

Transforming Exchanges in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

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When explaining why he forgives Criseyde's betrayal, the narrator of Chaucer's romance simply says that he "wolde excuse hire yet for routhe" —that her sorrow and feelings of guilt are reason enough to pardon her treachery (V.1099). The narrator's desire to forgive Criseyde, but ultimate failure to do so satisfactorily, forces us to ask why we similarly feel inclined to forgive her. As we continue to question our undeniable sympathies for Criseyde, a character scorned eternally through the epithet of "false," we witness Chaucer's intricate system unfold, and gradually we see his complicated layers of characterization, societal analysis, narration, and retelling at play in the poem. In particular, looking towards Chaucer's use of Ovid and other classical texts illuminates the poet's dynamic mechanisms within his own story. If we consider Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a foundational influence on Chaucer, then we can see how the fundamental theme of *change* in Ovid is reworked through the theme of *exchange* in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Moreover, the exchanges throughout Chaucer's poem accumulate until their effects begin to hold much of the same psychological and emotional weight as Ovid's physical changes. My essay begins by looking to Patricia Klindienst for a useful analysis of the violence that shapes a society of exchange, which I use to ground my analysis of the physical exchanges to which Criseyde is subject. I then look deeper into Criseyde's famous heart exchange dream, specifically the peripheral psychological influences leading up to the scene. After further discussion about the implications of exchange, and the inclusion of men as victims of the exchange society, I examine various ways in which the changes in narration reinforce the exchanges in the story, and evoke larger questions about translations, retellings, and other literary transformations. Finally, I look at Chaucer's medieval sources—Dante, Benoît de Saint-Maure, and Joseph of Exeter—to see how Chaucer uses the theme of change and

exchange compared to other medieval poets. As Chaucer transforms both his ancient and medieval source material, so he reinforces the transformations that his own characters undergo. By examining this theme of change and exchange, we can better understand why we sympathize with Criseyde, and how Chaucer reveals complicated intricacies of gender and society as he asks us to extend our sympathies.

Violent systems of exchange

Patricia Klindienst, discussing Ovid's Philomela and Procne myth in "The Voice of the Shuttle," argues that men repress their own subconscious violence by creating symbolic boundaries, such as city walls, and that the female body, exchanged in the marriage ritual, is used for such symbolic repression. The female's body is defended like the city walls, and the protection and exchange of her body parallels the politics that men devise, which are similarly meant to suppress innate aggression. When women are violated, "the invaded woman's body bears the full burden of ritual pollution," displaying clearly man's betrayal of his devised boundaries and "bringing to light the violence implicit in culture's inscriptions of its vulnerable exits and entries on the silenced woman's body" (8). Klindienst illustrates how the exchange ritual of marriage, and the coinciding obsession with female purity, reflects man's desire to suppress his own violent urges; as he transgresses these boundaries he displays both his internal violence and the structure he has created to contain it. But within this structure, women are punished even when they are not violated; they are silenced and forced to act according to an ideal of chastity, designed in order for the system to function. In her analysis, Klindienst draws from Claude Lévi-Strauss' alliance

theory, which examines how the incest taboo spurs the chain of women being exchanged, and how women and language serve as the core symbolic systems of human societies. Yet she also raises concerns about Lévi-Strauss and other male anthropologists, arguing that "women are silenced partly by being envisioned as silenced," and that our analysis must therefore also include the ways in which literature and culture subvert this custom (5).

Klindienst's analysis has several implications when we consider *Troilus and Criseyde*. First, when we examine the exchange ritual at play in the poem, we see how Criseyde is literally exchanged between men in keeping with their strictly male agreement; her voice and even her lover's voice cannot defend her body. According to this exchange ritual, Criseyde's society expects her to embrace her new Greek identity, and her love for Diomedes should therefore be justified. Yet Troilus, who has allowed her to become an object of exchange, expects her to remain loyal to him, without recognizing or understanding the implications of the exchange ritual. Interestingly, this expectation reflects Troilus' own naiveté about the masculine-designed structure of his society, and shifts the blame away from Criseyde, who actually performs as her society expects her to perform.

