Troilus and Criseyde Study Guide

Troilus and Criseyde by Geoffrey Chaucer

BOOKRAGS

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Book I

Book I Summary

The first book of "Troilus and Criseyde" sets the stage by introducing Troilus and depicting his first sight of Criseyde, with whom he falls instantly in love. It is this consuming love that drives the action for the rest of the poem.

Chaucer begins the poem with a brief introduction addressed directly to the reader, outlining the sorrowful story he intends to tell about Troilus and his "love-adventure...from grief to joy, and, after, out of joy," (p. 3) Chaucer calls on anyone who has been in love to remember the story of Troilus and Criseyde, and expresses his hope that his poem may provide comfort for those who have loved and lost.

The poem opens during the Trojan war, the ancient battle that ensues when the Greeks attack the city of Troy. A Trojan priest named Calkas learns through prophecy that Troy will eventually fall to the Greeks and flees the city to join the other side. He leaves behind a beautiful daughter, Criseyde. Criseyde is a widow who now finds herself without the protection of any man since her father has fled. The people of Troy, outraged at her father's defection, call on Criseyde to be killed as a traitor. She finds protection from Hector, a prince of Troy, who allows her to stay in the city.

The war rages on and the Greeks besiege the city. Spring approaches, and the Trojans, trapped within their city, nevertheless prepare for the annual festival honoring the goddess Athena. All the important people turn out for the festival, dressed in their finest clothes, including Criseyde. As a widow, she is dressed in black, but she still outshines all the other women in her beauty and noble bearing.

Troilus is a noble knight of Troy. He attends the festival along with several younger knights, for whom he tries to set an example. Troilus walks through the assembled ladies, abruptly passing his judgment on each of them with a smile or a frown. If he sees any of the younger knights acting lovestruck, he is quick to mock them for their ridiculous behavior. It is silly to lose sleep over any woman, he tells them, especially when she herself sleeps soundly with no thought of the men who imagine they love her.

Troilus' mockery of love angers Cupid, who gets his revenge by aiming his arrow at him. As Troilus and his knights continue to talk roughly about the women at the festival, his eyes fall on Criseyde and he is instantly stunned with love for her. Horrified that he should find himself in the same condition he scorns in other men, Troilus tries to hide his feelings by mocking the lovesick even more. As he does, however, he finds his conviction weakening. He leaves the festival, pretending he has important work to do. Troilus returns to his rooms and begins to think how he might win the love of Criseyde while keeping his own passion a secret from others.

Troilus cannot stop thinking about Criseyde, but it does not distract him from his soldierly duties. In fact, he becomes stronger and braver as a result. All fear seems to leave him, and his battlefield achievements bring him great fame and respect. His lovesickness does keep him from sleeping, however, and he stops eating. He nearly goes mad, unable to tell Criseyde of his love for her, and not knowing if she has any feelings at all for him.

Troilus' friend, Pandarus, comes to visit him and finds him crying in the throes of his lovesickness. Pandarus asks him why he is so troubled, but Troilus will not tell. To end his sadness, Pandarus tries to provoke Troilus to anger by suggesting that perhaps he feels grief for all the Greeks he has killed in battle. Troilus does not rise to the bait, and still refuses to tell Pandarus why he suffers. Pandarus continues to appeal to him to share the burden of his sorrow on the chance that he might be able to help Troilus.

Troilus considers, and finally does tell Pandarus that it is for love he suffers, but he does not reveal the object of his passion. Pandarus offers to help him win the woman he loves, but Troilus spurns the offer, replying that Pandarus has hardly been very successful with women himself. Pandarus agrees, but adds that his own bad experiences may be an advantage in helping Troilus, and besides, Troilus apparently seems unable to help himself.

Pandarus lectures Troilus at length about why he should trust him to help. Troilus makes no response at first, but finally tells Pandarus to leave him alone to die, lamenting that the woman he loves will never return his love. Pandarus sets in again and convinces Troilus that it would be far worse to die without the woman ever knowing of his love. Troilus finally relents and asks Pandarus what he should do.

First, Pandarus insists that Troilus tell him the name of his beloved. It nearly kills him to tell, but Troilus reveals that it is Criseyde, Pandarus' niece, whom he loves. Pandarus is pleased and agrees that Criseyde is a fine woman and worthy of his love. Pandarus then tells Troilus he should make peace with Cupid, whom he so often insulted with his mockeries of love. This Troilus does by openly proclaiming he was wrong to have done it.

Pandarus leaves Troilus and begins to plan how he will best help him win Criseyde. Troilus, no longer feeling quite so sorrowful after receiving the promise of Pandarus' help, goes to battle more emboldened than ever.

Book I Analysis

In this relatively short introductory book, Chaucer introduces two of the primary characters, Troilus and Pandarus. Troilus is a brave knight who once scoffed at his fellow soldiers who would swoon for the love of women, and he is embarrassed to find himself in the same position once he lays eyes on Criseyde. Troilus' passion is severe and appears to make him physically ill despite his obvious strength as a warrior. This

lovesickness is to return to Troilus several times over the course of Chaucer's book, and is a demonstration of the overwhelming power of love.

Chaucer raises an interesting potential interpretation of Troilus' eventual fate by depicting him as callous toward love before he is transformed. Many of the obstacles he will face in his affair with Criseyde stem from their insistence that they keep their passion a secret. Both Criseyde and Troilus will say this is to protect the honor of Criseyde, but in Book I, stanza 74, Chaucer has Troilus cry to himself, "...what will lovers say, do you suppose, should this be known? Ever, behind your back there will be scornful laughter," (p. 21). Troilus fears if it is learned that he himself has fallen in love after he has mocked so many other lovers that he will be ridiculed. Thus Chaucer suggests that Troilus' own pride may be a factor in preventing him from revealing his passion for Criseyde and, perhaps, taking bold action when their love is endangered.

Pandarus is introduced as a sympathetic character with a more pragmatic view on love. He does not have much time for Troilus' pitiful weeping and moaning and suggests a course of action. Troilus, normally a leader, seems only too happy to follow Pandarus' advice, a decision he will sometimes regret.

Chaucer provides an introduction to the entire work at the beginning of Book I that sums up the whole story in a few lines. There is no mystery to how the story ends. Troilus will find great love which will bring him great sorrow when Criseyde betrays him. The intent of the story, other than to entertain, Chaucer says is to perhaps give some hope to those who have loved and lost and to remind those who may be happy in love that love is not always kind.

Chaucer also hints at the role of Fortune in the story of Troilus. Fortune is a goddess that determines the fate of the course of our lives and is usually depicted as controlling a large wheel. A man at the bottom of the wheel will eventually find his fortunes rising until he reaches the top, at which point he will begin to descend once again. In the first few lines of the poem, Chaucer makes reference to this rising and falling of Troilus' fate in love, and he will make fuller reference to Fortune and the nature of free-will and predestination later in the book.

Book II

Book II Summary

Book II opens with Chaucer's renewal of his plea to his listeners to accept his poem as it is. He claims to be but a poor messenger of the original tale and calls on the muse Clio to guide his words. Chaucer also asks his listeners to withhold their judgment of Troilus in his overwrought condition. Love does not affect everyone in the same way, he reminds them.

