist, and, therefore, carnal love must be considered as a necessity in his life. Though love of God has the greatest priority in man's life, love of the flesh is the first step towards reunion with God, and it is good in itself because of its necessary condition. As long as it recognizes its inferior status and does not presume to invert the prescribed order of values by preferring the flesh over love of God, it is not sinful.[11]

Progress had been made. The necessary condition of human love was accepted and at least some respectability was awarded to human passion. But, though this theory accepted what C. S. Lewis calls "innocent sexuality,"[12] it still denied human love any ennobling or idealistic qualities. There remained a cleavage between spirit and flesh which had to be filled, and the love so devoutly espoused by the troubadours was still considered sinful.

On the religious side, the reconciliation was attempted by the great philosophical poets of the School of Chartres,

who, though they failed to reconcile courtly love with religion completely, at least asserted the wholeness of the nature of man and left "courtesy in a more reputable, and less precarious, situation."[13] Neither extreme asceticism nor irresponsible willfulness attracted them. They conceived the perfect man as composed of worldly as well as of spiritual values. Nature became for them the vicar of God on earth, and they revelled in exalting the beauties of this world,[14] always searching in it, as Johannes de Altavilla's hero did in his allegorical poem the Alchitrenus, for

> Her secret dwelling place; there to drag to light
> The hidden cause of quarrel, and reknit
> Haply reknit, the long-divided love.[15]

Courtly love poets also felt the need for a meeting ground. As men of their age, they were deeply religious, and the conflict between the earthly joys they could not deny and the joys of heaven they so firmly believed in were cause for great inner conflict. The efforts to find a *tertium quid* persisted. The French allegorical writers of the thirteenth century led the way in trying to effect a compromise. In his lengthy continuation of Guillaume de Lorris' *Roman de la Rose*, Jean de Meung hints at a parallel

between human and divine love in which courtly love is a parody of the divine.[16] The poets of the Italian Dolce Stil Nuovo, led by Guido Guinicelli, attempted the first successful blending of the two types of love. As Thomas Kirby points out, "By elevating his lady, by transforming her into a kind of spiritual being, he /Guinicelli/ inaugurated a revolution. The service of God and the service of woman are here united; the poet interprets, defends and explains the one in terms of the other."[17] However, though woman was idealized as a perfect heavenly being who spurred her lover on to worthy endeavor, she was not his road to salvation.[18] This step was left to Dante's crowning achievement, La Divina Comedia, where at last the longed-for synthesis was brought forth and the two sides of love were finally reunited. Woman not only became a lovely and spiritual creature, but her love aided man in his search for God, provided that what was loved in her was the reflection of God's eternal and immesurable virtue.[19] Thus could Dante love his Beatrice without sinning, for what he felt for her were

> those desires
> I stirred in thee, to make thee love the Good
> Beyond which nought is, whereto man aspires.[20]

Caritas and *Amor* finally joined together and gave of themselves to create a new Christian attitude towards human love. The exclusive worship of sensual love surrendered to the greater strength of Christian morality, but its ennobling elements gave sexual passion the spirituality it had lacked before and beautified the love that up to now had been considered questionable from the religious point of view. Though still considered a transient and imperfect good that by itself could not grant the perfect happiness that only the love of God can give, the love between man and woman became a vision of heavenly bliss, the most to which man could aspire on the human level, and a worthy feeling as long as it recognized its own finiteness when compared to God's everlasting love. No longer would human love need to deflect from the worship of God. *Eros* and *caritas* were recognized as but different steps to a reunion with God, and religious morality finally accepted not only the necessary condition of earthly passion but also the nobility and urgent beauty that its transient condition bestowed upon it.

The psychological impasse had at last been bridged, and the poets of the late Middle Ages could feel more at ease when singing their fervent praises to profane love.

Yet, always at the back of their minds was the medieval recognition of the impermanence of worldly things. Though they might have celebrated love in the fullest glory of the flesh, they were also conscious of that other love which transcends all other feelings, and no matter how vehemently they defended love's cause and dignified its beauty, it was always in relation to God's greater values, to which those of this world must remain subservient. As James L. Shenley suggests, their ultimate concern was with "divine peace and felicity, perfect and eternal, to be achieved not when individual wills were drawn to one another, but when they were drawn to God's, for it was His will that was peace."[21]

This is the love philosophy of the late Middle Ages, a philosophy that, while it recognized the nobility of earthly love, still considered it subject to the limitations imposed upon it by its finite condition, and this is what lies reflected in Chaucer's version of the Troilus and Criseyde story. In this, his "most profound and moving treatment of love", according to Derek Brewer,[22] Chaucer retells the story of the lovers' passion from the viewpoint of Christian morality, converting what had been a story of

love betrayed into a courtly love romance where the lovers' tragedy becomes an example of the unreliability of earthly love to bring true and lasting happiness.

For his new interpretation of the lovers' tale, Chaucer used Boccaccio's Il Filostrato as the main source for his poem,[23] effecting needed changes in characters and plot. Boccaccio's poem had been a song in praise of sexual passion; the tragedy had been wholly Troilo's, as the poet well intended it to be. Only Troilo's love had been charged with nobility and devotion; Criseida's had been mainly selfish, sensual and superficial. This could not do for Chaucer's intention to present love in its most tender and idealistic aspects, so he strengthened the romantic elements found in Boccaccio's poem, refining the atmosphere of outright sensuality and raising the love story above its previous level of intrigue. Even though he adhered closely to the general plot, he introduced incidents that shed new light upon the characters, making the action revolve around character motivation and placing the story on a high level of psychological realism. Most important of all, he refashioned two lovers who in the bitterweet tenderness of their passion make of the poem, as Roger Sharrock states,

a true exposition of

> human frailty and human exposedness, tender in recognition of the limited human goodness of passionate love, as of other limited human ends, but agonisingly aware of the limitation.[24]

Most of Boccaccio's characters undergo changes in Chaucer's Troilus. Only Diomede remains essentially the same, with no mysteries and no contradictions. His role in the story is clear: to provide a contrast to Troilus' behavior as the devoted and morally worthy knight of medieval romance. He is the prototype of the courtly anti-hero.[25] Aggressive, bold, brazen and ruthless, he pursues his conquest of Criseyde with little regard to the conventions of the courtly code.

Pandarus is a masterly creation. John Spiers calls him "a protagonist of life."[26] Indeed, with his immense gusto for living, Pandarus comes alive with that peculiar Chaucerian earthy quality which will find its fullest expression in the Wife of Bath. Cynical, affectionate, cunning, and loyal to Troilus, he is changed from Criseyde's young cousin to an older uncle who becomes the foil to Troilus' nobility and lack of experience in love matters, opposing common sense and practicality to the high-flown idealism of the lovers.

Troilus, Derek Brewer feels, "is a character of a noble simplicity, neither complex nor ambiguous."[27] As the embodiment of the medieval ideal of the perfect knight and lover, he is the least life-like of the four main characters. In him Chaucer develops to the full the courtly qualities already found in the Italian Troilo. For all the intensity of his passion, Boccaccio's hero fell short of the ideal courtly lover in his criticism of Criseida at the end, when he bitterly blames her for her disloyalty. Love is a much more idealistic feeling for Chaucer's Troilus. It makes him a better warrior and a more sensitive lover than Troilo. Criseyde becomes for him the sole reason for existence, and he is so noble and constant that even when faced with her perfidy he finds excuses for her conduct. In this completely orthodox courtly comportment C. S. Lewis finds remnants of the Dreamer in Guillaume de Lorris' Roman, the "mere 'I', of the allegories," with no clear-cut personality of his own.[28] I cannot fully agree with this statement, for though Troilus behaves in all ways as the ideal courtly lover, Chaucer has also given him a well-defined personality, and his capacity for serious thought and introspection keeps him from being completely stereotyped.

Even if the story remains the tale of Troilus' woes, it is Criseyde who carries the burden of the action. Troilus is, as Lewis states, "the shore upon which all these waves break,"[29] but it is Criseyde's conduct which motivates the tragedy. She becomes the most important character in terms of action, and upon her it is that Chaucer concentrates his genius for characterization. In Criseyde we have a completely different woman from Boccaccio's heroine. The Italian poet presented Criseida with a very superficial characterization, for all his attention was showered upon Troilo as his mirror image. Her importance in the story was conditioned by the way in which her conduct could bring out in relief Troilo's integrity and faithfulness. Chaucer, on the contrary, saw much more in his heroine than just a supporting character. For him her tragedy was as great as Troilus'; Boccaccio's rather shallow heroine did not satisfy his idea of the woman he wanted for his version of the tale. If Criseyde were to share Troilus' tragic importance, she had to be a person whose nobility of character could at least match his, so that the contrast between what she actually was and her final shameful conduct could awaken a sympathetic perception of the ironies of life. His Criseyde, therefore,

is a woman who matches Troilus' courtly behavior with her own, embodying thus the finer aspects of human conduct. At the same time, she is presented with such matchless realism, that she transcends the limits of _courtoisie_ to become an intensely human creature full of the complexities of character common to all humanity.

Trying to magnify Criseyde's nobility, Chaucer accentuates her attractiveness. We first meet her at the temple, a woman of such exquisite beauty that she commands the attention of all by the dignity of her appearance. Of even height, light-colored hair and bright eyes, she stands by herself in dignified aloofness. Her description reminds us of Guido Gunicelli's _donna angelicata_, the woman who shares her beauty and nobility with the angels and serves as inspiration to her lover:

> in all Troies cite
> Nas non so fair, for passynge every wight
> So aungelik was hir natif beaute,
> That lik a thing inmortal semed she,
> As doth an hevenyssh perfit creature,
> That down were sent in scornynge of nature (I,100-105).

The deliberate and leisurely narrative flow permits good character development, allowing us to catch glimpses of Criseyde's social conduct. While Boccaccio lightly glossed over this aspect of his heroine's personality, Chaucer

presents a clear picture of Criseyde's daily life, and this lends a semblance of realism to her actions by showing the medium in which she lives and which colors many of her attitudes. Chaucer shows Criseyde engaged in numerous activities which reveal much about her. We see her in her palace graciously presiding over her _entourage_, strolling through the gardens with her relatives, indulging in witty conversation with her uncle, or at a dinner party with some friends, slowly revealing herself to be a thoroughly charming, virtuous and tender-hearted young woman who knows how to temper her graciousness with dignified restraint. She is the medieval noblewoman to the core, a woman who never forgets that society demands constant tact and refined behavior. Pandarus' words to Troilus express in a nutshell the qualities the poet wants to emphasize in Criseyde:

> Love hath byset the wel; be of good cheere!
> For of good name and wisdom and manere
> She hath ynough, and ek of gentilesse.
> If she be fayr, thow woost thyself, I gesse.
>
> "Ne I nevere saugh a more bountevous
> Of hire estat, n'a gladder ne of speche
> A frendlyer, n'a more gracious
> For to do wel, ne lasse hadde nede to seche
> What for to don; and al this bet to eche,
> In honour, to as fer as she may strecche,
> A kynges herte semeth by hyrs a wrecche (I,879-889).

Chaucer's intention, as can be clearly seen, is to build-up Criseyde's character in every way possible. The most important aspect is her moral integrity, and to emphasize this, he strips her of all the sensuality and voluptuousness that characterized Boccaccio's Criseida. Her moral graces match her physical beauty. Fair within and fair without is the way Chaucer presents his heroine. Criseyde is the image of propriety. Repeatedly we find through the poem allusions to her discretion and good reputation. After her father's defection to the Greek camp, her conduct has been so exemplary that "wel men of hir tolde" (I, 131), the whole Trojan court holds her in great esteem "by cause, lo, that she a lady is" (II, 1633). "To kepe alwey myn honour and my name" (II, 762) is of paramount importance to her, and this we see mirrored in her discreet and prudent approach to matters that concern her. When Pandarus comes to her seeking to advance Troilus' cause, her first reaction is one of righteous indignation, and she chides him with virtuous anger:

> "Allas! what sholden straunge to me doon,
> When he, that for my beste frend I wende,
> Ret me to love, and sholde it me defende?" (II, 411-413).

Again we find her refusing to accept a letter from Troilus

because it could be harmful to her good name:

> "Scrit ne bille,
> For love of God, that toucheth swich matere,
> Ne brynge me noon; and also, uncle deere,
> To myn estat have more rewarde, I preye,
> Than to his lust! What shoulde I more seye?"
> (II,1130-1134).

Nothing that can sully her good name, nothing that can set her at odds with society can be acceptable to her. Everything she does is directed by her basic desire to act in accordance with what society demands, and she exhibits at all times the discreet behavior which is the mark of the well-born lady.

Another thing which brings out her essential seriousness is the slowness of her falling in love. Criseyde, contrary to Boccaccio's heroine, cannot be rushed into love. To do so would destroy the carefully wrought image of respectability the poet has built up for her, making the spectacle of her weakness less tragic. Criseida paid only lip service to discretion. She was so smitten by love at the first sight of Troilo that "she desired him beyond any other good and grieved much over the time she had lost when she had not known him".[30] Though Criseyde is also impressed by Troilus' manly good looks, she does not reveal her reaction so blatantly. Instead she blushes in confusion and begins

a long inner process of consideration before accepting him, for she must be thoroughly convinced of the propriety of her actions and the honorableness of his intentions. To sweep away any possible doubt that she is one to be lightly swayed by passion, Chaucer comments on the prudence and discretion she showed before making her decision:

> "For I sey nought that she so sodeynly
> Yaf hym hire love, but that she gan enclyne
> To like hym first, and I have told yow whi;
> And after that, his manhod and his pyne
> Made love withinne hire herte for to myne,
> For which, by proces and by good servyse,
> He gat hire love, and in no sodeyn wyse"(II,673-79).

"By proces and by good servyse," that was how Troilus achieved Criseyde's love, and it is in this gradual process of careful thought and discreet behavior that Criseyde's courtly love qualities are put to the test, as she exhibits the admirable nobility and restraint typical of courtly love mistresses. Even if she is attracted by Troilus at first sight, an indispensable courtly love precept,[31] she hangs back, playing hard to get, and displaying an indifference she does not feel but which is part of the courtship ritual. Troilus has to endure the trying-out period a lover must go through before proving himself worthy of his lady's favor, and only when she is completely sure of his devotion and excellent moral qualities does

she deign to look favorably upon his suit.