We can also recognize Chaucer's suppression of violence throughout the poem, which ultimately fails to conceal the force behind Criseyde's exchange. Chaucer writes a romance set during the Trojan War while barely addressing the ongoing violence, dismissing the war narrative as too lengthy to tell. Yet as much as the narrator and the lovers attempt to ignore the war, it inevitably persists and permeates the story, and ultimately the exchange of Criseyde is a result of this persistent violence. But the narrator's concealment of violence, and his focus instead on this story of changes and exchanges,

illustrates Klindienst's argument that these rituals suppress the obvious violent undercurrents of society. Furthermore, the whole process of prisoner exchange can be seen as a front of civility against a backdrop of barbarity, an attempt to establish certain civilized rituals in denial and rejection of what the war really reflects about man's barbaric self. And in this sense, the prisoner exchange ritual is just like the marriage ritual, another contrived boundary to suppress violence. But when Criseyde is finally exchanged, we realize the extent and impact of the violence that has been gathering force the entire story, and that the narrator, the lovers, and we ourselves have been ignoring. By creating a narrator who feigns ignorance of Troy's underlying violence, Chaucer forces us to forget the violence ourselves, only to painfully then remember what inescapably structures this society.

A final way we can understand Klindienst's argument in the context of *Troilus and Criseyde* is by analyzing the burden this ritual places on Criseyde herself. Klindienst argues that these exchange rituals render women silent and force them to obey certain stereotypes. Criseyde is not a mute character, and the narrator gives her a voice that is often more rational and calm than Troilus', but she is still stripped of a voice in the moment that will most fundamentally change her life. Further weight is placed on Criseyde by conflicting expectations; society expects her to remain pure, Troilus and Pandarus expect her to submit herself to Troilus and remain loyal to him, and eventually Diomedes expects her to submit herself to him. The typical reading of this story (though not perhaps of Chaucer's version) commends her submission to Troilus but rejects her submission to Diomedes. She is then judged by the societal standard as impure as soon as she cheats on Troilus, not as soon as she actually acts "impurely." Furthermore, Criseyde's autonomy in

love is questionable in both Troy and the Greek camp. Pandarus sets up a series of exchanges until finally Criseyde is exchanged into sleeping with Troilus; upon their first meeting, he switches Helen for Criseyde so that the couple might be alone, and later he maneuvers the guests staying in his house so that Criseyde can enter Troilus' bedroom undetected. In these situations, Criseyde finds herself repositioned without her consent. How different is Criseyde's exchange to the Greeks? Is she not also treated as a powerless object in Troy? Ultimately, any resentment we held against Criseyde is based upon our loyalty to Troilus, and we are reminded that the story is told from Troilus' point of view. If the story were centered on Criseyde and her late husband, Troilus would assume the role of Diomedes, and if the story were centered on Criseyde and Diomedes, the ending would be happy not tragic. In fact, Chaucer elsewhere titles the poem *The Book of Troilus*, and in *The Legend of Good Women* Alceste calls the poem "Criseyde," which gestures towards the various possible interpretations of the story based on its point of view. Shifts in narrative are then as fickle but as influential as the other changes we see throughout the poem. And ultimately one's moral judgment of Criseyde depends not on the character herself but on which story of hers is told by a male voice. Again, Chaucer creates complicated layers of narration that make us question our story's source and how we are to judge a story whose narrator is as manipulative as its characters.

Chaucer's Ovidian exchanges

Now that we have illuminated the exchange society that structures the story's background and foreground, we can examine a specific moment in the poem that illustrates

the pervasiveness of exchange. In many ways, Criseyde's dream of an eagle switching his heart with her own exemplifies the submissive and involuntary exchanges to which she is subjected throughout the poem. But the scenes in Book II leading up to the dream are also critical in explaining this transforming exchange and shed light on the complicated question of Criseyde's volition and agency in her affair with Troilus. These introductory scenes have their own dreamlike images, which reveal an interesting overlap between Criseyde's conscious and subconscious rationalizations and her eventual decision. We first find Criseyde struggling with the news of Troilus' love for her, oscillating between her attraction to him and her desire for independence. As soon as she feels positively towards Troilus, her demeanor suddenly changes:

But right as when the sonne shyneth brighte,
In March, that chaungeth ofte tyme his face,
And that a cloud is put with wynd to flighte
Which oversprat the sonne as for a space,
A cloudy thought gan thorough hire soule pace,
That overspradde hir brighte thoughtes alle,
So that for feere almost she gan to falle. (2.764-70)

Criseyde's recognition of a loving woman's "dredfull joye, hire constreinte, and hire peyne" affects her so much that she nearly collapses (776). Interestingly, the narrator describes this sudden awareness not as enlightened but as clouded judgment, and after "her thought gan for to clere," Criseyde thinks optimistically again of Troilus, merely by pushing aside these concerns (806). What is surprisingly perceptive becomes burdensome and poisonous in the narrator's eyes. Even if Criseyde appreciates these realizations for their insight and wisdom, the narrator asserts the tone and judgment of the scene so that we too are inclined to mistake the practical for the foolish. Perhaps even worse, we (guided by the narrator)

dismiss Criseyde's caution as prudish sensitivity, even though her reasoned insight eventually turns out to be accurate foresight.

Criseyde then ventures outside and overhears Antigone singing a Trojan love song, which dismisses critics of love as foolish, envious, or wicked, and claims that love is worth any potential pain. After the song, she asks Antigone if there is "swych blisse" among lovers that they can all "endite" so well; Antigone responds that no one can adequately describe love, and goes on to warn that not everyone is in love, and some just mistake lustful passion for love. Criseyde seems to ignore this latter point, ("unto that purpos naught answerde"), and Antigone's song is "somewhat able to converte" her (897, 903). Yet Antigone's response does not align with the optimism of her song, and importantly, Criseyde ignores any warning from Antigone's analysis. We wonder why Criseyde ignores Antigone, since the narrator also quickly changes topics and moves with Criseyde to her bedroom; does she simply miss the warning because she is already distracted by love, or does she hear the warning and choose to disregard it? Has love or passion already blinded her, or is she still considering rational arguments against love? In either case, the warning is clear but fails to penetrate Criseyde's already underway process of conversion. And we, as readers anticipating and desiring an affair, also disregard these arguments.

After this abrupt dismissal, night falls, Criseyde retires to her bed, and she hears the song of a nightingale that "made hire herte fressh and gay" (922). Nightingales are a conventional symbol for love, but Chaucer refers to Philomela and Procne in other parts of the poem, and this scene inevitably evokes Ovid's Philomela. If this nightingale is Philomela, then Criseyde misunderstands her song. Instead of warning her against men's potential abuse of women, the song lulls her into a dream in which she submits her heart to

an eagle, a masculine bird that the nightingale Philomela would surely protest against.

Importantly, at the beginning of Book 2, Pandarus has a similar experience with the swallow Procne:

The swalowe Proigne, with a sorowful lay,
Whan morwe com, gan make hir waymentynge,
Why she forshapen was; and evere lay
Pandare abedde, half in a slomberynge,
Til she so neigh him made hir cheterynge
How Tereus gan forth hire suster take,
That with the noyse of hire he gan awake (64-70).

Procne's "waymentynge" and "cheterynge" bother Pandarus so much that he wakes up and suddenly remembers the promise he made Troilus and his plans to manipulate Criseyde, the cruel intentions of which are confirmed by his joy that the moon is in good shape "to doon viage" and facilitate his plans (75). So in both hypnagogic states, the characters subconsciously reach unexpected and even wrong conclusions from the sisters' songs. The songs frame Criseyde's day as Procne's lament sets Pandarus, and by extension the plot, in motion, and Philomela's song abets Criseyde's submission. Procne's song awakens Pandarus, while Philomela's lulls Criseyde to sleep, and their misinterpretations both become inevitable motivating forces for the entire romance. Criseyde misunderstands Philomela's lament; Pandarus understands but is motivated into a role that Procne's cry warns against. This reveals quite a cold mentality in Pandarus, that one woman's wailing could inspire him to ensnare another. And the vivid contrast between Pandarus' awakening and Criseyde's hypnosis defines more clearly his instigative and her submissive role.