As Chaucer returns to the story, Pandarus is awakening at his home, mindful of the promise he has made to Troilus. Consulting the horoscope, he determines it is a good time to visit Criseyde.

He finds her in her home with two other ladies. They are reading a poem together, and Pandarus apologizes for interrupting. Criseyde welcomes him and tells him she dreamt about him the night before. Pandarus replies that he expects the dream will be a sign of good fortune for her. He asks what they are reading, teasing that he hopes it is about love.

Criseyde laughs at his small joke and responds that they are reading "The Siege of Thebes," a long, tragic poem. Pandarus calls on them to put away the sad poem and be happy, provoking shock from Criseyde, who asks what can possibly warrant being happy and joyful while Troy itself is under siege.

Pandarus tells her that the reason she should be happy is a secret he cannot tell. She asks if the siege has ended, and Pandarus says no, and besides his secret would make her five times happier than that. She begs him to reveal the secret but he will not, saying only that it would make her the proudest woman on earth if she knew.

The conversation continues with much gossip and joking, but Criseyde cannot stop wondering what wonderful secret Pandarus is keeping from her. Naturally, the conversation turns to the war and Criseyde asks Pandarus what he has heard about Hector, the Trojan prince and valiant soldier. Pandarus replies that Hector is well, recovering from a wound to his arm, and casually mentions that his brother, Troilus, is also well.

Criseyde does not take the bait. She replies that she is glad the Hector is well as he is the most courageous knight of Troy. Pandarus agrees, and mentions again that his brother, Troilus, is at least equal in courage to Hector. Criseyde finally acknowledges that she has also heard of the great courage of Troilus, and agrees that he is worthy of high praise.

Having successfully turned the subject to Troilus, Pandarus tells Criseyde of his extreme bravery in battle the previous day when he scattered the Greeks before him. He adds that despite being such a ferocious soldier, he is also quite friendly. Then,

abruptly, Pandarus tells Criseyde he must leave. Criseyde asks him to stay a while longer, saying she has some business affairs to ask him about. The other ladies leave them, and after they discuss her business matters, she asks him again to tell her the great secret he holds.

Pandarus pretends to be reluctant to reveal his secret, building Criseyde's desire to know it. Finally, he tells her that Troilus is so in love with her that he may die, and that she must help him. Pandarus grows serious, and tells Criseyde that if she will not help Troilus, not only will he die, but Pandarus will take his own life. All he asks, he tells Criseyde, is for her to give Troilus a kind word. He does not ask her to make any binding promises to him, he tells her, simply to pass on a smile to him. As her uncle Pandarus insists, he has no intention of shaming her, but implies that she would be cruel not to help Troilus when even the slightest attention from her would cure his heart.

There would be no harm in showing Troilus a bit of encouragement, Pandarus suggests, or in allowing him to come and visit her from time to time. It would be perfectly acceptable for a widow such as Criseyde to be friendly to him, Pandarus tells her, sensing that Criseyde will be concerned about propriety.

Criseyde, sensing that Pandarus has an ulterior motive, asks him directly what it is he expects will come of giving Troilus a kind word. Pandarus bursts out that he expects she will come to love him, and adds a warning that women who hold themselves above love rapidly move into a lonely old age.

Criseyde is astonished. She asks how it is that Pandarus can be encouraging her to love Troilus when, had she fallen in love with him first, she expects Pandarus would be rebuking her instead. Pandarus acts offended that his niece should mistrust him so much and says he will leave and not bother her again, but repeats that her actions are condemning both Troilus and himself to death.

Criseyde thinks to herself about what she should do. She believes her uncle's threat of suicide should she not do what she asks, and weighs that against the impropriety of encouraging a man she does not love in return. She decides that she must save her uncle and so relents. However, she adds, she will only give a kind word and not give Troilus any encouragement, and Pandarus must not make her do so. Pandarus agrees. Having secured his promise, she asks her uncle to tell him something about Troilus. Pandarus informs her that he is eloquent on the subject of love, and has kept his love for her a secret from everyone except himself.

Pandarus leaves Criseyde alone. Just then a cry goes up outside that Troilus has just been victorious in a great battle against the Greeks and will soon be riding down the street on his way back from the battlefield. Criseyde runs to the window and sees brave Troilus on his horse, helmet and armor in shreds from the battle, but sitting high. She wonders that such a brave and important man should be so in love with her. Chaucer addresses the listener to say that while she does not fall in love with him at first sight, this is the point at which she begins to fall for him.

Criseyde debates her course of action within herself. She is attracted to Troilus and honored that he should love her, but she is reluctant to return his love, knowing that to do so would make her subject to the constraints of love, making her the target of gossip and removing her liberty.

Criseyde is partially swayed by the words of a song sung by her niece, Antigone, praising love and the joys it brings. As she falls asleep that night, she hears a nightingale and is content.

Meanwhile, Pandarus returns to Troilus, who is eager to hear news of Criseyde. Pandarus convinces Troilus that he has secured everything for him and that Criseyde will be his. He insists that Troilus write her a letter, giving him very specific instructions on how it should be written and what to say. He promises he will take it to Criseyde and bring a response at once. He tells Troilus when he will be at Criseyde's home the next day, and instructs him to arrange to ride past her window while he is there, as if by accident.

Troilus writes a letter, expressing his love and his intent to win hers in return. Pandarus takes it Criseyde the following day, but she is angry. Exchanging letters is more than she promised to do, and she tells Pandarus to tear it up. Pandarus dismisses her response with a joke and leaves the letter with her as they prepare for dinner. Before dinner, Criseyde goes to her room alone and reads the letter, finding it pleasing.

After dinner, Pandarus takes Criseyde to sit by her window and asks if she is impressed with Troilus. She answers coyly that she is. At this Pandarus insists that she return a letter to him. Under protest, she does so, simply thanking Troilus for his letter and not giving him any further encouragement. She gives Pandarus the letter to deliver and insists that has only written it because he has forced her to.

Just then, Troilus passes by in the street, as arranged. He salutes Criseyde. Pandarus again reminds her that this glorious knight she sees is about to die for her love and asks that she at least speak to him. This she refuses to do.

Pandarus is nevertheless joyful as he returns to find Troilus in his rooms, where he gives him Criseyde's letter. While it is polite and not encouraging in any way, it ignites Troilus' desire to an even higher degree, which only increases his misery.

Pandarus hatches another scheme, intended to get Troilus and Criseyde together in person. He goes to Deiphebus, Troilus' brother, and tells him that Criseyde wishes to speak to him about a matter. Someone called Poliphetes is plotting to ruin Criseyde, he tells Deiphebus, and she needs his support and the support of his brothers and perhaps even Helen, the wife of Paris. Pandarus suggests that Deiphebus invite Criseyde to dinner along with his brothers, including Troilus, to have her tell of her plight. Deiphebus agrees.

Then Pandarus goes to Criseyde to put the second part of his plan in action. He tells her that Poliphetes is out to get her but that Deiphebus will offer her his protection if she will explain the situation to him. Deiphebus asks her to dinner, as promised, and she

agrees. He also asks Troilus if he will attend the dinner and support Criseyde. Of course Troilus agrees, but, as Pandarus has instructed him to do, he pretends to be too feverish to eat with the others. When the dinner is given at the home of Deiphebus, with Pandarus, Criseyde and Helen present, Troilus lies in a separate room, feigning illness.