It is noteworthy that Chaucer stresses that it is not Troilus' physical attractiveness that tilts the balance in his favor, but his gentle heart and moral worth. That is what she values more than anything else he could offer her, and this fact brings out in relief the tenderness and purity of her love. It was not, as she tells him after her surrender,

> "... youre estat roial,
> Ne veyn delit, nor only worthinesse
> Of yow in werre or torney marcial,
> Ne pompe, array, nobleye, or ek richnesse
> Ne made me to rewe on youre destresse;
> But moral vertu, grounded upon trouthe,
> That was the cause I first hadde on yow routhe!"
> (IV,1667-73).

Criseyde's nobility is further emphasized, ironically enough, by her resolute honesty. She does not beat about the bush in order to express what she feels. She refuses, for instance, to give Troilus false hopes regarding his chances of winning her affection quickly, and she bids Pandarus to tell him so:

> "But that I nyl nat holden hym in honde;
> Ne love a man ne kan I naught, ne may,
> Ayeins my wyl" (II,477-79).

> "And here I make a protestacioun,
> That in this proces if ye depper go,
> That certeynly, for no salvacioun

> Of yow, though that ye sterven bothe two,
> Though al the world on a day be my fo,
> Ne shal I nevere of hym han other routhe" (II,484-89).

She also frankly sets her conditions before accepting Troilus' love and warns him that she will be bound to him only in so far as his conduct is above reproach:

> "A kynges sone although ye be, ywys,
> Ye shal namore han sovereignete
> Of me in love, than right in that cas is;
> N'y nyl forbere, if that ye don amys,
> To wratthe yow; and whil that ye me serve,
> Chericen yow right after ye disserve" (III,170-75).

As the plot develops, it is made clear that Criseyde is no starry-eyed maiden who falls in love with love, nor is she a voluptuous siren who draws men on in order to satisfy her sexual desires. We see instead a level-headed young woman, satisfied with her life as it is, who naturally thinks carefully before taking a decision which will undoubtedly change her life completely. The soliloquy in which she debates the question of love proves this point. Besides being, as Arthur Mizener points out, "the meditation of a prudent but tender-hearted woman in love,"[32] it also shows her honesty of character, for she shows she wants to make sure of what love can mean to her in both emotional and practical terms. Everything is put on the balance--his noble station; his physical and moral qualities, the

advantages and disadvantages such a step would carry--and not even then is she completely convinced about what to do.

Once she decides upon love, however, she gives herself wholly and without reservations. There is no equivocation in the good intent with which she enters into her relationship with Troilus. Her sincerity is impossible to doubt, for Chaucer's skill at character build-up succeeds in giving absolute credibility to her actions. We see her as he wants us to see her--a woman in love, warm, tender and upright, who seeks gentleness and moral worth in the man she loves. Even if we look at her conduct in the light of future events, we must accept the fact that for a time she truly believes in the steadfastness of her love. Nothing in her has given us a reason to doubt her integrity. "Honour of trouthe and gentilesse" (III,163) has been her guiding principle from the start, and the fact that she has proven herself to be honorable and well-intentioned in all respects gives great tragic effect to her characterization.

Up to the moment of her betrayal Criseyde has adhered closely to courtly standards of conduct. Her avowed faithfulness to her lover is touching in its intensity. Her general

comportment lacks nothing an ideal courtly mistress should have. Even after she leaves Troy, she spends her days weeping and pining for her lover.

However, though her behavior throughout most of the poem is consistent with prescribed courtly standards, Criseyde is much more than a conventional courtly mistress following strictly the precepts of an artificial code of conduct. Chaucer has so imbued her with the naturalness of life that the interplay established between character and action makes of her a completely credible woman who, as Germaine Dempster comments, "is irresistibly led by a conspiracy of circumstances."[33] She has grown too human for anyone to consider her as a set character of medieval romance. As John Speirs points out, "she moves and talks through varying scenes and situations with the life of a real person and as such completely transcends ... the conventional lady of courtly love."[34] Though she violates a cardinal commandment of the code by playing false to a lover's trust,[35] it is from the human angle that Chaucer looks at her plight, and it as a human being that she weeps her misery and weakness, realizing she is not strong enough to rise above one of life's cruelest situations.

We have, then a heroine that seems the epitome of womanly perfection. Everything about her speaks of graciousness, gentilesse, softness and integrity. Yet this paragon of virtue and nobility fails at the very first test of constancy and betrays the love that has been entrusted to her. How can one explain this sudden and incongruous change of behavior in the basically noble and decent woman she has shown herself to be? Infidelity could easily be expected from Boccaccio's Criseida, for her conduct was always marked by selfish sensuality. But Criseyde has been so completely different that this character inconstancy endangers her credibility.

However, the point is that Criseyde had to prove unfaithful for two reasons. First, medieval literary tradition did not allow writers to effect substantial changes in the plots of the familiar stories which they retold. As James Tatlock observes:

> The most esteemed medieval narratives undertook not to convey convincing realities which had never been observed before, but to give a new and piercing momentum to stories which already had the warm appeal of familiarity, and the authority of what at bottom was felt as history.[36]

Criseyde's fate, therefore, had already been fixed by tradition, for hers was a well-known tale and everyone

knew of her unfaithfulness. The most Chaucer could do, according to accepted literary standards, was to give a different interpretation to her story. Yet--and this is the second reason--even if he had felt free to change it, it is my contention that he probably would not have done so, for it is absolutely essential to his interpretation of the lovers'tale that Criseyde remain unfaithful. First, it is precisely the bewildering contrast between her innate honesty and her treachery that proves the instability of human behavior which Chaucer wanted to illustrate in his poem. Also, the disastrous effect of her conduct on Troilus'life justifies the poet's final exhortation to young lovers not to put their ultimate trust on loves that pass "soone as floures faire" (V,1841), but on Him that "nyl falsen no wight" (V,1845), thus firmly establishing the difference that exists between human and divine love.

Yet, in spite of the limitations imposed upon him by the literary standards of the day, Chaucer was aware that the inconstancy between her conduct in the first part of the poem and her behavior at the end had to be made psychologically plausible. This he did through skillful character development, providing Criseyde with sufficient

logical motivations that by showing the "mental states, the attitudes and emotions which accompany and determine action,"[37] satisfactorily explain Criseyde's character inconsistancy.

Throughout the long and leisurely exposition of his heroine's character, the poet calls attention to certain aspects of her nature which seem to hold the key to her personality. Underlying the prudence and discretion that so distinguish Criseyde, there is an instinct of self-preservation that goes beyond a mere desire to comply with the demands of society. Everything she does is aimed at keeping herself out of dangerous situations that might affect her adversely. This young woman who possesses such sterling moral qualities has also a penchant for looking realistically at facts that concern her welfare. If she cares for her reputation, it is because she knows that by keeping a spotless name she assures herself of the approval of all. Criseyde does not want to make waves. When Pandarus melodramatically warns her that her refusal to accept Troilus might have tragic results, she reacts instinctively to protect herself from scandal, and consents to hear him out, for, as she shrewdly surmises:

"And if this man sle here hymself, allas!
In my presence, it wol be no solas.
What men wolde of hit deme I kan nat seye:
It nedeth me ful sleighly for to pleie" (II,459-462).

Though it could be argued that Criseyde's discretion is that of any normal young lady, it is the reasons behind it that count. This is made evident as the action progresses. Criseyde, for all her seeming self-possession and cool-headedness, is an essentially fearful, insecure and weak-willed person who feels a constant need for protection. Events in her life have made fear an important component in her psychological make-up, and this is a factor that will unconsciously affect her decisions and make her look out for herself, even if it means going against her better nature. Repeatedly Chaucer alludes to this feeling. From the opening lines there are continuous mentions of this most vital characteristic. We are told that "of hire life she was ful sore in drede" (I,95) and that her lonely state in Troy after her father's flight to the enemy had left her" wel nigh out of hir wit for sorwe and fere" (I,108), for the infuriated Trojans wanted to do away with all the traitor's kin. There is always fear for her around the corner. She fears the Greeks, she fears to draw undue attention upon herself, she fears accepting

Troilus at first; she fears, as C. S. Lewis says, loneliness, love, hostility--in short, everything that might be feared,[38] making her "the fearfulleste wight that might be" (II,460) and "slydinge of courage" (V,825).

For a woman of her sensiblity and sheltered upbringing, to be the innocent victim of her father's treason must have resulted in an anguishing situation of doubt and insecurity. This is why she makes her name synonymous with caution and discretion, aware that her safety lies in keeping herself out of the public eye. It also results in the very human and natural reaction of seeking protection from one powerful enough to look after her, placing herself, as Herbert Wright states, "at a disadvantage when she has to handle an unexpected crisis and come to a rapid decision unaided."[39] She goes to Hector for aid from the populace's fury. She listens to and lets herself be led by Pandarus' avuncular authority. When she accepts Troilus, it is because she feels sure that his discretion and love will give her the security she so desires, and that he will become

> a wal
> Of stiel, and sheld from every displesaunce;
> That to be in his goode governaunce,
> So wis he was, she was namore afered (III,479-82).

Once they become lovers she is content to accept him as her lord and master. Her dependence is so complete that the thought of leaving him drives her frantic with sorrow, leaving her completely lost and bereft of all reason for living.

Criseyde is, then, a basically noble but weak charcter who cannot struggle long alone against an adverse tide. Only when she feels herself on sure ground can she be seen acting with firmness and resolution, as we see her doing during Troilus' courtship. On the other hand, we also see her influenced by others and yielding ground when beset by too many difficulties. This weakness is well known by wily Pandarus, and is part of the psychological campaign he wages in Troilus' favor. By applying a continuous pressure upon her, and by mentioning the possible difficulties awaiting her, he finally wears down her defenses, and she comes to look upon Troilus as a bulwark she can depend on.

It is hard for Criseyde to adhere to a straight course once difficulties have set in. As long as no danger threatens, she gives full rein to her affectionate and noble nature, but, as soon as dark clouds gather, she is

thrown into a state of uncertainty that can override her best intentions. Her feelings of insecurity, her fears of what may come, her tender upbringing, and her need for security unite to make her always want to sail with the tide and follow her own convenience. This is most clearly seen in her reaction to the news that she is being exchanged for Antenor. At first she rebels against her cruel fate, vows eternal fidelity to Troilus, rails against her father for being the cause of her misfortune, and shows a firm attitude while making plans for her return, for a moment presenting a cool-headedness that impresses Troilus. However, her resistance is short lived. Continuous open defiance is not for her, for her gentle and timorous character cannot take much buffeting from adverse circumstances. Silent and meek she goes out of Troy, and when Calchas greets her,

> She seyde ek, she was fayn with hym to mete,
> And she stood forth muwet, milde and mansuete (V,193-94).

Though we do not know for certain how long she was at the Greek camp, Criseyde seems to have lost all the brightness of manner she displayed in Troy. She is a subdued character, depressed and despairing, who can only lament her fate while making useless plans for escape, for she does not

dare to face the risks involved in trying to return to Troy. It would need a woman with a strong and decided character to undertake such a step, and Chaucer's Criseyde is decidedly not that kind of woman. Alone, far from her lover and friends, she finds herself isolated and helpless. Diomede, as shrewd a reader of character as Pandarus, takes advantage of this fact; in his initial talk with her, he stresses her need for protection, cleverly playing upon her weakness:

> "...it is to yow newe,
> Th'aquayntaunce of thise Troians to chaunge
> For folk of Grece, that ye nevere knewe" (V,121-23).

> "And by the cause I swor yow right, lo, now,
> To ben youre frend, and helply, to my myght,
> And for that more aquayntaunce ek of yow
> Have ich had than another straunger wight,
> So fro this forth, I pray yow, day and nyght,
> Comaundeth me, how soore that me smerte,
> To don al that may like unto youre herte" (V,127-33).

The offer of friendship makes a deep impression on Criseyde, for in Diomede she seems to have found someone who can ease her burden of solitude and despair. Again begins the process of careful consideration which we saw in Troilus'case, only this time circumstances have changed. Then it was a matter of accepting love while surrounded by friends and in the familiar atmosphere of Troy. Her only concern was to be sure of the discretion that would keep her name free from

wagging tongues. Now it is almost a matter of survival. Alone, beset by the anguished memories of better days, and in the alien atmosphere of the Greek camp, it is not strange that a person of her apprehensive spirit reacts as she does. Faced with Diomede's persistent wooing and the growing conviction that she will never see Troilus again, she decides to make the best of what life offers and accepts the Greek warrior, looking to him for the protection that has always been such a needed ingredient in her life.

And yet, though false to her love, Criseyde is far from being the cold-hearted woman of Boccaccio's tale. Untrue like her she might be, but there the similarity ends. The two poets differ in the presentation of their heroines. The Italian Criseida was shown to be a child of the senses with little character depth. Though at first she resisted Diomedes briefly, she was soon won over by his good looks and convincing words, and she forsook Troilo easily, without shedding tears of regret for her cruel action. Boccaccio was not interested in her as a person. His only interest lay in showing Troilo's devotion. Once that is established, Criseida is dismissed without further comment.

On the other hand, Chaucer tried to enlist his audience's sympathy for his heroine through a skillful presentation

of attenuating circumstances. Criseyde the woman is of utmost interest to him, and he maintains her image of gentleness to the end, mitigating the impact of her treachery by painting a moving picture of her fears and anguish, the sufferings that waste away her beauty, her futile plans for escape, and, above all, her loneliness:

> In al this world ther nys so cruel herte
> That hire hadde herd compleynen in hire sorwe,
> That nolde han wepen for hire peynes smerte,
> So tendrely she wepte, bothe eve and morwe.
> Hire nedede no teris for to borwe!
> And this was yet the werste of al hire peyne,
> There was no wight to whom she dorste hire pleyne
> (V, 722-28).