So when we interpret Criseyde's eagle dream, we realize that the subconscious exchange that she dreams occurs against a backdrop of other important changes and errors. For one, in her own rationalizations, what is legitimate and insightful (a hesitancy

about love's miseries, a realization of love's implications for her independence) is deemed cloudy and unclear. Then comes Antigone's almost naively optimistic love song and cautious counterpoint that Criseyde either misses or disregards. And finally what might be a misunderstood warning song against men lulls Criseyde into a trance that overcomes any inherent hesitancy. We witness a series of alarm bells that are ignored and that are especially disconcerting once we know their predictive accuracy, though of course we too would ignore them completely if the story ended differently. As we can tell from her process of rationalization, Criseyde disregards any internal warnings, even if she recognizes their legitimacy. She falls into a dream state where her subconscious is completely consumed by blinding love. Yet this does not mean that this ironic cloud of reason no longer lingers inside her. And so when Criseyde does experience the pain and betrayal that Philomela and Procne have forewarned, she unsurprisingly falls easily back into this confused state of oscillating desires, lingering between her love for Troilus and her own survival. Perhaps in her dream, Criseyde "ne nothyng smerte" when the eagle rips out her heart since she has already begun to numb herself to love's potential pain (930). Yet on some level she must know that she has assumed a veil of ignorance, dismissing any clearheaded hesitations as clouds. She fades into what is actually a cloud, but we cannot be surprised when she finally returns to her rational self.

When considering Ovid here alongside Chaucer, we see similarities between change and exchange that further illuminate the weighty implications of these transformations. One such implication is the loss of human rationality which is brought on by a metamorphosis into a numbed state. We see that in both Ovid and Chaucer, the characters' attempts to order their surroundings bring about this fundamental change. John Fyler

discusses this similarity between the *Metamorphoses* and *Troilus and Criseyde*: "The effort of Pandarus and the narrator to serve love by giving order to blind impulse is Ovidian. So too is their failure, brought about by the insufficiencies of love itself" (*Chaucer and Ovid*, 138). As Fyler points out, both the narrator and Pandarus (as well as Chaucer) ultimately fail to order love; "blind impulse" functions like all that is mutable—its only consistency is its inconsistency. In Ovid, the gods (who are partly outside the human system) do reorder love's "blind impulse" by metamorphosing characters, but their transformations have significant implications for the humans they are reordering. After the characters (usually women) are exhausted in their human state (more than often run down by sexual aggression) they are transformed into a nonhuman form that lessens their vulnerability but also deadens their human senses. Therefore the gods can reorder, but not completely; humans who have suffered as a result of love can only be turned into something else, losing their human autonomy in the process. In line with this Ovidian understanding of order, Chaucer's *Criseyde* seems to undergo an Ovidian metamorphosis. That is, after she is traded to the Greeks, she gives in to Diomedes out of utter helplessness; at least this is the narrator's perspective, when he provides the reason for *Criseyde*'s submission to Diomedes as "that she was allone and hadde nede/Of frendes help" (5.1026-7). Consider how crucially different *Criseyde*'s dependency here is from her independence in Book 3, when she explicitly states that she chooses to be with *Troilus* of her own accord (3.1210-11). Whatever ordering Pandarus forces on *Criseyde* in Troy, her decisions there are ultimately her own; but after her exchange, she loses her autonomy in love, and loses her passion in love in the process. *Criseyde* remains human after her transformation, but loses part of her humanity, her agency.

Another implication of these exchanges is their immortalizing effect, particularly in literature. In Ovid, women transform in reaction to masculine aggression (as in the story of Philomela and Procne). This change claims to free them from their original threat, but actually confines them within that threat since they are now defined forever by the story of that aggression, and many times take on unwilling and eternal associations with their aggressors (i.e. Daphne as Apollo's laurel, Syrinx as Pan's reed pipes). Similarly in Chaucer, Criseyde is exchanged amidst and as a result of the violence around her; she then changes emotionally in reaction to this physical change, and is eternally known for this reaction. Carolyn Dinshaw, expanding on Criseyde's lasting literary connotation as a false lover, explains how "the exchange of women, always potentially a rape because it proceeds regardless of women's independent desires, structures" both "the workings of Troy" and "the working of literary history" (*Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 82). Criseyde's Trojan society sets up her involuntary exchange, and literary tradition transforms her against her will into an archetype of faithlessness. As in Ovid, a woman's defense mechanisms produce everlasting judgments of her that contradict what she was defending herself against, and she cannot escape the literary transformation that reduces her character in the process.