Criseyde, believing she really is in danger from Poliphetes, asks for the support of Deiphebus. He willingly agrees, then tells her they will go in to ask Troilus for his support as well. Afterwards Pandarus maneuvers the group carefully, sending Deiphebus and Helen off to read a letter from Hector and sending off Criseyde's nieces, who have also attended. As he leads Criseyde to Troilus' room, he entreats her to go in and see him alone while everyone else is busy. The book ends as Troilus, anxiously lying in bed, hears Pandarus and Criseyde approaching.

Book II Analysis

Pandarus drives the action of Book II as he schemes to bring the lovesick Troilus together with Criseyde, the object of his extreme affection. Troilus does not do much during this portion of the story except moan about his sorry state. Chaucer even offers a kind of apology for Troilus' behavior at the beginning of Book II, reminding the reader that love affects different people in different ways.

Pandarus is shown to be willing to bend the truth considerably in order to achieve his desired result. He lies to Criseyde and deceives her into meeting with Troilus when she has already told him she will not. Troilus, for his part, appears quite willing to take part in Pandarus' deceitful tactics, although he will later rebuke Pandarus for them.

Pandarus is also very adept at manipulating others by exploiting their weaknesses. Criseyde's weakness is her curiosity and Pandarus broaches the subject of Troilus' affection with her by pretending he cannot tell her about it and making her pry it from him. He then appeals to her sense of pity by describing Troilus' awful state of lovesickness, and finally to her vanity by reminding her that Troilus could certainly have any women he wanted, but that he has chosen her and that only she can relieve his great pain. He is patient, and leads her along by small steps.

Pandarus uses a similar tactic to manipulate Troilus, but exploits a different set of weaknesses. Troilus is already in a suggestible position, weak as he is from his lovesickness and apparently unable to act on his feelings himself. In Book I, Pandarus is able to goad Troilus into revealing the source of his weeping by teasing him and making him angry. Pandarus will try this technique later in the story, but Troilus eventually sees through his tactic.

Pandarus' orchestration of the dinner party at the home of Deiphebus is masterful. He finds plausible reasons not only to bring all of them together and to provide an excuse for both Troilus and Criseyde to attend without anything seeming wrong, but has ready methods for distracting everyone so that he can get Criseyde to meet alone with Troilus.

Although the eventual outcome of this first meeting is already known, Chaucer adds considerable suspense by shifting the point of view to that of the anxious Troilus, waiting in his room. Chaucer ends the book with Troilus listening in anticipation as he hears Pandarus and Criseyde approaching.

Book III

Book III Summary

Chaucer begins Book III with an ode to Venus, the goddess of love, praising her and asking for her help in relating the story of the love of Troilus and Criseyde, so that she and love might be properly honored.

As Troilus hears Pandarus and Criseyde approaching, he rehearses in his mind what he will say to her. As they near him, he moans out, pretending to be seriously ill as Panadarus has instructed him. He presents a pitiful sight laying in his bed, and Criseyde immediately kneels to him. Troilus is puzzled by this action and asks what she means by it. Criseyde says she is kneeling to thank him and ask for his protection.

Troilus is stricken by this, for it is he who wishes to place himself in her service. Her asking for his protection seems to drive him even further into despair. Pandarus, standing by in tears, prods Criseyde to relieve Troilus of his misery. Criseyde is confused. She asks what she can possibly do or say. Pandarus calls on her to have pity on Troilus and do something.

Criseyde asks Troilus to explain further what it is he wishes from her. He replies that he wishes to be her servant in love, obeying her desires and honoring her alone. Pandarus speaks up and asks Criseyde if this is not a reasonable request.

Criseyde thinks calmly for a moment and answers Troilus. As long as her honor is not compromised, she says, she will allow Troilus to express his devotion to her and accept his service. However, she warns, she is not giving him any claim upon her and her affection in return will only be in proportion to what he deserves by his proper actions. She tells him she hopes this will please him, and takes him in her arms and kisses him.

Pandarus is overjoyed at this development and calls out to Cupid and Venus in praise. He warns Troilus and Criseyde that Deiphebus and Helen are returning and that they must not appear to be doing anything unusual. He promises that as soon as possible he will arrange for them to be together again.

As they hear Deiphebus and Helen approaching, Troilus begins to groan in false agony. They look in on him and Helen tries to make him comfortable. Finally, they all depart, leaving Troilus alone. As soon as he can, however, Pandarus rushes back to Troilus.

Seating himself on Troilus' bed, Pandarus grows serious. He reminds Troilus that it is by his scheming and plotting that Criseyde now seems prepared to return Troilus' love. He tells him that he is somewhat ashamed for having become a "go-between" in this way, especially when the woman involved is his own niece. It is only because he believes in Troilus' high virtue and good intentions that he has done this, he tells him, but before he continues in his efforts on Troilus' behalf, he insists on renewing his promise to keep

everything secret. He does not want Troilus to despoil his niece by bragging of his conquest to other men or speaking of her roughly.

Troilus looks kindly on Pandarus and reminds him of the physical agony he was in for the love of Criseyde when Pandarus first found him and offered to help. He swears to Pandarus that he would sooner die in disgrace himself than disgrace Criseyde in any way. He is eternally indebted to Panadarus, he tells him, for the help he has given, and he urges him not to feel any shame for what he has done, even though those who do the same thing for money are considered shameful. Pandarus has acted out of "noble feelings" and not for his own gain, he tells him. He pledges to follow Pandarus' instructions in everything.

In the days that follow, Troilus spends his days fighting the Greeks and his nights lying and thinking about Criseyde. They see one another briefly from time to time, and Criseyde's esteem for Troilus grows as he proves to be a valiant and devoted knight. They each look forward to when they will be able to be alone together, for their pledge to secrecy only allows them brief conversations.

Pandarus all the while is plotting for exactly this, and tells Troilus of his plans. One rainy morning he calls on Criseyde at her home and invites her to come with him to his house for dinner. She is reluctant because of the rain, but he convinces her. She asks if Troilus will be there, fearful that if they are seen together their secret will be revealed. He lies that Troilus is out of town and will not be there, but even if he were there she need not be afraid for his house would be a safe place for them to meet. She says she trusts Pandarus and will attend.

Criseyde goes to dinner at Pandarus' house along with several of her nieces and maids. Pandarus sets out a feast for them and they all have a good time. Unknown to any of them except Pandarus, Troilus is nearby in a small room with a window where he can see them having dinner.

After the meal, Criseyde says it is time for her to go home. The rain is now falling even harder, however, and Pandarus uses this as an excuse to convince her she should stay the night at his house. She agrees, and he leads her to a small room apart from where he sends her friends to sleep. Once she is in her room, Pandarus goes to get Troilus and fills him in on his plan, telling him to be prepared to come to Criseyde's room.

Pandarus goes in to see Criseyde, waking her. He pretends to be upset with her, scolding her for treating Troilus badly. She is confused, asserting that she has been devoted to him and asking what she could possibly have done. Pandarus replies that Troilus is in misery from jealousy because he has heard she has promised her love to someone named Horaste. Criseyde is amazed. She has never even heard of anyone by this name, and she worriedly wonders who could be spreading such rumors. She begins to cry.