He also wisely refrains from specifying the length of time elapsed between the start of Diomede's wooing and her surrender, for thus nothing can be said about her being fickle:

> But trewely, how longe it was bytwene
> That she forsok hym for this Diomede,
> There is non auctour telleth it, I wene.
> Take every man now to his bokes heede;
> He shal no terme fynden, out of drede.
> For though that he bigan to wowe hire soone,
> Er he hire wan, yet was ther more to doone (V, 1086-92).

Chaucer avoids any suggestion of lustfulness in her acceptance of Diomede's love, but makes perfectly clear that her feelings of helplessness, her pathetic need for protection, and even her pity for his wounds were the factors that

in her the perfidiousness Boccaccio pictured in his Criseida, he conceived her mainly as a good but weak person subject to life's tragic twists. His sympathy for her knew no bounds, and though trying to keep an objective stance, he comes to her defense on various occasions, refusing to sit in judgment upon her. Nowhere in the poem can we find a word of condemnation. Instead, he tries to draw as much attention possible to her charming qualities in an effort to enlist his audience's sympathy to her cause. "Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde," he says on one occasion,

> Forther than the storye wol devyse.
> Hire name, allas! is punysshed so wide,
> That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise.
> And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,
> For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,
> Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe (V,1093-99).

At other times he waxes indignant at the possibility of calumny:

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

he declares, sorrowfully, managing to pack such indignation in his few words that one has the impression that she might have been more sinned against than sinner.

So favorable is Chaucer's attitude towards Criseyde, and so positive is the general impression that she gives,

that one feels, as C. S. Lewis states, that if Criseyde had been allowed to live her life out in Troy, she would have been "a happy woman and a cause of happiness to all about her."[40] As Chaucer pictures her, she is really a lovely, gentle and well-intentioned woman who by rights should have deserved a better fate, but whom life's unpredictability tossed into situations that proved to be too hard to solve in an honorable way.

Chaucer's deliberate combination of fineness of spirit with weakness of character gives an astounding realism to Criseyde's characterization. What wins one over completely is her human quality. As Albert Baugh observes, she "interests us because she is a woman--complex, baffling, sometimes childishly transparent in the workings of her mind, sometimes inscrutable."[41] Such is Chaucer's skill in his sympathetic presentation of his heroine that it is she and not Troilus who turns out to be the recipient of everyone's pity. Perhaps it is, as Tatlock argues, because Chaucer presents him only in high relief as the ideal lover who embodies everything that is noble and exalted in romantic love, while he sculpts her in the round with unparalled realism.[42] Be this as it may, it is Criseyde

who becomes the most important character in terms of vital action, and it is mainly through her that we get the impact of the poem's moral message.

We must look upon Criseyde from two levels of perspective: the human and the spiritual. In the human she lives her own tragedy; in the spiritual her character takes a meaning which transcends worldly values. Thus we see that the traits that constitute her personality also give moral relevance to her role in the story; the discretion and circumspection that so distinguish and ennoble her also form part of that instinct of self-preservation which will finally drive her into Diomede's arms, and her gentleness, timidity and need for protection become the expression of the weakness of purpose that at the end will make her love a symbol of inconstancy.

We can also see in her the blindness that prevents man from understanding the meaning of life completely. Like all mankind, Criseyde is bound by her mortality and cannot see very far. Her human finiteness limits her perspective, and though we find her continuously asking herself questions on the nature of love, on fate and on worldly happiness, she cannot provide the answers. Being mortal, she lacks the complete understanding which comes

only after death, when, in Troilus' case, he can look from afar and finally see the relative unimportance of earthly things and is able to laugh at "the blynde lust, the which that may nat laste" (V,1824).

Criseyde's role is made clear in the closing lines of the poem, when Chaucer uses the lovers' example to make a comparison between earthly and divine love. What need is there, asks the poet, "feynede loves for to seke," (V,1848) when there is God's love, which, stable and supreme, never betrays? Because it was of this earth, the lovers' passion was subject to the ups and downs of Fortune's wheel and proved to share the instability of all worldly things. For all her beauty, nobility and honest sincerity, Criseyde could not help being betrayed by her own weakness and she ended by bringing unhappiness on both Troilus and herself. Her own tragedy ironically answers her question, "Endeth thanne love in wo?" (IV,834) and confirms her assertion that "worldly selynesse, / Which clerkes callen fals felicitee, / Imedled is with many a bitternesse" (III,813-815). As Ida Gordon affirms, "Criseyde, for all she 'menes wel', exemplifies, both as agent and victim, the 'slydinge courage' inevitable in one whose values are those of this 'slydinge' world."[43]

Insofar as Troilus made his happiness depend on his lover, he was bound for sorrow and loss, for he committed the error Christian thought warns so much about: that of making human love an end in itself, forgetting there is a higher love to which one owes one's whole allegiance.

In this way Chaucer succeeded in turning Boccaccio's tale into a tragedy of great philosophical implications based upon a fundamental premise of Christian ethics: that although human love is desirable and necessary, it does not completely suffice. The awareness that the lovers' tragedy promotes is not intended, however, to elicit a repudiation of human love. Nothing was further from Chaucer's mind, for, like other writers of his time, he recognized and accepted the vital and sensitive part it plays in human existence. His poem stands out for its moving and tender treatment of love in all its aspects, presenting it as the greatest and noblest good on earth. If there is any repudiation, as Derek Brewer points out, it has to be from the point of view of Heaven, and not from a human standpoint.[44] Therefore, the fact that Chaucer classified Criseyde's love as an example of "feyned loves"(V,1848) did not mean that he was trying to denigrate or invalidate its worth. All he desired to convey was the idea that above human love, no

matter how exalted its beauty and idealism, must be set the love of God, for human passions are too subject to life's inconstancies to be completely dependable. This he succeeded in doing, not by condemning love as unworthy, but by translating Boccaccio's tale of passion into the most perfect example of human love--a courtly love romance--and then showing at the end how its dependance on frail human vessels for its fulfillment makes it end in disillusion and tragedy.

An important element in his interpretation of the story was the creation of a new Criseyde, a gentle and serious woman to take the place of the frivolous coquette of Boccaccio's poem. A woman, in short, whose tragic appeal could awaken in her audience a compassionate awareness of "common human weakness under the levelling shadow of mortality."[45]

Chaucer thoroughly succeeds in creating such a woman in Criseyde. Patterned on the noble lady of the courtly romances of his day, she takes on a fascinating realism as Chaucer applies his talent for characterization. Full of contradictory traits which add up to an absorbing complexity of character, she fulfills her role completely as her fate opens our eyes to the often unjust and

bewildering events in life, reminding us of how fragile and fleeting human happiness can be. So masterful has Chaucer's sympathetic characterization of Criseyde been that we do "excuse hire yet for routhe" (V, 1099). We can see mirrored in her tragedy the sheer vulnerability of man's life on earth, realizing, as Roger Sherrock points out, that "the horror into which Criseyde falls is that horror of the contingent that cuts across particular quirks of personality and lies in wait for all of us."[46]

Footnotes

[1] Geoffrey Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer's Major Poetry, ed. Albert C. Baugh (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), III, 1472-1473.

[2] Plato, in his Symposium, Great Books of the Western World vol.7, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), p.157, states: "And the love, more especially, which is concerned with the good, and which is perfected in company with temperance and justice, whether among gods or men, has the greatest power, and is the source of all our happiness and harmony, and makes us friends with the gods who are above us, and with one another."

Regarding human passions, Plato says: "The Love who is the offspring of the common Aphrodite is essentially common, and has no discrimination, being such as the meaner sort of men feel, and is apt to be of women as well as of youths, and is of the body rather than of the soul--the most foolish beings are the objects of this love which desires only to gain an end, but never thinks of accomplishing the end nobly, and therefore does good and evil discriminately." (p.153).

[3] Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, The Greek Way of Life (New York: Collier Books, The Macmillian Co., 1961), pp.120-121. On the subject, Dickinson writes: "So much indeed were the Greeks impressed with the manliness of this passion ... that some of the best set the love of man for man above that of man for woman. The one, they maintained, was primarily of the spirit, the other primarily of the flesh; the one bent upon shaping to the type of all manly excellence both the body and the soul of the beloved, the other upon a passing pleasure of the sense."

[4] Clive S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936),p.4.

5

Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Great Books of the Western World, vol.20, p.501. On the subject of caritas, Aquinas has to say: "Now the aspect under which our neighbor is to be loved, is God, since what we ought to love in our neighbor is that he may be in God. Hence it is clear that the act by which we love God, and by which we love our neighbor is specifically the same. Consequently the habit of charity extends not only to the love of God, but also to the love of our neighbor."

6

Saint Augustine, Confessions, World Masterpieces, vol.1 ed. Maynard Mack (New York: Norton & Co., 1973), p.674. St. Augustine repents of the sinful ways of his youth with these words: "I kept not the measure of love ... but out of the muddy concupiscence of the flesh ... mists fumed up which beclouded and overcast my heart, that I could not discern the clear brightness of love, from the fog of lustfulness.... and I strayed further from Thee, and Thou lettest me alone, and I was tossed about, and wasted, and dissipated, and I boiled over in my fornications, and Thou heldest Thy peace, O Thou, my tardy joy!"

7

Charles Homer Haskins, The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1928), p.viii. To this respect, Haskins states: "This century ... was in many respects an age of fresh and vigorous life. The epoch of the Crusades, of the rise of the towns, and of the earliest burocratic states of the West, it saw the culmination of the Romanesque art and the beginning of the Gothic; the emergence of the vernacular literatures; the revival of the Latin classics and of Latin poetry and Roman Law; the recovery of Greek science, with its Arabic additions, and much of Greek philosophy; and the origins of the first European universities."

8

For a fuller explanation of the system of courtly love read C. S. Lewis' chapter on the subject in his book The Allegory of Love. William George Dodd also has an

excellent chapter on the same matter in his book Courtly Love in Gower and Chaucer (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1959).

9
In Aucassin and Nicolette, an anonymous twelfth century romance, Aucassin illustrates this point when he says: "What would I be doing in Paradise? I don't want to enter there, but only to have Nicolette, my very sweet love, whom I love so much. For to Paradise go only ... the old priests, the old cripples and maimed ones.... But to Hell I wish indeed to go; for to Hell go the handsome clerics, and the fine knights.... There, also, go the fair and courteous ladies who have two or three lovers besides their husbands.... There, also, go the harpers and the jongleurs, and the kings of the world.... With them do I wish to go--provided that I have Nicolette, my very sweet love, with me." (World Masterpieces, vol.1, p.824).

10
Etienne Gilson, The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p.2.

11
Gilson, pp.42-43.

12
Lewis, p.16.

13
Lewis, p. 111.

14
Lewis, p. 104.

15
Lewis, p. 110.

16
Lewis, p. 147.

17
Thomas A. Kirby, Chaucer's Troilus: A Study in Courtly Love (Louisiana: Louisiana State U. Press), p.76.

18
Kirby, p.77. In Guido's Guinicelli's poetry the lady is all important, even superceeding God in his affection. Kirby quotes one of Guinicelli's poems in which the poet states that if when he dies and God accuses him of attributing to his lady "what belongs only to God and to the Queen of Heavens," he will answer: 'I thought my loved one was an angel from your kingdom; wherefore, do not hold me to blame if I gave her my love!" This makes evident that love of woman and love of God still vied with each other for primacy in man's affection.

19
Maynard Mack, ed., World Masterpieces, vol.1, p.728.

20
Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy, World Masterpieces, vol.1, ll. 22-24.

21
James Lyndon Shenley, "The 'Troilus' and Christian Love," Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Edward Wagenknecht (London: Oxford U. Press, 1959), p.388.

22
Derek S. Brewer, Chaucer, (London: Longman's, Green & Co. Ltd., 1967), p.94.

23
Herbert Wright, Boccaccio in England from Chaucer to Tennyson (London: The Athlone Press, 1957), pp.81-87.

24
Roger Sharrock, "Troilus and Criseyde': Poem of Contingency," Chaucer's Mind and Art, ed. A.C. Cawley (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1969), p.145.

25
Kirby, pp. 244-245.

26
John Speirs, Chaucer the Maker, (London; Faber & Faber, 1951), p. 58.

27 Brewer, p. 104.

28 Lewis, p. 195.

29 Lewis, p. 194.

30 Giovanni Boccaccio, _Il Filostrato, The Story of Troilus_, ed. R. K. Gordon (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1964), p. 52.

31 Andreas Capellanus, _The Art of Courtly Love_, ed. John Jay Parry (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1969), rule XVI, p. 185.

32 Arthur Mizener, "Character and Action in the Case of Criseyde," _Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism,_ p.354.

33 Germaine Dempster, _Dramatic Irony in Chaucer_ (New York: The Humanities Press, 1959),p. 29.

34 Speirs, p.52.

35 Capellanus, pp. 156-157.

36 James Tatlock, "The People in Chaucer's Troilus'," _Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism_, p. 333.

37 Albert C. Baugh, ed., _Chaucer's Major Poetry_, p.81.

38 Lewis, p. 185.

39
Wright, p. 91.

40
Lewis, p. 189.

41
Baugh, p. 80.

42
Tatlock, p. 336.

43
Ida Gordon, The Double Sorrow of Troilus: A Study in Ambiguity in "Troilus and Criseyde" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p.143.

44
Brewer, p. 113.

45
Sharrock, p. 151.

46
Sharrock, p. 148.

Chapter Three

Henryson's Cresseid

Robert Henryson, Scottish poet of the fifteenth century, was the next writer to pick up the Troilus and Criseyde story. However, instead of retelling the old familiar tale, he created a sequel to Chaucer's Troilus, an independent dramatic whole which Hyder E. Rollins considers as "the most artistic, the most powerful handling made by any poet after Chaucer."[1]

Henryson's Testament of Cresseid, a poem almost allegorical in the heavy symbolical meaning given to events, is a harsh and bleak presentation of the negative side of love which traces Cresseid's downward path into sin, her punishment and her final redemption. Its heroine is arrogant and selfish at first, repentant and submissive at the end. Her fate is hard and cruel. It is, in all aspects, a complete reversal of the philosophy underlying Chaucer's poem.