Changed Troilus

We must also note that Criseyde, and women in general, are not the only victims of violence in the story; Troilus too suffers his own transformations at the hands of the ongoing war. In fact, after we hear that Criseyde will be traded to the Greeks, Troilus' features are more often described as "chaunged" than Criseyde's. We realize throughout

the poem that Troilus is not a masculine aggressor like many of his fellow Trojans, which is why our sympathies are so conflicted between the hero and heroine towards the poem's end. In part we sympathize with Troilus because of his feminine characteristics—his innocence and ignorance of lovemaking in all steps of the process. Pandarus assumes the role of the masculine aggressor behind Troilus, and this allows us to shift much of our blame for Criseyde's manipulation unto Pandarus, and excuse Troilus, who is more often ignorant of Pandarus' ploys.

Alcuin Blamires discusses how the narrator conspicuously attempts to assert Troilus' masculinity, which only reveals Troilus' actual femininity. For example, during Book 3's climax, when Pandarus finally manages to get Troilus into Criseyde's bed, Chaucer changes Boccaccio's scene fundamentally: in Boccaccio, Troilus asks Criseyde to undress, but in Chaucer, Pandarus throws Troilus on the bed and undresses him, creating "a parody of the shy bride being prepared for the *rite de passage* with her bridegroom" (Blamires, "Questions of Gender in Chaucer," 99). Blamires' analysis of Troilus as a bride can be seen throughout the poem; earlier in Book 3, when Troilus speaks to Criseyde for the first time, we hear that his "chaunged" voice "quook," his manner was "goodly abaist" and "his hewes rede" (3.93-4). He then begs for her mercy, threatens to kill himself, and speaks with such "manly sorwe" that Pandarus starts weeping. The phrase "manly sorwe" is the narrator's less than successful attempt to mold Troilus' sensitivity into masculinity, and this concept of manly emotion is further complicated in Book 4. After Troilus hears that Criseyde will be exchanged for Antenor, he undergoes a change again, but this time must necessarily conceal that change to maintain his masculinity:

This Troilus was present in the place

Whan axed was for Antenor Criseyde,
For which ful soone chaungen gan his face,
As he that with tho wordes wel neigh deyde.
But nathelees, he no word to it seyde,
Lest men sholde his affeccioun espye;
With mannes herte he gan his sorwes drye. (4.148-54)

Here Troilus again changes physically, but he is able to endure his sorrows because of his "mannes herte." So in this passage, sorrow and manliness are incompatible (contrasted to their combination in Book 3), and Troilus' manly heart prevents an outpouring of emotion. Yet we have seen that even if the narrator tries to stress Troilus' masculinity, in reality Troilus' feminine side—his sympathy and emotional expression—most prominently gains our and Criseyde's affection for him. And here, when Troilus suppresses his emotions he prevents any potential rescue of Criseyde. So dynamically, even though a common reading of this story might blame Criseyde and her womanly fickleness for ruining her love with Troilus, actually we might argue that Troilus first ruins their love by *not* expressing these emotional changes that are negatively associated with the feminine.

Barry Windeatt, however, raises the important point that Troilus' failure to speak up for Criseyde reflects his respect for her autonomy: "Troilus refuses to exercise 'maistrie' or dominion over his lady; his refusal happens to be fatal [...] Chaucer has carefully shown how Troilus has given up choice and freedom rather than never possessing it" (*Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde*, 266). As Windeatt explains, Criseyde asks Troilus not to intervene, so Troilus defending her would actually impinge on Criseyde's freedom, even if the intention were to ultimately maintain her freedom. Yet this paradox arises as a result of society's construction of honor, which dictates "correct" female action; so Criseyde makes an autonomous choice that Troilus follows, but the choice is still entrenched in a

system of gendered barriers. We also sympathize with Troilus' position as a victim of society. The circumstances of the war and the precedent of female exchange (which his brother Paris and other men have established) place Troilus in a debilitating and nearly impossible position. We understand that Troilus is not Paris, and that his love for Criseyde is more genuine and mutual than Paris' love for Helen, which is why when Criseyde is treated as objectively as Helen, and Troilus stands mutely by, the romance effectively becomes a tragedy. Furthermore, our ability to forgive Troilus here, and Criseyde later on, validates Chaucer's successful creation. The couple's love is genuine, but fails to resist external forces. An easier interpretation would be to say, as Antigone might, that they were merely impassioned, and their betrayals reflect their delusional lust. Less comfortable is to say that their love is genuine, but the pressures of society, brought on by the burden of war and violence, ultimately ruptured their love, and they were too weak to fight back.