Pandarus tells her she must set Troilus' suspicions to rest as soon as possible. She replies that she will the next day. That is not soon enough, Pandarus tells her, for the

situation is dangerous and she would be showing him she did not care for him by waiting so long. This remark increases Criseyde's worry, and she asks if Pandarus will help her by taking her ring to Troilus right away, as a sign of her devotion. Pandarus dismisses the gesture as still not enough to still Troilus' noble heart. She must tell him in person, he tells her, and she can because Troilus has come to Pandarus' house secretly.

Criseyde is torn over whether to see him or not, and asks her uncle what to do. He replies in mock astonishment that her choice is obvious. She says she will place her trust in Pandarus, and will get up and go to see Troilus. There is no need for that, Pandarus says, for Troilus will come to her.

Suddenly, Troilus is at her bedside, kneeling. Pandarus encourages him to move a little closer to her and then moves to the other side of the room to let them speak together. Criseyde tells Troilus that his jealousy has saddened her because he has apparently mistrusted her without reason when she has been only true to him. In tears, she hides her head under her blanket. Troilus is suddenly stricken with grief as he sees how the false scheme of Pandarus' has given grief to his beloved. He is overcome with grief himself, and faints.

Pandarus responds immediately and lays Troilus out on Criseyde's bed. When he comes to, Criseyde is overjoyed and embraces him in forgiveness. Pandarus leaves them alone, and she presses Troilus to explain how he came to think she had been untrue. He lies that at some feast where they were both present she had not even looked at him. She assures him that this meant nothing and teases him that he is acting like a child. Troilus offers his lovesickness as an excuse and the two lovers are soon reconciled.

Finally, Troilus takes Criseyde in his arms. She trembles for him and they make love. Afterwards, they lay talking until daybreak, and Troilus curses the sun for forcing them to part.

They continue to spend the night with one another secretly from time to time in the same way, aided by Pandarus, and their love for one another grows stronger.

Book III Analysis

Chaucer builds the suspense by taking a brief side trip to introduce the third book and ask for the guidance of Venus as he is about to get to the heart of the story.

Troilus plays his role to the hilt as he hears Criseyde and Pandarus approach and begins to moan. Pandarus brings in Criseyde and continues to orchestrate the whole affair by putting her on the spot, insisting that she do something about Troilus' agony. She has no choice but to speak with Troilus, which is the first goal of Pandarus' scheme. At his prodding, she acquiesces slightly and says she will accept Troilus' devotion, but is careful not to make any promise in return.

Pandaraus shows a glimmer of conscience following this episode. He acknowledges that under certain circumstances what he is doing might not be deemed honorable, but reminds Troilus that his intentions are pure and that he has the highest respect for his niece. He does not seem to be certain of Troilus' intentions, however, as he makes him promise not to go boasting of his conquest of Criseyde once she has become his lover. Troilus promises to keep everything quiet, adding another source of pressure to keep his love a secret.

Whatever guilt Pandarus might feel does not stop him from continuing to lie to Criseyde in order to guide her into loving Troilus. After exacting a small promise from her to be kind to Troilus and planting the seed of affection for him in her mind, he hatches a scheme to let the two spend the night together alone at his home. Once he has convinced Criseyde to stay at his home, and with Troilus waiting in the wings, he concocts a story about Troilus being jealous because he has heard she has given her love to another man, Horaste. Here Pandarus is manipulating Criseyde through her own indignation. She protests she has never even heard of such a person, which the reader knows is true as Pandarus has just made him up. Her anger at this rumor provokes her into wanting to set things right with Troilus, and one of the more comical scenes in the book ensues. Pandarus strikes down her proposal to send Troilus her ring as a sign of faith and says she must send for him in person. She reluctantly agrees and Troilus appears at her bedside. Chaucer does not describe Troilus entering the room, he is simply, suddenly there. "She was struck dumb seeing him there, so suddenly had he come," (p. 145)

Pandarus continues to call the shots, even suggesting where the two should sit on Criseyde's bed as they talk. He withdraws to the other side of the room.

There is a turning point here in Troilus relationship with Pandarus and with Criseyde. It is by means of Pandarus' scheming that he now finds himself face to face with the sympathetic and willing Criseyde. However Criseyde, believing Pandarus' story about Troilus' jealousy, is upset and angry with Troilus that he would believe such rumors about her. Seeing his love in distress over these lies, he curses himself for having helped deceive her, but holds Pandarus ultimately responsible. He faints away in his guilt and grief. Troilus' fainting seems to finally tip the balance for Criseyde. At the urging of Pandarus, they lay him on the bed and revive him. Criseyde forgives him and Pandarus jokes that the candle might hurt his eyes, so he will take it away.

This scene is interesting in that Chaucer injects humorous touches into the melodrama of weeping lovers swooning in one another's arms. Troilus is eternally grateful to Pandarus for what he has done, but no longer will he allow any deceit or scheming on his behalf. This first night together leads to many more, but always in secret. Chaucer makes reference once again to the wheel of Fortune that is still turning. The third book, which ends with Troilus ecstatically happy for fulfilling his love for Criseyde, is the top of the wheel. The next two books will complete the circuit.

Book IV

Book IV Summary

Book IV is introduced with a brief synopsis of the fate in store for Troilus and Crisyede. Chaucer invokes Fortune in his introduction and foreshadows Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus for Diomede.

The action of the book opens with a short description of a large battle between the Trojans and the Greeks where many Trojans are killed or captured, including Antenor, a son of King Priam and Troilus' brother. Antenor is taken prisoner by the Greeks.

Following the battle, the Greeks call for a truce so they might negotiate to exchange and ransom prisoners of war. Calkas, Criseyde's father, who has joined the Greeks, goes to the Greek leaders and reminds them of his prophecy from Apollo that the Greeks will soon take Troy, and asks that in exchange for Antenor they ask the Trojans to hand over Criseyde to return to him. The Greeks agree to Calkas' request.

As a prince of Troy, Troilus is present at the council that considers the offers of ransom and exchange from the Greeks. When he hears the Greek emissary ask for Criseyde he is mortified, but dares not speak out lest he reveal his secret passion. Hector opposes the trade, pointing out that Criseyde is not a prisoner of war. The majority of the council feels that exchanging Criseyde for Antenor is a good bargain and overrules Hector's protests.

Troilus rushes to his room and laments this turn of events, crying out to Fortune for abandoning his cause. He falls into grief.

Pandarus, hearing the news of the exchange, rushes to Troilus, Troilus roars with grief while Pandarus listens in silence. He finally agrees with Troilus that Fortune has turned against him and suggests he should cheer up. He can always find another woman to love, Pandarus tells him.

Troilus rebukes his friend for treating the matter so lightly and reminding him he has not been so successful in love himself. Pandarus is chastened, and resolves to help Troilus. His first idea is for Troilus to carry Criseyde away bodily and go away with her, not worrying about the scandal. Troilus replies he would never take her away without her consent and Pandarus makes the obvious point that he has not even asked her if she might be willing to go away with him. He tells Troilus he will arrange for them to meet in private so he might ask her.

Meanwhile, Criseyde hears of the impending trade through word of mouth. Her friends are excited for her, thinking she will be glad to be with her father once more. Criseyde is in a daze, however. She hates her father as a traitor, and retires to her room to cry alone. Wild with grief, she resolves to starve herself to death rather than leave Troilus.