As Marshall W. Stearns suggests, Henryson's conception of love and its reflection on his portrayal of Cresseid as a sinner "seems to be the Scot's inability or refusal to adopt the elements of courtly morality in Chaucer."[2] Stearns has a good point there. Though Henryson cast

his poem within the traditional courtly framework, he used its elements only for purposes of dramatic effect, not to direct the conduct of his heroine. The woman that Chaucer pictured as a near paragon of virtue and respectability because of her courtly pattern of behavior becomes in Henryson's poem someone whose conduct shows proof of moral instability and sexual indulgence. It is obvious that the two poets did not see eye to eye regarding their heroines' behavior, and these differing conceptions of character are indicative of the shift towards stricter ethical standards which occurred in fifteenth century courtly poetry. Ever since their inception during the twelfth century, courtly love ideals of conduct had slowly been evolving towards more acceptable standards of Christian behavior. As Albert Baugh has pointed out, "The springtime of Courtly Love was the twelfth century, its autumn the thirteenth; by Chaucer's day it was merely a literary tradition."[3] Still, even if its traditional rules did not hold complete sway over the courtly romances written at the time Chaucer wrote his <u>Troilus</u>, <u>courtoisie</u> still carried weight in the fourteenth century. At least, its rules and conventions were understood and accepted by the select and sophisticated court circles which constituted

its main audience, making it possible, for instance, for Chaucer to write Troilus and Criseyde, a profoundly Christian poem extolling an essentially illicit relationship as an example of all that is best and noble in human love.

However, the passing of time and the changing social and religious realities of the fifteenth century resulted in a still more radical departure from traditional courtly standards of conduct. Several factors contributed to this: Feudalism and its accompanying institution, chivalry--two important conditions that had been essential for keeping alive the fin amour tradition--were on the wane. In its place, a powerful and vigorous middle class began to impose its practical and realistic approach to life and created a climate of thought that had its inevitable influence on the aristocratic traditions of courtly love poetry. Finally, a growing religious orthodoxy inspired by the strong winds of reform already beginning to blow through the established Church demanded stricter moral standards of behavior, eventually imposing its stern exigencies over the profane atmosphere of courtly romance.[4]

No longer did the poets have an almost exclusively noble and sophisticated audience to delight with the love

affairs of brave knights and their beauteous ladies. The increasing ability of the bourgeoisie to read and write created a different reading public. Pragmatic and conservative, the prosperous middle class demanded an instructive and realistic literature which would reflect their ideas on life. A serious, unironic literary product concerned with moral, social and political issues came to answer the needs of this public. Histories, fables, sermons with exempla, books on etiquette and religious instructions were the usual literary fare of the day.[5] Though it was not "'a literature of power',"[6] to use Bennett's term, it had something traditional courtly poetry lacked: realism.

Dread of God, knowledge and observance of His laws, respect for authority, and a sober moral comportment were, then, the bases of the social and moral creed of the fifteenth century. It affected all facets of life and, in reflecting itself in the literature of the period, it worked its way into courtly love poetry, introducing a moral and didactic element into the ideal service of love. Courtly romances now had other purposes than to entertain. The adulterous elements of conduct which might still

linger in them were frowned upon, and the poems became vehicles of moral exempla, where the social virtues mingled with the spiritual, and where continence, dedication to duty and moral uprightness received their reward. In other words, as John Speirs observes, "The courtly lover must learn to be a good and virtuous man."[7]

The characters' behavior in fifteenth-century courtly romances reveals the moral philosophy underlying the action. We have, for example, the courtly romance La Belle Dame Sans Merci, where the lady's matter-of-fact-attitude towards her lover's ardent wooing strikes a note of common sense and practicality usually absent from conventional courtly behavior.[8] Lydgate's The Temple of Glass is another good example of this point. It is the narrative of a completely conventional and proper love suit, full of the usually fin amour paraphernalia--gods of love, temples, lovely ladies and courteous knights--but its purpose is mainly didactic. Of it, Derek Pearsall observes:

> Venus in the poem represents no particular facet or synthesis of love, but is merely a mouthpiece for advice and instruction... /Her/ admonitions to the lovers show love as a test of virtue and an opportunity for virtuous conduct, delay in fulfillment as a form of purification, fulfillment the reward of truth, chastity and patience. Her tone is lofty and

> serious. What moves Lydgate to eloquence is not the prospect of love's rewards (he was a monk after all) but the satisfaction of duty and service well performed. It is essentially a moralist's handling of the code of love, and very much a fifteenth-century one.[9]

In another of Lydgate's poems, The Flower and the Leaf, we can see the same elements of morality in the characters' behavior. H. S. Bennett coincides with Pearsall in the following evaluation:

> The chaste, brave, and constant in love are set against the idle, frivolous, and casual. The knightly amusements of the chase or the pleasuring with ladies 'down by the river or up in the forest' are pastimes of the party of the Flower, which wilt and suffer under the blasts of everyday life. The life of devotion ... is opposed to one of pleasure and indulgence ... It marks the beginning of a change: the appeal seems no longer to be to ... 'courtly' standards but rather to a common-sense morality which might commend itself to the changing age it sought to amuse and instruct.[10]

The new shift of emphasis to a specifically moral and didactic ideal of conduct marked a definite transformation in the fin amour tradition. Its adulterous traits disappeared, and courtly love behavior turned moral from an admittedly Christian point of view.[11] Fifteenth-century poets could no longer accept as correct the illicit and secretive qualities of Criseyde's love, for the conduct that had been admired and accepted by previous

centuries was for them an indication of moral laxness.

Here, then, lies the difference between Henryson and Chaucer. Though they both treat the themes of mortality and the fugacity of human passions in their poems, their viewpoints are poles apart. The Troilus is a poem in the courtly love tradition in which the poet uses his heroine to present both the beauty and the limitations of human love. Its courtly love elements ennoble and dignify her conduct; there is no consciousness of sin in the sense of a violation of God's laws in Criseyde's remorse for her unfaithfulness. Her sin is against courtly love canons of conduct; she is blamed for having been false to her "name of trouthe in love," (V,1055) and it is for this reason that she weeps her sorrow. Chaucer, broadminded and tolerant, presents her breach of faith as an understandable human frailty and refrains from passing moral judgment upon her.

Henryson, on the other hand, beholds human conduct from the standpoint of a strict Christian morality that draws a sharp distinction between right and wrong and metes out severe punishment for lax behavior. Instead of the exaltation of passionate love we saw in Chaucer's

poem, there is in the Testament an insistence on the culpability of sexual passion, a moral awareness of the awful consequences of sin. Without a real understanding of the courtly love canons that lie behind Chaucer's conception of his heroine, Henryson sees in her a promiscuousness richly deserving of punishment. If to this inability to see Criseyde as Chaucer saw her we add Henryson's Scottish heritage of a strict and stern religious orthodoxy, to which, as Charles Elliot suggests, "the paths of right and wrong and towards bliss or bale are clear and separate,"[12] it is clear why his Cresseid's conduct does not remain unpunished, and why her original offense of unfaithfulness is relegated to a secondary position, overshadowed now by lechery, pride, and anger --three cardinal sins of the Christian faith.

Henryson's poem, then, is a tale of sin and redemption where Cresseid is punished for her moral turpitude, but acquires divine forgiveness through her sufferings. The method of characterization is simple and direct. There are no in-depth descriptions, no elaborate dialogues or soul-searching introspections that reveal quirks of personality. Henryson strips his characters of superfluous

adornment and stresses only those qualities that are important for the development of the action. Diomeid's portrait, for example, is a <u>tour de force</u> of brevity and conciseness. In a few short lines the poet paints a picture of ruthlessness and sensuality which is chilling in its deliberate cruelty:

> Quhen Diomeid had all his appetyte,
> And mair, fulfillit of this fair ladie,
> Vpon ane vther he set his haill delyte,
> And send to hir ane lybell of repudie
> And hir excludit fra his companie.[13]

As Patrick Cruttwell observes, "The two words 'and mair' suggest a terrible weight of satiety and humiliation."[14] Diomeid's description, brief as it is, impresses by its cold and impersonal finality, bringing into the open, not only all the selfishness and cruelty implied in Chaucer's warrior, but also a merciless indifference which sets Cresseid on her downward path to whoredom and alienation.

Troilus' appearance is very brief. "A colorless abstraction, the perfect gentleman,"[15] as Stearns calls him, he rides swiftly through the story, his virtuous and noble comportment towards the woman who had betrayed him contrasting sharply with her past selfishness and lechery. He remains a courtly figure who changes hue and trembles at the remembrance of his lost love, but he is a shadow

of his former self, used by the poet to emphasize the baseness of Cresseid's betrayal.

In Henryson's hands, the character of Calchas undergoes a radical alteration. Instead of Chaucer's selfish priest of Apollo who flees from Troy without a thought for the daughter he leaves behind, he is now a priest of Venus, a sympathetic and loving father who, in true Christian spirit, offers understanding and forgiveness to his erring daughter. There are reasons for these changes. The new links of affection between father and daughter serve to increase the pathos of Cresseid's condition. Also, for the story's moral effectiveness, Cresseid must be made to shoulder the whole blame for her misfortune, and Calchas is changed in order to exclude him from any responsability for his daughter's conduct. Finally, the fact that he becomes a priest of Venus increases the irony in the poem, for it makes him the priest of the goddess his daughter blasphemes against.[16]

As the main character of this poem, Cresseid is a completely modified Criseyde who retains only traces of Chaucer's immensely likeable though weak heroine. Her characterization is quite simple. As he does with the other characters, Henryson brings out in her solely those

traits which are needed to advance the action in the direction he wishes. In Cresseid's case, only some aspects of her predecessor have been retained. She is beautiful (at first), weak and self-protecting. To these traits the poet also adds others which we did not find in Criseyde, but which are essential to her new characterization; she is sensual, arrogant and promiscuous.

Action in Henryson's poem is swift and to the point. He does not waste time in excessive explanations, but condenses the action in short verses which carry the poem at a rapid pace. We meet Cresseid after she has been abandoned by Diomeid, having thus paid for her unfaithfulness to Troilus. Ironically called by the poet "the flour and A per se / Of Troy and Grece" (ll. 78-79), she has descended to the level of a court whore, tainting her femeninity with fleshly lust. Older now, bitter and harder, no longer able to stand her equivocal situation at court, she has fled to her father's house, where she insists on keeping to herself, refusing to undergo the humiliation of having others know about her disgrace. Loving and compassionate, Calchas offers protection to his sorrowing daughter, and in a scene reminiscent of the Prodigal Son's

homecoming he counsels her to Christian resignation with the words, "Perauenture all cummis for the best" (1. 104). But deaf to all counsels, too steeped in self-pity and false pride, she does not heed him. Instead of joining the faithful in prayer, she retires to a lonely chamber, not to pray for forgiveness for her sins, but to bitterly blame the gods for her misfortune.

At this stage of her life, Cresseid feels no shame for her ill-living. All she feels is an arrogant pride that makes her shun the company of others, for her self-esteem makes it impossible for her to give "the pepill ony deming / Of hir expuls fra Diomeid the king" (11,18-19). From now on, her actions will be permeated with a strong symbolic meaning, as she comes to represent the arrogant and unrepentant soul who refuses to acknowledge her guilt, preferring to attribute her miseries to others.

In her haughtiness and ignorance Cresseid rages against Venus and Cupid, the gods of love, accusing them of having broken the contract they had made with her that she would be "the flour of luif in Troy" (1.128).

> 'O fals Cupide, is nane to wyte bot thow
> And thy mother, of lufe the blind goddes!
> Ȝe causit me alwayis vunderstand and trow
> The seid of lufe was sawin in my face,

> And ay grew grene throw ȝour supplie and grace.
> Bot now, allace, that seid with froist is slane,
> And I fra luifferis left, and all forlane'(ll.134-140).

Henryson uses the concept of a broken contract between a lover and the gods of love, so common in courtly poetry, to emphasize Cresseid's presumptuousness and lack of self-knowledge; when she implies that the gods have failed to keep their part of the contract, she makes clear she does not realize that, as Elliot point out, the gods favor only those who are true in love and that her trials had begun when she proved false to Troilus.[17]

Cresseid's only regret is for her lost life of love, as she makes evident in her referral to the lovers that no longer seek her. To her sins of pride and lust she now adds the sin of anger, as she provokes the ire of the gods with her furious denunciations. In the familiar dream sequence of medieval courtly literature, Henryson presents us with a pantheon of pagan gods who sit in judgment upon Cresseid. The use of these pagan elements does not subtract from the deeply Christian intent of the poem, for the gods are invested with highly symbolic meaning, standing as surrogates of an aspect of divine power--in this case, the Boethian principle of love.[18]

By blaspheming against the gods of love, Cresseid sins against that powerful universal binding force through which the providence of God expresses itself and, by derivation, against the natural order of things which requires a state of moral and physical equilibrium in the universe.[19] According to Denton Fox, the gods "seem to be the symbol of the inexorable natural order: when Cresseid becomes promiscuous she throws the pantheon out of balance, and a merciless just retribution is inevitable."[20]

Both in their capacity as divine surrogates and as representatives of the astrological influences that bear upon men's lives, Henryson's gods mete their implacable and terrible justice upon the puny mortal who has offended them. Their majesty and anger are accentuated so as to bring out, through the pitiful spectacle of Cresseid's helplessness, the smallness of man in comparison to God's awful power. Saturn, with "lippis bla and cheikis leine and thin" (1.159), and Cynthia, goddess of the Moon, "of colour blak, buskit with hornis twa" (1.255), punish Cresseid with leprosy, one of the most terrible sicknesses a human being can be afflicted with, and the process of alienation that started when Diomeid had cast her aside is completed.

Cresseid's leprosy is Henryson's major contribution to the tale and the central fact around which the symbolic meaning of the poem revolves. The poet uses it to establish a parallel between the physical and moral corruption that has taken place in Cresseid. With terrifying logic, he picks the most horrible type of leprosy for his heroine--elephantiasis--which was and still is considered as the least curable,[21] intensifying thus the implacability of God's punishment of sin. With horrid livid swellings on face and body and a morbid alteration of the voice, Cresseid is now a far cry brom being the flower of love of Troy. All the impurity that had been hidden beneath her fair exterior comes now to the surface, and the beauty that made possible her life of sensual pleasure is completely destroyed. Cresseid finds herself truly isolated. She is the living symbol not only of sin, but also of the inevitable destruction of the flesh common to all mankind. John Speirs sees in Cresseid's leprosy "the transformation or metamorphosis from youth to age, the withering of the flesh.... It is the common fate of humankind, man or woman, sinful or innocent."[22] In our heroine's case, it serves both purposes, for the disease's gradual corruption

of her flesh is a vivid and graphic remainder of the corrosive effect of sin upon the human soul and, at the same time, of the gradual decomposition of dead flesh.