Narrative exchanges

Now that we have seen the various physical transformations throughout the poem, we can examine how they are reinforced by the story's narration. If the *Metamorphoses* is a poem of changes that is adopted into *Troilus and Criseyde*, a story of exchanges, then interestingly Chaucer makes a point of changing these changes, as we saw with the characters' misunderstanding of Philomela and Procne. Ancient texts, misreadings, and mistranslations recur throughout the poem and complicate our understanding. These narrative changes evoke several questions: If the narrator mistranslates or misinterprets part of the story, then is his retelling incorrect? Does a story exist in a pure, "true" form, or

do all of its variations, even if they are mistakes, form some sort of collective story? The narrator forces us to ask these questions in the prologue to Book 2, just before we see several instances of miscommunication, such as Criseyde's incomplete reading of Statius, the previously discussed misinterpretation of Procne and Philomela (from its source in Ovid), and Antigone's questionably sourced Trojan song. In the prologue, the narrator says of his source:

Ye knowe ek, that in forme of speche is chaunge
Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge
Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so,
And spedde as wel in love as men now do;
Ek for to winne love in sondry ages,
In sondry londes, sondry ben usages. (2.22-28)

Words that once worked in love no longer provide us the same meaning, and if "speche is chaunge," then inevitably translation creates some alteration of significance. The narrator's motivation might be merely to extricate himself from the story's plot, but he raises larger questions. For example, does the language of love change the experience of the lovers? This question returns us to Antigone's discussion in Book II of whether lovers can ever accurately describe love in the first place. If some lovers are better at describing love, and the language of lovers somehow impacts what they mean, then perhaps their meaning falls away in translation. And what happens when stories are misread or mistranslated? Well, we see what happens in this poem: Criseyde misses a forewarning of her own fate by not being allowed to finish the *Thebaid*, as well as general warnings about love by mishearing the nightingale. So what does it mean if our narrator provides us with a misunderstood interpretation of the story, especially if he changes a story whose plot and interpretation depend on pivotal changes? Maybe if we could better understand this language of "sondry

ages, in sondry londes," we would be somehow closer to the "true" Troilus and Criseyde. Yet it seems that if language can never quite grasp love in the first place and often confuses passion for true love (as Antigone claims), Troilus and Criseyde may not even understand their own love themselves.

We can further examine the narrative's distortion of reality by returning to Antigone's song, which eventually plays a significant role in converting Criseyde to Troilus' love (the images from the song are directly adopted into her dream, after which she submits to the affair). After Antigone finishes singing, Criseyde asks who the song's author is, and if all lovers "konne faire endite" as well as this Trojan woman can (2.886). Antigone identifies the author as the "goodlieste mayde" in all of Troy, which does not shed particular light on her identity; she could be a number of women in Troy, considering the narrator's previous implications that Troy is simply abundant with lovers (though not all of them "goodly") (2.880). "Endite" translates to both "compose" and "write," and calls our attention to the ambiguity of the song's origin; not only do we not know its author, but we also do not know the means by which it was created—whether it was originally spoken or written. The distinction between songs and letters appears throughout the poem; songs, such as Troilus' in Book I (which is in fact a close translation of a Petrarch sonnet) allow for instantaneous outbursts of emotion, while letters, such as Criseyde's in Book 5, allow for Criseyde's contemplation (and perhaps distortion) of meaning. Troilus and Antigone's songs might be considered impassioned, even irrational, proclamations of love, while Criseyde's letter functions as a well-thought out diminishment of love.