Pandarus comes to her secretly, finding her in deep sadness. He tells her he comes from Troilus, who wants to see her. Though she thinks seeing him will only make her feel worse, she agrees to meet with him. Pandarus tells her to stop crying, for if Troilus sees her in such a state he may be overcome with grief and try to kill himself.

Pandarus returns to Troilus, finding him in a temple. Troilus delivers a long speech on the nature of predestination and free will, believing that he is destined by Fortune and God to lose Criseyde, so there is no point in trying to change his fate. Pandarus dismisses his reasoning, reminding him he has not yet even spoken to Criseyde since the news of her leaving. He tells Troilus to go to her and find out what she says. He suggests she may have a plan to save them both. Troilus agrees to go to her.

When the lovers meet they fall into each others' arms, sobbing in grief. Criseyde is overcome and faints away. Troilus cannot revive her and believes she has actually died from grief. Unable to withstand her death he takes his own sword and prepares to kill himself, unwilling to live without her. Just as he is about to fall on his sword, Criseyde awakens and saves him. She tells him that had she awakened a moment later and found him dead she would have used his sword to kill herself, as well.

The two lovers spend all night consoling one another in their grief. Criseyde tells she cannot run away with him, but not to worry. She will go to the Greeks but will find a way to return to him in ten days. As the morning dawns, Troilus leaves her side.

Book IV Analysis

In Book IV, everything begins to fall apart. Troilus is in danger of losing Criseyde and yet takes no action to keep her. Pandarus tries to provoke him into action, but Troilus cites his promise to Criseyde to keep their love a secret, and his insistence to keep this promise prevents him from speaking up to keep her from being exchanged for Antenor. Chaucer leaves the question of Troilus' true motivation open somewhat, however. Hector is the first to oppose the exchange for Criseyde, and Troilus might certainly have supported his brother with nobody thinking anything was amiss. Chaucer has also had Troilus show his own pride in Book I and fear that he will be ridiculed for falling in love after speaking ill of it. Troilus has also promised Pandarus not to reveal his affair with Criseyde, but Pandarus seems to relieve him of this obligation when he suggests that Troilus ignore the potential scandal and simply carry Criseyde away. The exchange is arranged and once again Troilus takes to his bed to cry helplessly while Pandarus attempts to prod him into action.

Chaucer puts aside a large part of Book IV holding forth on the subject of free will and predestination, presented in a long speech made by Troilus. It is an old question, whether humans can affect their destiny through their own actions or whether their destiny is predetermined despite anything they might try to change it. The wheel of Fortune is tied in with the notion that Chaucer gives to Troilus that there is nothing that can be done to change one's destiny. Pandarus takes a slightly different view, it seems, suggesting that while the wheel of Fortune does have its down side, it will also turn back

upwards. He suggests that Troilus will find another woman to love. However, Troilus rejects this notion and seems determined to accept that it is his fate to lose Criseyde no matter what.

This does turn out to be his fate, as the reader already knows, but Chaucer has him give one last try. He attempts to convince her to run away with him, but she assures him she will return to him ten days after she leaves.

Book IV contains a very interesting episode that very nearly results in the double suicide of both lovers when Troilus, believing Criseyde has died, prepares to kill himself and she tells him that if he had, she would have done the same. They are spared, however. Ironically, had they both died in this episode, their suffering would have been far less. Chaucer seems to be coming down on the side of predestination. The two lovers were just seconds away from escaping their fate, but it was not to be.

Book V

Book V Summary

Chaucer introduces Book V explaining that the final destiny of the lovers is drawing near. At noon on the day Criseyde is to be exchanged, the Greek knight Diomede approaches Troy with Antenor. Troilus rides out with Criseyde and other knights to meet them. As he watches the exchange, he contemplates attacking Diomede and rescuing Criseyde, but holds back, afraid that she might be killed in the ensuing fight.

Dimoede escorts Criseyde back toward the Greek camp. He immediately begins to try to ingratiate himself to her, offering his service in any way she wishes. Criseyde, still in shock over leaving Troilus, barely hears him. She responds politely. He takes her to Calkas, who is overjoyed to see her again.

Meanwhile, back in Troy, Troilus feels he will soon die from grief. He calls for Pandarus to make arrangements for his funeral. Pandarus replies that he is again over-reacting and suggests he only needs some distraction while he waits the ten days until Criseyde promises to return. Reluctantly, Troilus agrees to go with Pandarus to the home of King Sarpedoun for a week of feasting, but he is not in a sociable mood and spends all his time re-reading old letters from Criseyde. He returns home after a week and rides past Criseyde's boarded up house, which only deepens his anxiety. He returns to the gate where she rode from, and begins to mark the time until she promises to return.

In the Greek camp, Criseyde laments her fate. She wishes she had run away with Troilus as he proposed. She weeps in sorrow, but has nobody with which she shares the source of her sadness.

Diomede senses that she longs for a lover in Troy and is at first hesitant to approach her while she is so sad. However, he is a proud soldier, Chaucer explains, and decides it would be all the more of a victory to win her love while she still loves a Trojan knight. He comes to her and offers her his devotion, asking her directly if she grieves for a Trojan knight. She lies that it is only her dead husband for whom she weeps. He comforts her and offers her his devotion again, telling her he has never offered it to another woman. He reminds her of the prophecy of her father that Troy would be destroyed by the Greeks, and that its knights are doomed to die.

Exactly how Criseyde falls in love with Diomede, Chaucer explains to his listener, he cannot say exactly, as the book from which he gets his story does not tell him. She does grow to love him, however. She gives him one of her gloves as a token, and eventually a brooch that had been given to her by Troilus.

Back in Troy, the tenth day arrives and Troilus waits on the walls of Troy looking out toward the Greek camp and waiting for Criseyde to return. By noon she has not arrived and he tells himself that her father probably insisted she wait and eat before returning.

By dark she has still not arrived and he tells himself she must be waiting for dark to return in secret. She does not come, and the next day, Troilus convinces himself he had counted the days wrong and still watches for her. He finally gives realizes she will not come and is again stricken down with grief.

Pandarus asks him why he does not write to Criseyde and ask why she has not returned. Troilus writes a long letter explaining how he is near death from his sorrow and how she can relieve his pain by simply replying to him. Even if she no longer loves him, he suggests, he asks that she relieve his suffering with just a word. Criseyde receives the letter and replies that she does still love him and she will return as soon as she can, but when Troilus reads it he senses that the words are hollow.

Troilus begins to have a recurring dream where he sees Criseyde embracing and kissing a wild boar. He calls for the prophet Cassandra to interpret the dream and she tells him the boar represents the Greek knight Diomede. Troilus refuses to believe her and sends her away in a rage. Nevertheless he begins to fear that she has been untrue. He makes plans to go to her in secret, but does not carry them through. He writes again, asking her when she will fulfill her promise to return.

Criseyde writes back that she does not know the "day or year" she might return, but that she does intend to come back to him. Why she cannot return now she should not write in the letter in case it is intercepted, she says. Upon reading it, Troilus senses that something has changed, but still believes she will keep her word.

A day comes when Diomede's armor is captured in battle and carried back to Troy as a trophy for all to see. Attached to the breastplate is Criseyde's brooch that he had given to her. He now knows that Criseyde has indeed been untrue to him with Diomede, and he swears to kill him.