Medieval medical, astrological and religious beliefs about leprosy lie behind Henryson's choice of this disease as punishment for Cresseid. Medically it was thought to be a venereal disease, in Cresseid's case the result of the profligacy the poet deplores in her when he suggests, at the beginning of the poem, that she took other lovers after being deserted by Diomeid. It was additionally believed to be brought about by an excess of melancholy humors, characterized by too much cold and dryness in the body. This was also backed by astrology, for the conjunction of Saturn and the Moon was associated with the onset of leprosy. In this respect, Henryson's choice of Saturn and Cynthia as the avenging planets who punish Cresseid for her blasphemy is dramatically effective and astrologically correct. The Scot poet's masterful description of the two gods emphasizes in them the qualities associated with leprosy. Saturn's face is dry and seamed with age, his teeth chatter with cold, his nose drips, and he carries a quiver full of ice-capped arrows (11.156-158).

The moon-goddess, Cynthia, bluish and cold, wears a mantle "ful of spottis blak" (l.260), the same black spots that characterize leprosy.[23] In a highly dramatic scene which accentuates the strictness of divine justice and the utter helplessness of the soul when deprived of the warmth of God's grace, the two planet-gods lay their hands on the recumbent and defenseless Cresseid and pronounce the sentence that will deprive her forever of the unwisely used beauty that has brought her to such difficult straits.

Cresseid's sickness also takes a deep religious significance which integrates both medical and astrological causes. Leprosy was thought to be a divinely sent punishment for the sin of blasphemy and came to be considered its symbol.[24] For Henryson, Cresseid's life had been, in a way, a blasphemy against the laws of God and society; therefore, leprosy was a fitting punishment for her sinful life. It was also the worst punishment he could have devised for her, for leprosy is a living death that destroys the beauty our heroine was so proud of, excluding her from the admiration and companionship which she always craved for. But paradoxically, from the

religious point of view, at the same time that her sickness is a cruel punishment, it is also her means of salvation, for her isolation brings her into a closer relationship with God, and permits her the opportunity to reflect upon her past deeds.

Cresseid's recognition of her sinful ways and the admission that she is the only one to be blamed for her sufferings is a long process of purification through pain, misery and humiliation, a true earthly purgatory during which she is brought face to face with herself. As the action progresses, there is a gradual change in Cresseid's attitude towards her problem, a slow awakening towards an understanding of herself. At first, she is a woman full of anger and hurt pride who dares the anger of the gods. Her words"'O fals Cupide, is nane to wyte bot thow / And thy mother, of lufe the blind goddes'" (ll. 134-135) are clear evidence of her arrogance and blindness. After she wakes up from her dream and sees her deformed features in her mirror, she begins the process of self-awareness, but though she admits that her blasphemy has precipitated her sickness, there is still no evidence of the deeper understanding that her sinful life is the ultimate cause

of all her misfortunes. We see no real repentance, no admission of guilt. She has not yet acquired the true humility of contrition; the gods are "crabbit" (l.353) and willful, and she blames her wicked fate for everything. Still, some measure of acceptance is seen, for she resigns herself to life in a leper-house, as she realizes that a normal life is no longer possible for her.

With stark realism, Henryson describes Cresseid's life in the spital house. "'Quha sal me gyde?'" (l,131), the pitiful question born from the constant need for guidance and protection also present in Chaucer's Criseyde, is cruelly and ironically answered when she is led to the leper house. Here, dead to the world, her isolation and alienation are completed, a clear symbolization of the lonely and outcast condition of the soul tainted by the disease of sin. Cynthia's sentence comes true with awful severity:

> 'And to thy seiknes sall be no recure
> Bot in dolour thy dayis to indure.
>
> Thy cristall ene mingit with blude I mak,
> Thy voice so cleir vnplesand hoir and hace,
> Thy lustie lyre ouirspread with spottis blak,
> And lumpis haw appeirand in thy face;
> Quhair thow cummis, ilk man sall fle the place
> This sall thow go begging fra hous to hous
> With cop and clapper lyke ane lazarous'(ll.335-343).

Cresseid has reached the nadir of despair and wretchedness. Alone in a dark corner she weeps her anguish and desolation, an emotional catharsis that helps her on her way to purgation. In a moving complaint which is an excellent example of the medieval ubi sunt theme she mourns for her lost beauty and luxurious life, contrasting them to her present miserable condition:

> "Al is decayit, thy weird is welterit so;
> Thy hie estat is turnit in darknes dour;
> This lipper ludge tak for thy burelie bour;
> And for thy bed tak now ane bunche of stro,
> For waillit wyne and meitis thou had tho
> Tak mowlit breid, perrie and ceder sour;
> Bot cop and clapper now is all ago" (11.436-442).

The change that began at the onset of her leprosy is carried on still further as she finishes her lament, for if she begins by grieving for her material losses, she ends by holding herself as a mirror for others, as she realizes the transitory nature of earthly happiness. However, she does not as yet fully understand her share of guilt in her sufferings, but bewildered by her fate she prefers to blame her "wickit weird" (1.385) in her warning to other fair ladies about the end of wordly joys. As Elliot points out, "To her, the suffering appears unwarranted and capriciously inflicted. Regret is for

loss ... and not for trespass. It is a chydand, a sorrowful indignation, still embracing Pride and Anger."[25] Yet, at least there is the recognition that she is beyond earthly help. Her words "My greit mischeif, quhilk na man can amend" (l.455) can be interpreted as the acceptance of the helplessness of her condition and the start of the realization that help can only come from God.

Henryson leads his heroine through the cruel expiation of her sickness, for it will be through her sufferings that her soul will be purged from sin. We can perceive the slow acceptance of her fate, the gradual waning away of pride, anger, and presumptuousness. Another leper counsels her about the Christian virtue of resignation:

> '...Quhy spurnis thow aganis the wall
> To sla thy self and mend nathing at all?'
>
> 'Sen thy weiping bot dowbillis thy wo,
> I counsall the mak vertew of ane neid;
> /G/o leir to clap thy clapper to and fro,
> And lei/f/efter the lae of lipper leid' (ll.475-480).

Meekly Cresseid does as she is told, for the first time making a gesture towards submitting to her fate, in sharp contrast to her previous arrogant and negative reaction when advised by her father to accept her fate with resignation.

Her humiliation is not yet complete. It is evident that Henryson thought there was further need for penance before a Christian soul could aspire to achieve total absolution. Already punished for her lechery, she must now suffer for her pride, going forth in the rags of a leper to show her ugliness to the world and to suffer the bitterness of her alienation as former friends flee from her at the sound of her leper bell. Cresseid, "the flour and A per se / Of Troy and Grece," is now showing to all the corrupt self that had been hidden under her fair exterior. She still has to undergo the most bitter trial of all: that of meeting Troilus in her now ugly and humiliating condition, to beg from him the kindness she had not shown him when she was at the height of her beauty and prosperity.

Henryson makes Cresseid meet Troilus in a moving scene of non-recognition which is the most powerful scene in the whole poem, with its sharp contrast between the nobility, splendor and wealth of the betrayed Troilus and the wretchedness and ugliness of his betrayer. In a brief and restrained climax, ironically reminiscent of that other famous encounter in Chaucer's Troilus, when

it was he who begged for her kindness, Troilus, in full knightly splendor, meets but does not recognize Cresseid, the begging leper. No words are exchanged between the two erstwhile lovers, and nothing could be more dramatic than his silent departure. But before he rides away, something in the hideous face lifted to him in begging reminds him of his lost love, of "The sweit visage and amorous blenking / Of fair Cresseid, sumtyme his awin darling" (11.503-504), and with noble pity he casts a pouch of gold in her lap, thus bestowing upon her the selfless gift of caritas, in place of the love born of flesh he had given her before.

Curiously enough, Cresseid does not recognize Troilus. Henryson gives no explanation for this, but several critics have advanced their theories on the subject, basing them mostly on the symbolic meaning of Cresseid's characterization.

Denton Fox sustains that the reason is because she had never really known him, but had selfishly considered him, just as she did Diomeid, as a source of stability and protection.[26] Elliot, according to Fox, believes that leprosy had impaired Cresseid's vision, and this, coupled with the fact that Troilus's face was half hidden by his helmet, made it difficult for her to recognize him.[27]

Tatyana Moran advances the theory that when Cresseid meets Troilus, "she has already advanced so far on her way to purgation that she is living in an inner world totally incompatible with the one in which she loved and betrayed Troilus. It is a world in which there is no room for love and handsome knights, and the woman Troilus meets by the roadside is not merely altered in appearance but has become a different being whose mind cannot form any associations pertaining to her past."[28]

Of these highly speculative theories, Elliot's is the one that seems to me to be most plausible, because it is in line with the consistent realism of the poem and with the symbolic meaning that can be given to it. Physically, leprosy causes an inflammation of the eyes that can bring on blindness. To this respect Denton Fox quotes John of Salisbury as saying, "Certainly concuspiscence is a miserable and wretched leprosy.... Whoever does not moderate this love, let him fear leprosy and dread greatly the blindness of the eyes which it threatens."[29] It is to be expected, then, that, half-blind because of the inflamed state of her eyes, Cresseid could not recognize Troilus. But, aside from the real possible causes of her not recognizing him, the fact of her being told who he

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was after receiving his gift of charity has tremendous ironic and dramatic value; it is a shattering eye-opening incident which makes her see his true worth and completes her awareness of guilt. Symbolically, it is Cresseid's lack of physical sight that finally clears the inner blindness which had characterized her before.

Cresseid's open admittance of her guilt ends her penance. Humility and repentance replace arrogance and selfish pride. Knowing now what she has been, she no longer tries to deceive herself as who is to blame, and she wails out the full acknowledgement of her guilt:

> "Thy lufe, thy lawtie, and thy gentilnes
> I countit small in my prosperitie,
> Sa /efflated/ I was in wantones,
> And clam vpon the fickill quheill sa hie.
> All faith and lufe I promissit to the
> Was in the self fickill and friuolous:
> O fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troilus!
>
> "For lufe of me thow keipt continence,
> Honest and chaist in conuersation;
> Of all wemen protectour and defence
> Thou was, and helpit thair opinioun;
> My mynd in fleschlie foull affectioun
> Was inclynit to lustis lecherous;
> Fy, fals Cresseid; O trew knicht Troilus!" (11.547-560).

There is at last an open admission of her lechery; her pride and anger have finally disappeared, and she accuses herself in an agony of self-reproach, holding herself as a

mirror to all women to see the fate of those who spend their lives in selfishness and ill-living.

"Nan but my self now I will accuse "(1.574). With these words Cresseid comes to a final understanding of herself, and her trials are over. Through suffering her soul has been purged, and she is ready to die, in true medieval fashion bequeathing her body to the worms and her now pure soul to Diane, goddess of chastity.

This is, then, Heryson's Cresseid, a woman more utterly tragic than Criseyde could ever be. Still, her characterization, however forceful and dramatic, lacks the depth and perspective that made Chaucer's heroine so vibrantly alive. It is hard to analyze Cresseid's character by looking for psychological motivations, for there are no hidden depths in her, no contrasting shades of character that could give an impression of vital conflict. Cresseid is flatly and simply the personification of a sinner, a character who goes through an almost ritualistic sequence of sin and purgation, and who does not come to repentance through an inner psychological convulsion, but through a symbolical process of physical suffering.

Partly to blame for this is Henryson's terse and direct style of narration, which moves the action steadily forward without character - revealing digressions. But mainly to blame, I think, was Henryson's moralistic intention in writing his poem. While both he and Chaucer dealt with the same themes, Chaucer's interest was largely settled on Criseyde as a woman, and he concentrated on revealing every facet of her personality. Criseyde is important for what she is and what she does regardless the morality that can be deduced from her actions. Henryson's poem is, above all, a moral tale dealing with the consequences of sin. Cresseid's importance resides in the symbolic meaning of her characterization. Consequently, the poet concentrates only on those aspects of her personality which justify her fate and passes over anything that does not contribute to present Cresseid as a sinner. This, of course, results in a one-sided approach that prevents her from being a well-rounded personality.

But, in spite of these shortcomings, Cresseid's fate was so impressive in its implacability and emotional power that it had a drastic influence on the Criseyde legend from then on. The instinctive horror towards a sickness

that was an ever present reality to medieval man caused a consequent revulsion towards Henryson's heroine. Completely missing the moralistic and symbolic meaning of her characterization, Henryson's readers came to look upon her as a false and vulgar trollop worthy only of disgust and contempt. Rollins cites sixteenth-century writer, George Whetstone as an example of this negative attitude:

> The inconstancie of Cressid is so readie in every mans mouth, as is needelesse labour to blase at full her abuse towards yong Troilus ... her wanton lures and love: nevertheless, her companie scorned ... her lothsome leprosie after lively beauty, her wretched age after wanton youth, and her perpetuall infamie after violent death are worthy notes (for others heede) to be remembred.[30]

Criseyde's fate was sealed. Henryson's forceful characterization of his heroine brought true with a vengeance the prophetic words of Chaucer's heroine about her own fate:

> "Alas! of me unto the wordes ende,
> Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
> No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
> O, rolled shall I ben on many a tonge!
> Thoroughout the world my belle shal be ronge!" (V.1058-1062)

In trying to describe what he thought could have been the consequences of Criseyde's conduct, the Scottish poet inadvertedly so debased her that, as Hyder Rollins observes, "he rang Criseyde's bell so loudly that it reverberated

to the time of Shakespeare and forever damned her as a loose woman."[31]

Yet, when looked at from the right perspective, it is evident that it was not the poet's intention to make his heroine into an object of contempt and derision. Cresseid is really not a character to be despised or hated. She is, instead, eminently pathetic, and infinitely more to be pitied than Chaucer's Criseyde, for her fate, though morally suitable according to Henryson's standards, was a cruel and terrible one. However, the fact that Cresseid becomes a leper and ends her life in misery and suffering does not mean that he condemned or despised her. In fact, if we consider her case from a strictly religious point of view, taking into consideration the fate of her inmortal soul, it appears that Henryson acted more charitably towards his heroine than Chaucer towards his, for, whereas Henryson leads his Cresseid to redemption, Chaucer leaves Criseyde to whatever fate her weakness of character might lead her. Seen thus, Henryson's apparent cruelty is disguised Christian charity, for only through admittance of sin and purgation can salvation be achieved, and by making his heroine plumb the depths of physical and psychological

suffering Henryson offers her the possibility of acquiring the self-knowledge and repentance that will cleanse her soul of sin. Like Chaucer before him, he felt pity for his creation, but his was a stern and dour compassion, appropriate to the moral century in which he lived, and he could not release her from the responsibility of her actions. His Christian charity appears harsh and inflexive, but in the long run proves to be effective, for it sets her on the path to salvation.