Inevitably the question arises: which is more genuine, a song sung immediately, or a letter written over time? One might argue for abrupt emotional outpouring, but these

proclamations parallel and often coincide with love at first sight, and accordingly we might counterargue that these lovers are not really *in love* but merely *impassioned* (such as Antigone herself suggests), and that these songs are more naive and overblown than genuine. Then one might argue for the careful deliberation of the written word, but clearly Criseyde's letter is not very genuine; rather, it is just a euphemistic avoidance of her desertion of Troilus, and the vehicle of writing provides her the ability to conceal what might otherwise be apparent. But if Criseyde's letter is essentially a well-manufactured disguise, then what is the entire narrative of the story? Because interestingly, many of the letters and songs are "falsely" created by the narrator, since Lollius (his source) does not provide the text of their letters and messages; Chaucer uses some of Boccaccio's letters from the Italian poet's narration of the story, but these adaptations reveal his reliance on another "non-genuine" source, if Lollius is the supposed true source. So both songs and letters are "created" and added to the "true" fictional world, and then serve to express the lovers' sentiments and ideas that we as readers determine to be legitimate or illegitimate, based on what we decide are the lovers' "real" dispositions. Yet meanwhile Chaucer undermines our attempts to judge and decipher the genuineness of their sentiments as he subtly reminds us that all we are given are questionable, unreliable clues to begin with. With this in our mind, we are pushed farther away from moral judgments and led rather towards appreciating the impossibility of piecing together a reality out of illusive shards.

The dynamic influence of narration is also apparent in Criseyde's changing of love in Book 5, especially compared to her emotional transformation in Book 2. After the narrator gives us such descriptive scenes of Criseyde's rationalizations (or irrationalizations) in Book 2 when she is deciding whether or not to love Troilus, surprisingly we see little of her

sensibility in Book 5 when she apparently switches her affections to Diomedes. We are mostly given Diomedes's persistent persuasions, followed by one stanza in which the narrator tells us Criseyde is thinking over these words (but we do not witness her actual thought process). Then we hear how Criseyde *acts* on her love for Diomedes (giving him Troilus' brooch, and healing his wounds after battle), but again we are no longer allowed inside Criseyde's head. In fact, the narrator tries his hardest to deny that Criseyde falls in love with Diomedes; before she denies Troilus' existence to Diomedes, the narrator comments that Criseyde speaks "strangely," and when Criseyde gives Diomedes Troilus' brooch, he says "that was litel nede" (955, 1040). The narrator seems to be questioning the legitimacy of his sources, as if he somehow knows Criseyde's character and what she is capable of better than they do. This persistent denial is clearest and also most ironic when he says that "Men seyn—I not—that she yaf hym hire herte," implying that he does not say or does not know that Criseyde ever loved Diomedes, even if his sources say so (1050). The stanza following this line continues, "But, trewely, the storie telleth us,/ Ther made never womman moore wo/ Than she, whan that she falsed Troilus" (151-3). The narrator inevitably contradicts himself and admits to Criseyde's falseness (which he must—it is the story's main plot point), but interestingly he clearly states that we can *only* be assured of her betrayal (not of her potential love for Diomedes). Catherine Sanok points out the similarities between the narrator's ignorance and Troilus': "The narrator's aporia mirrors that of Troilus, who fails to read an abundance of signs—his prophetic dream, Criseyde's failure to return on the assigned date, her increasingly abbreviated responses to his letters" ("Criseyde, Cassandra, and the *Thebaid*," 51). The narrator proves himself as susceptible as

Troilus to Criseyde's blinding love, and his narration is therefore as unreliable as a lover's rationalizations.

The narrator's attempt to judge the validity of his sources proves his desire to uphold Criseyde's honor, even if he contradicts himself. But inevitably he is just another male force of change that strips Criseyde of her autonomy and possible legitimate justifications for loving Diomedes. In fact if the narrator would be "true" to the story, and show us once again the rational and thoughtful Criseyde of Book 2, we might be more sympathetic to what, in its current telling, appears to be a rash and insensitive betrayal. But the narrative changes (and perhaps even censorship) prevent us from understanding Criseyde, and therefore leave us unsettled about why and how she could so quickly betray Troilus; these changes actually reinforce the accusations that the narrator is attempting to turn aside (just as Ovid's immortalizations of the women in his stories depend solely on what they were trying to escape in their mortal forms). Furthermore, these narrative changes reinforce the fickleness of both sexes, not just of women. As Jill Mann argues, "Chaucer patiently transforms the story of Criseyde so that her betrayal is evidence neither of female fickleness nor of female sensuality, but of mutability ineradicably present in human nature as a whole" (*Apologies to Women*, 28). Chaucer accomplishes this transformation subtly but clearly through his narrator, who, telling a story of an inconstant female, cannot help but being inconstant himself.