However, this is not to be, Chaucer tells his listener. While Troilus and Diomede do meet in battle many times, neither kills the other. It is Troilus' fate to be killed by Achileus. After he dies, Chaucer explains, his soul rises to Heaven and as it does he looks back toward the earth. He realizes the futility of having been so sorrowful in life when the glory of Heaven awaits. Chaucer closes the poem with a dedication and a prayer.

Book V Analysis

With the eventual outcome already known, it is now Chaucer's task to fill in the details of how Criseyde came to love Diomede and how Troilus came to learn of it. On the first matter, Chaucer is quite sparse in his information. He portrays the polite attentions of Diomede to Criseyde once she has come to the Greek camp, and he documents Criseyde's change of mind not to return to Troy and to Troilus, but he sums up her reasons succinctly by saying she was comforted by the words of Diomede and that she believed the prophecy that Troy was doomed to be destroyed by the Greeks.

However, really it is the story of Troilus that Chaucer is intending to tell more than that of Criseyde, and it is clearly with Troilus that the reader's sympathies are intended to lie.

Chaucer's description of Troilus waiting in anxious agony for his lover to return and making excuses each hour she does not is heart-wrenching and his thoughts will be familiar to anyone who has ever been jilted by a lover. When he reads Criseyde's letter, he senses subtle changes in her writing that signal that he has lost her, even though outwardly she is promising to return. Chaucer turns the tables. Now it is Criseyde who is putting up the pretense.

Chaucer does not tell us what finally happens to Criseyde, and he gives very few details about Troilus following his discovery of her betrayal. He vows to kill Diomede, and one imagines that Chaucer might have provided a more suitable ending for Troilus had he not run up against the already existing traditional stories of the Trojan War that have Troilus being killed by Achileus. Chaucer skips ahead to Troilus' death and has his soul ascend to Heaven. It is not literally the Christian Heaven, as the story's setting is in pre-Christian times, but Chaucer's reference to his contemporary Christian beliefs is understood.

Characters

Troilusappears in All Books

A knight of Troy and son of King Priam. As a prince of Troy, Troilus is also a military leader who tries to set an example for the younger knights. Part of his duty, he feels, is to keep them from getting entangled in love affairs and he openly mocks the other young men who cry over their beloved women. This changes when he himself is hit by Cupid's arrow and falls deeply in love with Criseyde, a Trojan widow whom he sees at a feast of Athena.

Troilus is a brave fighter of wide renown, but he becomes weak and helpless with grief over his love for Criseyde. He is helped by his friend Pandarus, who is also Criseyde's uncle, and under his direction schemes to win her heart. In the process, Troilus deceives Criseyde, inadvertently causing her sorrow. He is deeply sorry for his actions, which he blames on Pandarus.

Troilus wins the heart of Criseyde and they carry on a secret affair for three years before circumstances take her away from him. Although she promises to return, she does not. Troilus remains faithful to Criseyde and always keeps his word to never reveal their secret love. He remains valiant in battle and is finally killed by the great Greek warrior Achileus. His soul ascends to Heaven where he finds peace.

Criseydeappears in All Books

A widow of Troy, the daughter of Calkas, and the lover of Troilus. As a widow, Criseyde is afforded a place of honor in Troy, but when her father, Calkas, defects to the enemy Greeks, she is afraid she will be branded a traitor as he was. She approaches Hector, the greatest warrior of Troy and a prince of the city, for protection, which he grants her.

Criseyde seems content to live out her life as a widow and is astonished and reluctant when her uncle Pandarus tells her that Troilus is in deep agony from his love for her. Her uncle plays upon her pity and her vanity to plant the seed of love in her mind and as she learns more about Troilus, this seed grows into her heart. She carries on a secret affair with him for three years.

Criseyde is taken away to the Greek camps in a prisoner exchange arranged by her father. This causes her immense grief, but she finds comfort in the attentions of Diomede, a Greek warrior, who asks to be allowed to devote himself to her. She consents, and gives Diomede a brooch that was once given to her by Troilus. When Troilus sees the brooch on the armor of Diomede, he understands she has betrayed him.

Chaucer does not describe the eventual fate of Criseyde. He does not believe that she truly gives her heart to Diomede, he writes, but he notes that in other versions of the story she does.

Pandarusappears in All Books

The uncle of Criseyde and a close friend of Troilus. Pandarus is a womanizer who nonetheless feels qualified to instruct Troilus on how to win the heart of Criseyde. He is a skillful manipulator of others, playing upon their weaknesses and vanity to get them to do what he wants. He carefully leads Criseyde into regarding Troilus first as a friend and then as a lover and facilitates their secret meetings. He shows a glimmer of conscience about his sometimes deceitful actions, but seems to feel that the ends justify the means, and since his main purpose is honorable, he is right in using his influence to bring the two together.

He is often lighthearted, making jokes and laughing. He seems to have a light view of love himself, encouraging Troilus to simply find another woman after he has lost Criseyde and offering to distract him with feasting and fun while he waits for her to return. He turns serious when he sees how tortured his friend becomes over his love for Criseyde. He eventually grows to hate Criseyde for her betrayal.

Calkasappears in Book I, Book V

A Trojan priest of Apollo and the father of Criseyde. After Calkas receives a prophecy from Apollo that the Greeks will be victorious over Troy, he defects to the Greek side and is considered a traitor. He later convinces the Greeks to ask for Criseyde in exchange for Antenor in an exchange of prisoners, setting into motion the events that lead to Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus.

Diomedeappears in Book V

An outstanding Greek warrior. Diomede begins to court Criseyde as soon as she leaves Troy and is eventually successful in winning her love. His armor is captured in battle and brought back to Troy, where Troilus sees that he had worn a brooch of Criseyde's, confirming her infidelity to Troilus. Troilus vows to kill Diomede and the two meet often in battle, but neither kills the other.

Deiphebusappears in Book III

A brother of Troilus. Deiphebus is an unwitting part of Pandarus' plan to bring Troilus and Criseyde together when he agrees to host a dinner party where they will both be present.

Hectorappears in Book I, Book IV

The finest warrior among the Trojans and the brother of Troilus. Hector offers his protection to Criseyde after the death of her husband and the defection of her father to the Greeks. He initially opposes sending Criseyde to the Greeks, but relents to the majority opinion.

Antenorappears in Book IV, Book V

A brother of Troilus. Antenor is captured by the Greeks and later exchanged for Criseyde.

Parisappears in Book I

A prince of Troy and husband of Helen. Paris steals Helen from the Greeks, starting the war with Troy

Helenappears in Book III

The wife of Paris and sister-in-law to Troilus. Helen cares for Troilus while he pretends to be ill.

Priamappears in Book I

The King of Troy and the father of Troilus.

Antigoneappears in Book II

A relation of Criseyde who sings a long of love, included by Chaucer in the book.

Fortuneappears in All Books

The goddess of fate and luck. Fortune is portrayed as driving much of the action and causing most of Troilus' woes.

Cupidappears in Book I

A god of love. Cupid takes offense at Troilus' mocking of love and shoots him with an arrow that causes him to fall in love with Criseyde

Venusappears in All Books

The goddess of love. Chaucer invokes Venus in the introductions to the sections of the poem, and Troilus offers a prayer to her once he has won the heart of Criseyde.