Like Chaucer, too, he tried to express in his poem his ideas on the transience of everything in this world, but he did so in a plainer, more severe and sterner way than Chaucer's, a way "more befitting his Scottish imagination."[32] Throughout the poem we find expounded the profoundly Christian elements of his faith: his belief in an afterlife, the need for prayer and repentance, and the presentation of life on earth as full of sorrows and temptations. All this he tried to convey in his sequence to Chaucer's poem, and for this he created his own Cresseid, a woman whose degradation was needed for the development of this symbolic tale of a soul's moral deterioration, purging and redemption.

Footnotes

[1] Hyder E. Rollins, "The Troilus and Cressida Story from Chaucer to Shakespeare," PMLA, XXXII (1917), 396.

[2] Marshall W. Stearns, Robert Henryson (New York: Columbia U. Press, 1949), p.53.

[3] Albert C. Baugh, ed., Chaucer's Major Poetry (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), p.79.

[4] Henry S. Bennett, Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1947), p.103.

[5] Bennett, pp.119-123.

[6] Bennett, p.120.

[7] John Speirs, "A Survey of Medieval Verse," The Age of Chaucer, The Pelican Guide of English Literature, vol.1, ed. Boris Ford (Middlesex, England: Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd., 1954), p.51.

[8] Bennett, p. 132.

[9] Derek Pearsall, "The English Chaucerians," Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature, ed. Derek S. Brewer (Alabama: U. of Alabama Press, 1966), p. 211.

[10] Bennett, p.134.

11

Care must be taken when one speaks of the lack of morality in courtly love. It must be kept in mind that it was also quite moral in respect to the standard of conduct expected from lovers, as it demanded an elevated degree of spiritual and actual fidelity which perforce resulted in honorable conduct. Only in its adulterous characteristics was it that courtly love fell short of ethical Christian standards of behavior.

12

Charles Elliot, ed., Robert Henryson: Poems (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p.xi.

13

Robert Henryson, Testament of Cresseid, ed. Denton Fox (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1968), ll. 71-75. Subsequent references to the poem are to this edition.

14

Patrick Cruttwell, "Two Scots Poets: Dunbar and Henryson," The Age of Chaucer, Pelican Guide to English Literature, vol.l, p.184.

15

Stearns, p.49.

16

Stearns, pp.50-51.

17

Elliot, p.xiii.

18

Elliot, p.xiv.

19

Speirs, p.53.

20

Denton Fox, ed., Testament of Cresseid (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1968), p.35.

21
Johnstone Parr, "Cresseid's Leprosy Again," MLN, LX (Nov. 1945), 489.

22
Speirs, p.53. Also, Denton Fox, in his article "The Scottish Chaucerians," Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature, p. 178, makes this point: "The disease destroys her flesh, so punishing her for her misuse of it, but also teaching her of its essential and permanent corruptness."

23
In his edition of Henryson's Testament of Cresseid, pp. 24-38 Denton Fox makes an excellent exposition of the symbolic significance of Cresseid's leprosy.

24
Elliot, p. xiv.

25
Elliot, p.xiv.

26
Fox, ed., Testament, pp.47-48.

27
Fox, ed., Testament, p.47,n.l.

28
Tatyana Moran, "The Meeting of the Lovers in the 'Testament of Cresseid'," Notes and Queries, CCVIII (1963), 11-12.

29
Fox, ed., Testament, p.36.

30
Rollins, p.408.

31
Rollins, p.397.

32

Ian Robinson, Chaucer and the English Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1972), p.2.

Chapter Four

Shakespeare's Cressida

The works of Shakespeare can be better understood if we refer to the ideas on creation which prevailed during his time, and to their bearing on man's psychological and social order. Inherited from the Middle Ages, the Elizabethan view of creation propounded that the universe was God's work and that it was made up of an infinite series of corresponding planes which stretched in perfect order from the lowest of inanimate objects to the archangels in Paradise[1]. Eustace Tillyard quotes Sir John Fortescue, a fifteenth-century jurist, on this subject:

> In this order angel is set over angel, rank upon rank in the Kingdom of Heaven; man is set over man, beast over beast, bird over bird, and fish over fish, on the earth, in the air, and in the sea; so that there is no worm that crawls upon the ground, no bird that flies on high, no fish that swims in the depths which the chain of this order binds not in most harmonious concord.[2]

In Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida, we find Ulysses applying the same principle in the cosmic order:

> The heavens themselves, the planets, and this center
> Observe degree, priority, and place,
> Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
> Office, and custom, in all line of order.[3]

Both cosmic and natural orders were tightly interbound in this chain of being, and every step or plane tended,

as we have seen from the works quoted, towards a natural equilibrium and respect for degree. A disturbance anywhere in this perfect balance would cause chaos and disaster, for, as Ulysses goes on to say,

> But when the planets
> In evil mixture to disorder wander,
> What plagues, and what portents, what mutiny,
> What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,
> Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors,
> Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
> The unity and married calm of states
> Quite from their fixture? (I,iii,94-101).

The same balance that ruled over nature and the cosmos governed man's behavior. Standing in a unique position in the chain as the highest of all animals, he possessed a duality of nature which made him share his appetites with the beasts below him and his intelligence with the angels above. Because of this midway position between beast and angel, he had a singular capacity for excellence as well as for base passion. The Elizabethans insisted on the dominance of reason over sense, for as long as it governed the will, all was well, as man's intelligence would show him the right path of action. But if his animal nature were to gain the upper hand and cloud his intellect, then he was left the slave of his appetites, with no capacity to distinguish between good and evil, and prone to be led

by his desires.[4] This danger was clearly to be avoided; as John Hayward advises in one of the books of the epoch:

> Seeing then that thou art of so noble a nature and that thou bearest in thy understanding the image of God, so govern thyself as is fit for a creature of understanding. Be not like the brute beasts, which want understanding: either wild and unruly or else heavy and dull.[5]

If reason distinguished man from the beasts, it also dictated that he seek the company of others of his own kind, for in society man found his greatest fulfillment. The Elizabethan era was the age of the gentleman. Balance and decorum were the hall-marks of civilized behavior, and respect and deference were essential for a happy life. The ideal man was one who was able to keep harmony between mind and body; only thus could he be of utmost service to himself and to the community in which he lived. Subordination and unity were also the rules for a well-ordered society. Everyone had his appointed place; the social scale went all the way from peasant to king, and the latter, as ruler of all men, merited the obedience and fidelity of his subjects. Again respect for order was of great importance. The <u>Book of Homilies</u> of 1547 expresses this preoccupation:

> For wher there is no right ordre, there reigneth all abuse, carnall libertie, enormitie, syn, & babilonicall confusion.... For euery one haue

> nede of other, so that in all thinges is to be lauded & praised ye goodly ordre of God, without ye whiche no house, no citie, no common wealth, can continue & endure.[6]

Just as an upset in the balance of man's dual nature resulted in moral confusion, and just as a disturbance in the equilibrium of nature would unleash the strength of elemental forces, a juggling of degree in the social order brought strife and unrest to the community, for, so tightly interlaced were man's personal and social life, the destruction of this delicate balance caused misery on the personal and public planes.

As Theodore Spencer points out, the Elizabethans felt that "with the destruction of one element in /the<u>ir</u>/ universe, the whole structure is in pieces"[7] and disorder would ensue. Thus, a balanced behavior that reflected the equilibrium that existed in the universe was essential to their well-being. Constance and order on the cosmic, social, and moral planes were the keynote to their view of the world, and the need for balance and respect for degree was of fundamental concern to their conception of a law-abiding society.

In larger or lesser degree we see this reflected in Shakespeare's body of work. The stress he placed on the

constancy that should prevail in man's personal and public life; the danger that results from an immoderate conduct; the awful consequences of an upset in the social forces when a king is deposed from his rightful place; the misery caused by men who cannot keep control over their passions; the mysteries of good and evil in love--all these are seen as basic leit motifs of his work.

Shakespeare's body of work is characterized, according to L. C. Knight, by a continuous "attempt to define and assert certain values ... a consciousness of change and death, of a world subjected to time and appearance, of an inextricable mingling of elements in energies and passions that are at once the necessary condition of achievement and, apparently, self-destructive."[8] This questing to find new approaches to the ever present themes of life, love, and death, carries with it a corresponding change of attitude to his topics as his growing virtuosity in the handling of dramatic forms combines with the experience of age to give him an expanded awareness of the complexities of existence. This results in a significant difference between his attitude in his early plays and those of his later years. For instance, if we take his early history

plays, we find, that notwithstanding the tragic elements of the plots, evil has only its brief hour, reason and order eventually recover the upper hand, and man is better off through the lessons learned. In tragedies such as Romeo and Juliet, and comedies such as The Merchant of Venice, love, in its finest sense of abnegation and dedication, reaches beyond the bounds of mortality or of prejudice to overcome hatred and misunderstanding.

Hereafter there is a darkening of his vision. The initial optimism and faith in man's power to triumph over his lapses from grace are lost with the passing of time. Beginning with the plays of the middle period that precedes his great tragedies, Shakespeare's work is characterized by a strain of cynicism and an apparent disillusion towards man's evident inability to master his passions.[9] Dubbed problem plays or dark comedies,[10] these plays represent what Theodore Spencer has called "an extension of awareness in Shakespeare's presentation of man's nature. ... /they/ describe in a new way the difference between man as he ought to be and man as he is."[11] To Derek Traversi they are "tragedies in which the heroes are actuated by no clear motives, but rather

grope in a kind of spiritual darkness, seeking to clarify their own impulses."[12]

Both definitions are quite apt. These are plays where the heroes move against a background of social or moral chaos; the atmosphere is charged with passion and indecision. The problems presented are so complex that no satisfactory answer is possible. Certain forms of behavior which Shakespeare had previously presented as highly commendable--gallantry, the rightful exercise of power, a rich vision of love--are now shown in a state of confusion, disorder and senselessness. In Hamlet, one of the great tragedies of his last years, we hear the hero exteriorize the playwright's opinion of his fellowmen when he says "Man delights not me; no, nor woman neither."[13] Man, that admirable piece of work, the wonder of creation, possessed of ennobling reason, arouses only disgust and bitterness in Shakespeare now.

One of the products of this depressing view of man's nature is the play Troilus and Cressida, catalogued by J. C. Maxwell as the play that embodies "the fullest .... version ... of the Elizabethan doctrine of social and cosmic order,"[14] but which shows the awful consequences when these

rules are disregarded. It is a puzzling and depressing work, based mainly on Chaucer's Troilus and bearing echoes of Henryson's Testament in the character of Cressida.[15] Only the bare bones of the plot remain. The Elizabethan passion for moral and social decorum greatly modifies characters and intent. The lovers' story is symbolic now of moral disorder, and the war that had traditionally been regarded as splendid and heroic is now beheld as evidence of social chaos.

Contrary to Chaucer who devoted his attention to the development of the lovers' tale and left the story of the war to serve as background, Shakespeare gives equal importance to the twin plots of love and war, uniting them in the person of Troilus and signaling in both the deterioration caused by moral disorder. In the private and public aspects of the general plot we find that a woman's treachery causes a tragedy: Helen's betrayal of her husband brings about the war and the destruction of Troy; Cressida's betrayal of Troilus' love results in misery and anguish. The action takes places in a world devoid of faith and noble purpose, a twilight world of moral values where a war is fought over an unworthy

woman and where men are at the mercy of their appetites. Everywhere--both in love and war--we see signs of moral disorder and confusion. The Greek heroes are divided among themselves. Homer's magnificent warriors have suffered a sorry change. Menelaus is a weak fool; Nestor is a rambling talker; Ajax is a bully; Achilles is dominated by pride and spends his time sulking in his tent accompanied by effeminate Patroclus; Thersites is a foul-tongued villian who enjoys spreading hate and malice among all. Only Ulysses shows himself to be a figure worthy of any respect, but no one listens to his wise words, and, alone among unthinking fools, he ends by being as ineffectual as the others.

The Trojans are no better as they show themselves full of a false and vainglorious honor which makes them war over unfaithful Helen, violating all moral laws by insisting on keeping her. Except for Hector, all the Trojan warriors are ready to give up their lives to maintain an empty claim to fame and honor, and even Hector suffers the same fate as Ulysses, his counterpart in the Greek camp, when he sets aside his call for reason and bows down to the demands of those who share Troilus' feelings:

Nay, if we talk of reason,
Let's shut our gates and sleep !Manhood and honor
Should have hare-hearts, would they but fat their thoughts
With this crammed reason: Reason and respect
Make livers pale and lustihood deject (II,ii,46-50).

The love story itself is permeated by a spirit of dark cynicism. Chaucer's tale of two sensitive lovers caught in the stream of implacable and contrary events becomes the story of a young man whose unreal and infatuated vision of love and honor is destroyed by war and the treason of a woman who at the end reveals herself to be no better than a common strumpet.

Though Shakespeare follows the incidents of the love plot quite closely, he does not maintain Chaucer's conception of love. On the contrary, the passion that had dignified Chaucer's lovers and inspired Troilus to exemplary conduct becomes in Shakespeare's play a senseless appetite that, by disregarding the voice of reason, results in an obsessive and destructive feeling in Troilus and in lustful behavior in Cressida. Chaucer's idealization of love as a supreme human experience has disappeared. In its place there remains only lust, selfishness, and scepticism.

Chaucer's characters suffer a profound change as

Shakespeare refashions them drastically to suit his own idea of the story. Clever and cynical Pandarus, whose sometimes broad humor added a touch of human appeal to the courtly atmosphere of Chaucer's tale, is now a contemptible old lecher, a truly depraved pimp who shows a prurient interest in the lovers' passion. A vain and sardonic man without solid moral values, he exceeds in a vulgar and lewd wit that contributes greatly to the general atmosphere of decadence and immorality.

Without courtly love canons to judge a lover's conduct, Shakespeare looks at Troilus under a different light than Chaucer did. The Elizabethan passion for the predominance of reason over the emotions influences the playwright's conception of his hero. Troilus' overpowering love is no longer a worthwhile and inspiring feeling, but a blind, enervating and stultifying passion which, in Troilus' own words, makes him

> ...weaker than a woman's tear,
> Tamer than sleep, fonder than ignorance,
> Less valiant than the virgin in the night,
> And skilless as unpracticed infancy (I,i,9-12).

Instead of spurring him on to noble deeds, it drives him to distraction and makes him lose his taste for battle. In him Shakespeare presents the man who, besotted by love,

refuses to see things as they are and, permitting his reason to be overcome by desire, creates his own image of reality. Troilus is a young sensualist who gives in to the demands of a vainglorious honor. He deceives himself into idealizing Cressida in such a way that he refuses to see her true reality and opens himself wide to misfortune. Shakespeare does not feel sympathy for his hero, for he is the cause of his own downfall. As E. C. Pettet points out, "Unlike Chaucer's hero, ... he is the dupe of his own blind infatuation, and chooses to found his happiness on a creature who stands confessed to everyone else as a worthless trull."[16]

There are only faint vestiges of Chaucer's Criseyde in Shakespeare's heroine. Only her beauty unites her to the soft and plaintive woman who had inconstancy forced upon her by the overwhelming force of circumstances. In her place stands a hard and flippant female with a sharp and vulgar wit who moves in a world of cold and selfish reality, a world completely shorn of illusions, where the only values are those of expediency.

Shakespeare's Cressida is, according to E. C. Pettet, "one of the most repulsive female characters he /Shakespeare/

ever drew."[17] She is not, however, taken directly from Chaucer's poem. The character that reached Shakespeare had been radically altered by Henryson's characterization of her as a sinner afflicted by leprosy. As I stated in my previous chapter, Cresseid's physical leprosy was given a moral significance, and the resulting degradation served its purpose in Shakespeare's play. His Cressida is no longer Chaucer's Criseyde, but one descended from Cresseid the begging leper, a hard and amoral woman who fits better than Criseyde ever could into a play which is a biting satire on human existence.

Shakespeare presents his heroine in a radically different way than Chaucer. The exigencies of dramatic structure demand compression, and Chaucer's leisurely and rambling presentation of his Criseyde's character is fitted into three short acts. As the playwright skims over the surface of Cressida's character, he brings out only the negative aspects of her personality. Cressida appears but five times in the play, and each appearance reinforces her shallowness, sensuality and calculated approach to life. The impression one gets from the opening scene is one of a witty but vulgar sophistication, a lightning-sharp

intelligence always ready with a squashing retort, but one that reveals a flippancy and lack of depth that bodes no good for Troilus' love. If we take Chaucher's Criseyde as a measuring stick, we find that Shakespeare has effected a complete inversion of every charming quality that adorned Chaucer's heroine. Beginning with the opening scene, where Criseyde admired Troilus, Cressida disparages him, calling him "a minced man" (I,ii,267), punning and jesting at his expense. Criseyde was moved by Troilus' wounds; Cressida shows herself indifferent and makes no response to Pandarus' eloquent praises of the hero. Criseyde's love was based on love and respect; Cressida has a low opinion of men--she calls them monsters with "the voice of lions and the act of hares" (III,ii,90-91) and considers love a fleeting and carnal passion. Criseyde's soliloquy brings out her best moral qualities; Cressida's serves to give an insight into the mind of a woman who is an expert at playing the love game. Though Cressida displays an elusiveness similar to Criseyde's, her reasons are different. Criseyde was the courtly love lady who had to assure herself of a man's devotion, moral qualities and discretion--all essential courtly love qualities—

before committing herself. Cressida's cautious attitude is that of the seasoned coquette who feels her ground before deciding to enter into what she considers a battle between the sexes in which woman must take care not to lose the upper hand. It is impossible to pin her down to reveal her feelings, and she drives Pandarus to distraction with her jesting and evasiveness. Only at the end of the scene, in her soliloquy, does she declare her intentions and her love creed:

> Women are angels, wooing;
> Things won are done, joy's soul lies in the doing.
> That she beloved knows nought that knows not this:
> Men prize the thing ungained more than it is;
> That she was never yet, that ever knew
> Love got so sweet as when desire did sue.
> Therefore this maxim out of love I teach:
> Achievement is command; ungained, beseech (I,ii,298-305).

Joined to this alert attitude is an irrepressible sensuousness that marks her relationship with men. Cressida is a sophisticated woman of the world who can hold her own against all comers. She cannot be called, as we did Criseyde, a weak woman at the mercy of her weakness and cruel fate. If one thing is made clear in Shakespeare's play, it is that Cressida is far from uncertain on how to act. She makes it evident that she has no need for the protection Criseyde craved more than

anything else, that she is always ready, as she says in her witty but vulgar answer to Pandarus,

> Upon my back to defend my belly; upon
> my wit, to defend my wiles; upon my secrecy,
> to defend mine honesty; my mask, to defend my
> beauty (I,ii,272-275).

She is always in full control of the situation; aware of her uncle's intentions from the start, aware of how far to go in her love affairs, and aware of how to make the best of difficult situations. With an easy off-hand manner she fends off Pandarus' efforts to draw her attention to Troilus; she sees clearly through his intentioned praises of the young man's prowess and delights in teasing her uncle to exasperation. Though attracted to Troilus, she refuses to show her real feelings and bides her time until she is sure of Troilus' passionate infatuation. She is not one to be laid low by life's sudden changes. Although the news that she must leave Troy alarms her, she is not fazed for long. When she appears at the Greek camp she has made a remarkable recovery from her previous sorrowful state. It is obvious that she has come to terms with her situation, and has decided that she must begin to look out for herself, as usual. Troy has been left behind and she must carve a place among strangers; so,

instinctively, she uses the weapons she knows how to use best--her beauty and her sex--and with sure steps she goes among the Greek warriors, on the look-out for someone upon whom she can exercise her charms. I cannot agree with I. A. Richards when he describes her as very young --"almost with her finger in her mouth still"[18]--a girl who innocently experiments with love in a light-hearted spirit of curiosity and candor. Nothing could be further from the woman presented by Shakespeare. Her skillful and lewd bantering with Pandarus reveals her to be past mistress of the <u>double entendre</u>, the sly phrase that hides a world of meaning. When she maintains that "This maxim out of love I teach: /achievement is command; ungain'd beseech" (I,ii.306), we can hear the voice of experience behind her words, showing previous encounters which have hardened her, leaving no illusions where love is concerned. Again, her conduct when wooed by Troilus in the third act shows her to be completely sure of herself, an old hand at the love game. Surely no tyro could express herself so wisely on men's behavior as when she says that

> ... all lovers swear more performance than they are able, and yet reserve an ability that they never perform, vowing more than the

> perfection of ten and discharging less than the tenth part of one (III,ii,86-90).

She baits Troilus with consummate skill, showing her sensuality as she draws forward at times and then retreats in a kind of coy dance that plays upon his infatuation. It is made clear from her words and actions that if she holds back, it is not from innocence or modesty, as it was with Criseyde--we have heard her too often in her vulgar exchange of quips with Pandarus for us to believe that--but from a desire to seduce. As we watch her use her wiles on Troilus, we feel that her reluctance is part of the mating game, that behind her pretty confusion and apparent indecision lies the deliberate intention of inflaming even more Troilus' already awakened passion. It would be absurd, therefore, to try to see Cressida as "an experimentalist in feelings,"[19] as Richards calls her, when her conduct makes obvious that she is nothing of the sort.

If anything can be said to her credit, one has to admit that Cressida does not hold any false ideas about herself and her capacity for love. At no time does she try to fool anyone into believing that she is what she is not. From the very beginning we see her manifesting her

vulgar wit, her hardened opinions of love, her low opinion of men. She is clearly a woman who finds it impossible to give herself over wholeheartedly to a sincere and deep passion. Frankly she declares that "to be wise and love / Exceeds man's might" (III, ii, 157-158), that to be in love means to be blinded to reality, and when she finally decides to enter into an affair with Troilus, she shows her flippancy to the end by saying to Pandarus, "What folly I commit, I dedicate / to you" (III, ii, 104-105). Her conduct plainly proclaims that she is a highly sexed woman who frankly recognizes the fact and who enjoys the admiration and desire of men. Every man in the play except Troilus judges her rightly: Pandarus is exasperated by her evasiveness and almost calls her a whore in the first act; Diomedes ironically tells Troilus that "to her own worth/ She shall be prized" (IV, iv, 133); Ulysses calls her a daughter "of the game" (IV, v.63) when he sees her flaunting her beauty to the Greeks, and Thersites, in the most scathing commentary of all, calls her a "dissembling luxurious drab" (V, iv, 8) whom "any man may sing ... if he can take her cliff" (V, ii, 10). Only Troilus in his blind passion sees in her what he wants and builds his

world around a woman that does not exist. Even when she tells him of a possibility of change in her affection by saying,

> I have a kind of self resides with you;
> But an unkind self, that itself will leave
> To be another's fool (III,ii,149-151),

it falls upon deaf ears, for his infatuation is so great that he refuses to relinquish the ideal image he has forged of her.

Being what she is, her infidelity poses no enigma. Cressida has shown herself to be too sensual and hot-blooded, too cynical and blasé for anyone to believe that her brief protestations of love have behind them the force of a deep and enduring attachment. Despite her lyrical manifestations of constancy she has given ample proof of how little love means for her. As the action progresses, we see that all the fears and doubts she had revealed to Troilus prior to their love affair were not moral barriers to temptation, but part of a conscious attempt to draw him on. Fidelity cannot be really expected of Cressida. She lives only for the moment, with barely a sign of that sense of responsibility which is associated with a rich and generous spirit. Consequently, she finds it impossible

to remain constant for long, especially in difficult circumstances. It is noticeable that, even before leaving Troy, her farewell promises of eternal love gradually taper off in intensity, and what started out as a vehement avowal of fidelity gradually change to petulance at Troilus' insistence that she be true, and finally to a doubtful "Do you think I will?" (IV, iv, 92) to his anguished petition that she resist temptation. Her conduct on her arrival at the Greek camp is enough to settle any doubts left concerning her lack of moral integrity. To see her flaunting her beauty before the Greek warriors and exchanging kisses without a thought for the lover she left behind is enough indication of what her future actions can be. The light-hearted and sensual coquette of the first part of the play, who speaks about the influence of time on love and who goes into lyrical rapture when speaking about the intensity and durability of her love, reveals herself as a worthless trollop, justifying Ulysses' words when he says:

> O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
> That give a coasting welcome ere it comes,
> And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
> To every ticklish reader, set them down
> For sluttish spoils of opportunity
> And daughters of the game (IV, v, 58-63).

The expected denouement comes with brutal and merciless swiftness. Cressida shows her falseness openly and cruelly, without wasting time in useless tears. If in Chaucer's Criseyde we saw the gradual collapse of desperate resistance, in Cressida there is a quick and cold-blooded change of heart. There are no lamentations, no self-reproaches. Unlike Criseyde before her, she does not yearn for a pitiful respectability that will elude her from now on; she shows no pain for the lover she has betrayed. Cressida could not care less for Troilus or for her reputation. He is out of sight, and Diomedes is near, ready and willing to take his place. Her commitment to the Greek hero is made with no sign of love from either part. There is only physical need in this affair. The whole scene is filled with repressed lust, irritation and impatience as she plies her wiles on Diomedes with little effect. This time it is Diomedes who calls the shots, and he makes clear to her that he will not be made a fool of. With ironic effect Shakespeare turns the tables on Cressida, and now it is she who must plead and cajole for love. In the Greek hero she has found her match. They are two of a kind: both hardened realists, both sensual and

without illusions about the finer aspects of love. Diomedes' way with her is masterful and cynical. He is not the besotted Troilus who had placed her upon a pedestal, but a man who has seen through her and judged her correctly. As we watch him bending her to his will, making her follow him like any strumpet following her lover to an assignation, it is evident that Cressida will pay a heavy price in exchanging Troilus' love for Diomedes' contemptuous dominance.

Daniel Seltzer has seen Cressida's degradation as too sudden and out of character; according to him, Shakespeare did not develop her enough along the lines of harlotry to justify her final whorish behavior.[21] If it is true that Cressida's character deterioration comes with lightning swiftness, her sluttish behavior is not a complete surprise. It seems to me that Shakespeare has given enough hints throughout the previous acts to suggest the true nature of his heroine's character. From the very beginning she has given every indication of shallowness, sensuality, and even vulgarity. Her conversation with Pandarus in the first act is sufficiently lewd to reveal the type of woman she is, as, for instance, when she says,

> If I cannot ward what I would not have hit,
> I can watch you for telling how I took the blow;
> unless it swells past hiding, and then it's
> past watching (I,ii,279-282).

or when she declares with bawdy intent, "Troilus will stand to the proof if you will prove it so" (I,ii,135). Her yielding to Troilus is thoroughly sensual, and in the awakening scene we see no signs of devotion or tenderness. Shakespeare creates an atmosphere of gnawing lust that permeates both lovers. Her fretful anger at Troilus' hurry to leave, the irritation at Pandarus' bawdy comments which provoke in her angry answers instead of the modest blushes we saw in Chaucer' Criseyde, all this indicates a woman seasoned in the lists of love. If we contrast this scene with the lyrical beauty of Chaucer's _aubade_, where the lovers' awakening is full of the beauty and tenderness of true love, we can see the type of love Shakespeare's heroine represents. Even her words

> Prithee, tarry;
> You men will never tarry,
> O foolish Cressid! I might have still held off
> And then you would have tarried (IV,ii,15-18).

are no revelation of intense devotion, but rather of fretful indignation at the thought that satiation might have cooled Troilus' ardor.