Jupiterappears in All Books

Also called Jove or Zeus. The king of the gods.

Apolloappears in All Books

God of the sun and the patron of the Greeks. Apollo tells Calkas, one of his priests, that Troy is doomed, causing Calkas to leave Troy and join the Greeks.

The Furiesappears in All Books

Supernatural goddesses who punish those who have broken oaths.

Athenaappears in Book I

Also called Pallas. The patron goddess of Troy. It is at a feast of Athena that Troilus first lays eyes on Criseyde

Cassandraappears in Book IV

A Trojan prophetess who tells Troilus the meaning of his dream about Criseyde. Troilus does not believe her interpretation, which turns out to be correct.

Poliphetesappears in Book III

The person Pandarus claims is plotting against Criseyde along with Antenor and Aeneas.

Horasteappears in Book III

The name of the person Pandarus tells Criseyde that Troilus believes she has been unfaithful with.

Sarpedounappears in Book IV

A Trojan nobleman who hosts Troilus and Pandarus at his palace while Troilus waits for Criseyde to return

Objects/Places

Ancient Troyappears in All Books

A large walled city under the leadership of King Priam. At the time of the poem, Troy is under attack by the Greeks.

Troilus' Homeappears in All Books

Where Troilus spends much of his time while not at battle, holed up in his rooms, weeping in grief over his love for Criseyde

Pandarus' Homeappears in Books II-V

The home of Troilus' friend and Criseyde's uncle, Pandarus. It is here that Pandarus arranges for the lovers to meet secretly and spend the night together.

Criseyde's Homeappears in Books II-V

A stately home where the widow Criseyde lives with several nieces and attending ladies. The house is boarded up when she leaves for the Greek camps and Troilus passes by it to remind him of his days with Criseyde.

Deiphebus' Homeappears in Book II

The home of Troilus' brother where he and Criseyde are both invited to dinner under the scheme of Pandarus. It is here they first speak to one another face to face.

The Walls of Troyappears in All Books

The high protective walls surrounding the city. Troilus walks the walls looking out over the Greek camps for any sign of the return of Criseyde.

The Greek Campappears in Book V

The enemy encampment that besieges Troy. Criseyde is taken to the Greek camp after she is exchanged for Antenor. It is here she gives her promise to Diomede.

The Temple of Athenaappears in Book I

The temple in Troy where Troilus first sees Criseyde and falls in love with her.

King Sarpedoun's Palaceappears in Book V

A stately home in Troy that Pandarus convinces Troilus to visit to distract him while he waits for Criseyde to return.

Troilus' Broochappears in Book IV, Book V

The brooch that Troilus gives to Criseyde on the day she is taken from Troy as a sign of his faithfulness. Criseyde later gives the brooch to Diomede, and when Troilus sees it on Diomede's armor he knows she has betrayed him.

Themes

Free Will and Predestination

Whether or not people can change the outcome of their final destiny is a recurring theme throughout Troilus and Criseyde. Chaucer address it both directly in his asides to the reader and indirectly using the narrative action of the story.

Troilus, during a long speech in Book IV, laments that he has no chance of changing his own destiny, which seems to be to lose Criseyde and grieve for her forever. Chaucer has him reason out the matter based on the assumption that an all-powerful God knows the ultimate destiny of every person. It cannot be that God only sees what will happen and has no control over future events, because that would place God under the control of the things he has created, which is a paradox. Therefore God controls our destinies. People are sometimes given foreknowledge of their destinies, by prophets and by revelation, but this does not mean they also have the power to change their destiny. No matter what they do to try to change it, they will always reach their predestined fate.

Troilus seems to know this unconsciously as from the moment he falls in love with Criseyde he is in torment for not having her. This is a shadow of what is to be his ultimate fate. Once he has gained her love and is in actual danger of losing her, he resigns himself to this destiny. Only the prodding of Pandarus gets him to try to alter it by approaching Criseyde with a plan to run away.

It is at this meeting that Troilus nearly cheats his fate. When he thinks Criseyde has died, he nearly commits suicide but is saved when she awakens and stops him. He is destined to live to be betrayed by her, and even though it appears for a moment that he has the free will to escape this fate, at the last moment events turn him back toward his predestined end.

The Wheel of Fortune

Closely tied to the theme of free will and predestination is the recurring appearance of Fortune. Fortune is the goddess of luck and fate, often depicted as controlling a large wheel that represents the course of a person's life. As the wheel turns, a person finds himself either on the way up or the way down, with a brief period at the top. The story of Troilus follows this path, as he gains the love of Criseyde, enjoys his passionate affair for three years, and then finds it all slipping away.

Chaucer invokes Fortune several times during his asides to the reader, as in the introduction to Book IV where he writes, "How short a time, lament it as we may, such joy continues under Fortune's rule. She that seems truest when about to slay, and tunes her song, beguiling to a fool, to bind and blind and make him her tool, the common traitress!" (p. 179). Here Fortune is not merely the same thing as mere luck, but actively deceives us into our own downfall. Chaucer tells his reader that it is Fortune who

deceives Troilus as he waits for Criseyde to return into thinking that she has simply been delayed by one thing or another rather than face the fact that she is not coming.

In the end, however, Troilus is victorious over Fortune as everything is put in perspective as his soul ascends to heaven. In the end, the suffering he and others endure on the wheel of Fortune mean nothing compared to the glory of the afterlife. Chaucer seems to be suggesting that we should embrace our fate.

Betrayal

Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus is arguably the central event of Chaucer's tale, but the theme of betrayal runs through the entire work.

Criseyde's father, Calkas, betrays his people when he defects to the side of the enemy Greeks at the beginning of the book, but more importantly, he betrays Criseyde, who is left behind. Without a father or husband to protect her, Criseyde turns to Hector for protection and receives it.

She also expects protection from her uncle, Pandarus, but he also betrays her in a way. Pandarus' actions might be considered unsavory to an outside observer as he goes about deceiving Criseyde in order to deliver her to Troilus. Pandarus regrets his betrayal of his niece, but rationalizes it by telling himself that, because his intentions are honorable, what he has done is acceptable. He is not merely a pimp, in other words.

Troilus, while he does not betray Criseyde in an overt sense, does take part in the deceitful schemes of Pandarus, including the plot to convince Criseyde that Troilus believes she has forsaken him. Betrayal is at the center of this scheme as well. Pandarus fabricates a story that Troilus has heard Criseyde has given her love to another man. When he tells Criseyde this lie, she is filled with both sorrow and anger. She is sad because she feels she has been slandered, but also takes offense that Troilus thinks she would have broken her word to him. When Troilus sees the effect his lie has had on her, he feels he himself has betrayed her in a way, although he is quick to blame Pandarus. Ironically, it is this story of betrayal that leads to the two lovers' first night together, beginning their passionate affair even as it foreshadows the actual betrayal that will end it.

There is irony in the final outcome, as well, as Calkas attempts to undo his betrayal of Criseyde by arranging for her to come to him in the Greek camps. It is this action that sets in motion the events that will lead to Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus for Diomede.