Another factor to be taken into consideration that could justify Cressida's rapid character deterioration is the demand for fast situation development which is part of the structure of a good play. It was impossible for Shakespeare to reproduce Criseyde's lengthy psychological self-exploration and protracted surrender to Diomedes in the limited time space allowed in the play. What took a relatively long time in Chaucer's poem, had perforce to be briefly condensed into only one night--just as brief as Cressida's surrender to Troilus had been[22]--and this lends an air of inconstancy to Cressida's character.

Compression, however, has its virtues, for the fact that the revelation of Cressida's whorishness takes place before Troilus' very eyes drives home with tremendous impact the contrast between what she is and the ideal image of her that Troilus had forged for himself, clearly setting forth the concept of the blinding by passion which is one of the major concerns of the play.

It also seems to me that Cressida's inconsistency is not the accidental result of poor character development, as Seltzer seems to suggest, but a deliberate attempt by Shakespeare to give his heroine the mercurial temperament

that reveals the emotional imbalance and moral disorder she is supposed to represent in the play. After all, a selfish, cold-blooded and inconstant Cressida that can go suddenly from fervid avowals of love to callous whorish behavior is much more effective for Shakespeare's intention in the play than a constant and pitiful woman who opposes a virtuous resistence to other loves than Troilus'.

The fact that Shakespeare dismisses his heroine with hardly a backward glance and that he morally degrades her so absolutely is seen by George Brandes as a projection of hatred and vindictiveness towards women in general, caused by a personal disillusionment which made him vent upon Cressida all his pent-up-anger. Cressida is the product, he states, "of a new, fiery, and scorching impression of feminine inconstancy and worthlessness."[23] She is "treachery in woman's form, as false and flightly as foam upon the waves."[24]

It seems to me however, that Shakespeare's conception of Cressida's character did not obey any particular personal animus, but was part of the general scheme of the play. It was Shakespeare's intention to delve into the nature of that constancy which plays such an important

role in preserving happiness in love and stability in politics. The Trojan war and Cressida are the negation of this concept. As the representative of sensuousness and inconstancy in this negative version of the story, Cressida is a completely amoral woman, who, in representing the darker side of love, knows how to inflame men without being spiritually affected. The disagreable aspects of her personality are needed in a woman who plays a vital part in a play where the playwright presents a vision of life devoid of the saving grace of moral rectitude and where reason and love are corrupted by pride, envy or lust. It was inevitable that to indicate the corruption caused by moral disorder all the characters would have to suffer a change for the worse. If Pandarus comes out as a lascivious go-between, Troilus as a passion-ridden youth and the Greek warriors as a group of men riddled with foolish pride and anger, Cressida also had to undergo a process of degradation.

Shakespeare saw character in the terms his culture afforded him: a balance between reason and will. In measuring Criseyde to this standard, her unfaithfulness was not seen as a forgivable human weakness, but as the

predominance of passion in her nature. This condition could not be tolerated by the Elizabethan conception of moral order, and this is the reason that Shakespeare did not attempt to rescue his Cressida from the spiritual debasement she had suffered since Chaucer had written about her. That is why he painted her with such unflattering colors and made her debasement even more complete by causing her to suffer the ignominy of being left to the inevitable life of harlotry her final act implies. Shakespeare's Cressida fully justifies Brandes' statement that "in no other of Shakespeare's characters is the sensual attraction exercised by a woman so completely shorn of its poetry."[25] Wily, raw, sensual, and spiritually unclean, Cressida shows herself to be a fit representative of the world shorn of illusion, love and respect that Shakespeare wanted to portray in his <u>Troilus and Cressida</u>.

Footnotes

1

L. G. Salingar, "The Social Setting," The Age of Shakespeare, The Pelican Guide to English Literature, vol.2, ed. Boris Ford (Middlesex, England: Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd., 1955), p.18.

2

Eustace M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (Middlesex, England: Penguin Shakespeare Library, 1969), p.19.

3

The History of Troilus and Cressida, The Signet Classic Shakespeare, ed. Daniel Seltzer (New York: New American Library 1963), I,iii,85-88.

4

E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (New York: Vintage Books, n.d.), pp.75-77.

5

Quoted in Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p.21.

6

Quoted in Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p.27.

7

Theodore Spencer, "'Troilus and Cressida' as Dramatic Experiment," His Infinite Variety: Major Shakespearean Criticism since Johnson, ed. Paul Siegel (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1964), p.200.

8

L. C. Knight, "Shakespeare: King Lear and the Great Tragedies," The Age of Shakespeare, The Pelican Guide to English Literature, vol.2, p.232.

9

The period between 1599 and 1603 contains such plays as Julius Caesar, As You Like It, Troilus and Cressida,

Measure for Measure, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Twelfth Night*. They are all puzzling plays which exhibit a clouding over of Shakespeare's vision of man and society. Oscar James Campbell, in his article "Shakespeare's Union of Comedy and Satire," "*His Infinite Variety*: *Major Shakespearean Criticism since Johnson*, ed. Paul Siegel, p.155, sees them as presenting a "social world in which the characters live in a state of chaos and for the same reason: 'The specialty of rule hath been neglected'."

10
William Toole, *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*: *Studies in Form and Meaning* (London: Mouton & Co., 1966), pp.10-11.

11
Theodore Spencer.*Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), p.121.

12
Derek Traversi, *An Approach to Shakespeare* (Doubleday & Co., 1969), p.323.

13
Hamlet, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. William Aldis Wright (New York: Garden City Pub. Co., 1940), II,ii.308.

14
J. C. Maxwell, "Shakespeare: The Middle Plays," *The Age of Shakespeare*, The Pelican Guide to English Literature, vol.2, p.214.

15
William Aldis Wright on page 818 of his edition of the *Complete Works of Shakespeare*, states in the historical data he gives for *Troilus and Cressida* that due to the popularity of the story of Troy in the literature of many nations, it is very difficult to pinpoint the exact sources for this play. However, he gives Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* as a source for the love plot, and Caxton's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* and Chapman's translation of Homer for the source of the war plot. For Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid's* influence on the character of Cressida, see Hyder Rollins' "The Troilus and Cressida Story from Chaucer to Shakespeare," *PMLA*, XXXII(1917), 383-429.

16

E. C. Pettet, Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition (London: Staples Press, 1949), p.143.

17

Pettet, p.142.

18

Ivor A. Richards, ""Troilus and Cressida' and Plato," Troilus and Cressida, ed. Daniel Seltzer (New York: New American Library, 1963), p.245.

19

Richards, p.245.

20

On this, Robert K. Presson, in Shakespeare's 'Troilus and Cressida' and the Legends of Troy (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1953),p.133, comments: Shakespeare so portrayed Cressida, and allowed others to see her as a wanton, and not Troilus, in order to emphasize in Troilus how ardor can blind the judgment."

21

Daniel Seltzer, ed. Troilus and Cressida, pp.xxxi-xxxii.

22

Although Chaucer does not say exactly how long it took, al least ten days passed before Diomede started to press his suit on Criseyde. In Book V of his Troilus and Criseyde, starting on line 841, we read:

But for to tellen forth of Diomede:
It fel that after, on the tenthe day
Syn that Criseyde out of the citee yede
This Diomede, as fressh as braunche in May,
Com to the tente, ther as Calkas lay,
And feyned hym with Calkas han to doone:
But what he mente, I shal yow tellen soone.

Regarding the time Diomedes took to begin wooing Cressida, see Robert Presson, p.130,n.1.

[23] George Brandes, William Shakespeare: A Critical Study, vol.2 (New York: Frederick Ungar Pub. Co.,1963) p.196.

[24] Brandes, p.162.

[25] Brandes, p.218.

Conclusions

The analysis of Criseyde's character as she goes from Chaucer to Henryson and then to Shakespeare shows the radical alterations to which these last two writers subjected Chaucer's heroine. Each saw her in a different light; each used her differently in his own version of her story. As a result, the immensely likeable and noble beauty of Chaucer's poem becomes a loathsome leper in Henryson's tale and a hard and vulgar strumpet in Shakespeare's play.

In looking for an explanation for these differences in character conception, we took into consideration the vital role that the ideas of their times played upon the three writers' notion of life. Three different ideals of ethical conduct directed the poets' conception of their heroine: courtly love in Chaucer, orthodox Christian morality in Henryson, and the Elizabethan desire for balance and restraint in man's moral order in Shakespeare. Upon this fact hinges the explanation for Criseyde's moral deterioration.

Chaucer's dramatic presentation of Criseyde was clearly determined by the strong influence that courtly love standards of conduct still had upon fourteenth-

century poets. Though, as I mentioned above on page 70, courtly love had been gradually weakened through the years, its rules of conduct were still understood and used by the writers of Chaucer's time. For those familiar with courtly moral standards, illicit and secret love was the expected relationship between lovers, and this in no way detracted from their moral integrity. Thus it is that Chaucer presents his heroine in his Troilus, with no moral onus attached to her relationship with Troilus or to herself. The code of morals that dictates her behavior is that embodied in the laws of courtoisie, where the power of love ennobles those who serve it. Criseyde is a truly charming, sensitive and moral heroine who exhibits all that is best in a woman.

Chaucer's realistic approach to Criseyde's character is noted for its sympathy and understanding. At the same time that he presents her as a dignified courtly mistress, he also manages to make her into a woman beset by problems whose honorable solution are beyond her control. True to courtly love rules, he does not try to excuse her for her infidelity, but by stressing her insecurity, her fears, and her loneliness in the Greek camp, he creates a feeling of sympathy for her dilemma. The picture he draws of her

undeniable attractiveness overshadows her act of treachery, and though her weakness is lamentable, it is hard to blame her too severely for her lapse.

This highly favorable view of Criseyde's character did not last for long. The ideals of conduct in courtly romances suffered a radical change during the fifteenth century. Criseyde's conduct could not be understood by an age whose literature was noted for the conservative and didactic approach to its subject matter. There came an inevitable shift in attitude towards her, as conventional courtly behavior was replaced by stricter orthodox Christian standards of conduct. She was judged by this new morality and condemned for adulterous conduct. Even her love for Troilus constituted now a matter for reproach and her affair with Diomede only compounded her guilt. No longer was she considered as a paragon of virtue whose error had been to violate the sacred courtly precept of fidelity, but a woman whose overall conduct was morally condemnable.

All this was reflected in Henryson's characterization of his heroine. In his _Testament_, Henryson does not attempt to retell Chaucer's tale. He is more concerned with teaching a moral lesson than with the beauty of the lovers' passion. His poem is conceived and written

according to the strict moral canons of his time, and he sets with great emotional power what he believed was the implicit harlotry of Chaucer's heroine. Unable to accept the elements of courtly behavior that so ennobled Chaucer's Criseyde, he sees in her an example of licentious living and he uses her as the main character of a poem which is an exposition of the wages of promiscuity. His Cresseid is a loose woman who reaps the sorry rewards of her ill-living. Punished with leprosy, her sufferings are physical, related to her excessive desire for earthly pleasures. Not until she has been completely purged by suffering from her sins of lechery, pride and anger, is she granted forgiveness.

Henryson debased his heroine until she became a begging leper. This was needed in a symbolic tale which follows a sinful soul's descent into the healing fires of an earthly purgatory; it was not an irrevocable condemnation of her as a person. Though Henryson treated his heroine with harsh severity, he was led by a Christian sense of duty; if he made her suffer, it was so that at the end she could be rescued from eternal damnation. He may have been dour and stern, but he did not consciously make her into a contemptible character. His Cresseid might have been arrogant and selfish, but she was not despicable or

depraved. Her sufferings make her into an object of pity and finally offset her arrogance and venality. At the end, death gives her back the dignity she had lost in life.

Whatever his pious intent, the truth is that Henryson's poem doomed Criseyde to a progressive moral deterioration. By the end of the sixteenth century her name had become synonymous with whorishness, and it was impossible to try to see in her either Chaucer's graceful heroine or the pitiful leper of Henryson's poem.

In Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida we see the culmination of the character's degradation. In it we get the Elizabethan view of the consequences of moral and political disorder. Shakespeare, like other writers after Henryson, did not see the Scot poet's intention behind Cresseid's symbolic debasement. He took her as she came to him, and inserted her back in a story that had become for him an example of moral and political corruption. In it she is the personification of a sexual libertinage which represents a split in the moral order of man: the undesirable predominance of the animal nature of love so criticized by Elizabethan ethics.

Shakespeare is completely ruthless in his treatment

of his heroine. If Chaucer felt compassion for his Criseyde and tried to minimize her guilt by dwelling on her positive qualities, and if Henryson's moralistic fervor eventually rescued his Cresseid by leading her into a Christian acceptance of her sins, Shakespeare treats his Cressida with utmost contempt and unkindness, bringing out only her negative qualities and stripping her from every shred of dignity. Unkind, opportunistic, vulgar, and whorish, Cressida lacks Criseyde's quiet charm or Cresseid's dignity in the face of misfortune. Shakespeare's is the most unkind of the three characterizations.

After having made this comparative study of the three Criseydes we may reach the following conclusion: it is evident that, due to the changing ethical standards of conduct that prevailed in each poet's society, the courtly mistress conceived by Chaucer's fourteenth-century mind, was not understood by Henryson's fifteenth-century mentality or by Shakespeare's Elizabethan point of view. With the gradual development of conventional courtly love standards of behavior into more traditional Christian norms, Chaucer's Criseyde could not continue to be seen in the same light as before. She was, therefore, the

victim of a progressive debasement as succeeding writers saw her in the light of their own century's morality. From courtly love ethics, through Christian moralistic piety, to the Elizabethan conception of moral order, the three Criseydes respond to the ethical demands of their writers' outlooks. Criseyde, the exquisite courtly love mistress, Cresseid, the redeemed sinner, and Cressida, the unrepentant slut, are three different realities of the same person, three conceptions of character behavior, each one reflecting the artistry and genius of its creator.

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