Style

Point of View

Troilus and Criseyde is a story that takes place in ancient times and has been told before by other authors. Chaucer positions himself as an interpreter of the story for his contemporary courtly medieval audience. He borrows the story from previous authors, notably Boccaccio, which he openly acknowledges within the poem itself, pointing out where his source fails to elaborate on a point and where he is inserting his own interpretation.

Chaucer is himself a member of the court class, and the culture he assigns to ancient Troy seems to reflect the ideals and point of view of him and his fellow courtesans regarding the nature of love and the chivalrous ideals of courtly love. Being true to one's cause and keeping one's word are central to these ideals, and these are important plot points in the tale. Troilus remains true to his word as a good knight should be and suffers greatly for it. Criseyde betrays her love and does not keep her word. Chaucer does not openly condemn her for it, but neither is she shown any sympathy.

Chaucer also seems to share the point of view of Troilus that a person's fortunes will rise and fall and that there is little one can do about it. In the end, it does not matter, Chaucer suggests, as long as one has been true to oneself and to one's principles, the ups and downs one experiences in life are petty compared to the glory one will find in Heaven.

Setting

Troilus and Criseyde is set during the siege of Troy, an ancient battle that is the source for many other tales from antiquity. The Greeks have sailed to the shores near the walled city of Troy and encamped there. They have surrounded the city in a siege. The Trojan warriors come out from the city and engage the Greeks in battle on a large plain between the walls of the city and the Greek camps.

Troilus is a son of King Priam of Troy and along with his brothers is a distinguished fighter. Criseyde is a widow whose husband has been killed in the fighting. It is against this backdrop of war that their love story unfolds, and the war is what provides the mechanism that separates them when Criseyde is sent to the Greeks in exchange for Antenor, a Trojan prince who has been captured in battle.

Most of the action takes place inside the walls city of Troy, in the homes of Troilus, Criseyde and Pandarus, where the two lovers meet frequently to spend the might together in secrecy. In the final book, some of the action takes place in the Greek encampment where Criseyde has been taken to live with her father, Calkas, and where Diomede works to win her love. Battles on the plain outside Troy are alluded to, but very little action in the poem actually happens there.

While the time is supposedly ancient antiquity, the characters seem to behave much like the medieval ladies and gentlemen who were Chaucer's original audience. Chaucer calls the warriors "knights" and the code of devotion and love that Troilus adheres to appears much like the code of chivalry found in tales of the Knights of the Round Table and other similar traditional stories.

Language and Meaning

Troilus and Criseyde was originally written in Old English, a language that has some things in common with Modern English, but which is different enough that it is difficult to understand without translation. When discussing language and meaning in a translated work, it is often hard to discern between the original author's word choice and tone and that of the translator. A good translator will try to convey the original as much as possible while still making the result meaningful and readable.

Chaucer's poem is made up largely of straightforward narrative interspersed with sections of dialogue. The characters speak to one another in an informal, conversational way for the most part, unless they are addressing the gods or making a speech, when their language becomes more formal and circumspect. The author shifts between the more formal narrative style and a direct, conversational address of the reader or listener, where he steps outside the narrative to further explain a point of the plot or refer to his source material. At the beginning of each book, Chaucer includes a formal introduction which both addresses the reader and invokes guidance in telling the story.

Within the writing itself, Chaucer makes several references to classical mythology and the gods and goddesses of the characters in the ancient setting.

Structure

Troilus and Criseyde is divided into five untitled books. Book I is the briefest of the four, with Books II-V of approximately equal length. Each book is introduced by the author in a direct address of the reader or listener. These introductions set the scene for the following book, comment on the motivations of the characters, foreshadow the events of the book and those in later books, and invoke various muses, gods and goddesses to assist the author in telling his story.

The poem is written in verse. Each stanza is seven lines with the rhyme scheme ABABBCC, meaning that the first and third lines rhyme, the second, fourth and fifth lines rhyme, and the the final two lines rhyme in a couplet. In this translation, the translator has retained the rhyme scheme and meter of Chaucer's original work. There are 1,177 stanzas in this edition of Troilus and Criseyde.

The action in the book is laid out chronologically, with some of the action taking place simultaneously in the final book. Chaucer frequently inserts songs and other set pieces into the narrative, which break up the linear action of the narrative and speak to the

underlying moral of the story. He ends the poem with a dedication to two friends of his and closes it with a prayer borrowed from Dante.

Quotes

"Before we part my purpose is to tell of Troilus, son of the King of Troy, and how his love-adventure rose and fell from grief to joy, and after, out of joy, in double sorrow." Book I, Stanza 1 (p. 3).

"Criseyde this lady's name; and, as for me, if I may judge of her, in all that place there was not one so beautiful as she, so like and angel in her native grace." Book I, Stanza 15 (p. 6).

"He had supposed that nothing had the might to steer his heart against a will as free as his; yet, at a look, immediately, he was on fire, and he, in pride above all others, suddenly was slave to love." Book I, Stanza 33 (p. 11).

"When Troilus heard Pandarus consenting to help him in the loving of Criseyde, his grief, as one might say, was less tormenting, but hotter grew his love..." Book I, Stanza 145 (p. 39).

"Now little niece of mine, the King's dear son, good, wise, and open-hearted, fresh and true, who bears himself so well to everyone, Prince Troilus, is so in love with you that you must help; he'll die unless you do." Book II, Stanza 46 (p. 56).

"But it was always Pandarus to whom he turned, in his complaining, for relief, begging advice and succour in his gloom..." Book II, Stanza 194 (p. 93).

"And then this Troilus began to strain her in his arms and whispered, 'Sweetest, say, are you not caught? We are alone, we twain, now yield yourself, there is no other way.' And soon she answered him, as there she lay, 'Had I not yielded long ago, my dear, my sweetest heart, I should not now be here.'" Book III, Stanza 173 (p. 154).

"This Troilus was present in his place when Antenor was asked against Criseyde; It brought a sudden change into his face, to hear those words was almost to have died." Book IV, Stanza 22 (p. 184).

"But tell me Troilus, why are you so mad, taking it all to heart, the way you do? What you desired you at least have had; by rights that ought to be enough for you." Book IV, Stanza 57 (p. 193).

"For the imagination hardly can grasp, or perception feel, or poet tell the cruel pains of this unhappy man, for they were greater than the pains of Hell. " Book IV, Stanza 243 (p. 239).

"This Diomede who led her by the bridle, now that the Trojans could no longer stay, thought, 'Well, this is no moment to be idle; I have the work so I should get the pay; I'll talk to her; it will beguile the way." Book V, Stanza 14 (p. 246).

"There, on the collar, could he not perceive the brooch he'd given her when they had to sever, yes on the very day she took her leave, in memory of his grief and him for ever? Had she not pledged her faith that she would never part with that brooch? But that was long before; He knew he could not trust her any more." Book V, Stanza 238 (p. 302).

Topics for Discussion

What role does religion play in Chaucer's poem?

How does Chaucer reconcile the Christian beliefs of his own and of his listeners with the mythological religion of the characters in his poem?

How does Troilus' view of his own free will change over the course of the story? What changes it?

Does Troilus share any of the blame for his own fate?

Is Criseyde to blame for her actions? Why or why not?

Does Pandarus act honorably regarding his niece?

How does the final scene where Troilus' soul ascends to Heaven color the narrative that precedes it?

Chaucer seems reluctant to condemn Criseyde for her actions. Why might this be?