Virgilian exchange

These confusions in narration therefore further complicate the physical changes and exchanges throughout the poem. Just as Criseyde is physically exchanged, so is the story changed through translation and narrative manipulation. If Criseyde's exchange makes us more sympathetic to her character, narrative changes make us question whether there is an even more "true," more sympathetic Criseyde hidden behind masculine narration. Chaucer is concerned with translation's distortion throughout his body of work, and one particular story in his *Legend of Good Women* addresses these complications further. In "The Legend of Dido," we again see Chaucer's engagement with classical texts, which additionally illuminates these questions surrounding a story and character's authenticity. The original source of Dido's story is Virgil's *Aeneid*, where Dido is first introduced as Aeneas' love interest, and Ovid then adopts this tale in his *Heroides*. Whereas Aeneas is the center of Virgil's work, and Dido a secondary but intriguing character, Ovid is the first to make Dido the protagonist in his *Heroides*, in which she writes a letter to Aeneas lamenting his betrayal of her. Chaucer amplifies our concerns for Dido further by also placing her at the center of his story, providing her another outlet for lament in order to emphasize Aeneas' injustice and cruelty. Yet interestingly, when we read the *Aeneid*, what perhaps is most unsettling about Book 4 is not Dido's heart-wrenching cries of sorrow, but rather Aeneas' utter silence. And by providing Dido further voices of lament, what the two later poets actually achieve is to emphasize Aeneas' unsettling silence that vibrates increasingly and painfully against Dido's cries.

Several critics have noted Aeneas' introverted, isolated presence throughout the *Aeneid* and describe how his distance from humanity impairs his heroism. W.R. Johnson argues that Aeneas' failure to communicate classifies as tragic: "He speaks with difficulty at

best everywhere; worse, he moves in a world where the occasions of discourse are rare and at last illusory, where speech is, for him by its very nature, aborted, tragic" (89). For Johnson, Aeneas' failure to speak is so apparent that it becomes tragic. Ovid and Chaucer by contrast significantly change their character of Aeneas by portraying him as an increasingly false lover who in fact uses his eloquence to deceive Dido. Understanding Aeneas' desertion of Dido as uncompassionate and selfish, the two poets amplify Dido's pitiful cries and scorn their Aeneas' false flattery. Ovid's Dido mourns Aeneas' deceptions: "You are false in everything—and I am not the first your tongue has deceived, nor am I the first to feel the blow from you" (*Heroides* 7.81-2). And Chaucer's Dido is victim to a slew of fraudulent lovemaking, from Aeneas' singing to his sending of "lettres, tokens, broches, rynges" (1275). Chaucer's Aeneas is an artist of trickery that "so wel hire plesen can,/So gentil, and so privy of his doinge,/ That feyneth hym so trewe and obeysaunces" (1265-7). Chaucer goes even farther than Ovid by making Aeneas' deceptions extravagant and even unrealistic. But if we look at Virgil's original text, Aeneas is nowhere, at least to our eyes, such a deceiver; in fact there are only four times in the entire *Aeneid* that Aeneas speaks directly to Dido, and only during the first speech does he really sing *any* sort of praise for her. This flattery comes in Book I, as Aeneas asks Dido for hospitality, and he proclaims: "What age so happy/ Brought you to birth? How splendid were your parents/ To have conceived a being like yourself!" (612-14). But this is not very romantic praise, in fact it is actually non-gendered, and seems like a generic commendation any guest would give to any host. The next time Aeneas speaks to Dido he tells his own story, the third time he attempts to excuse his approaching departure and merely promises he will always remember Dido (though not necessarily romantically), and finally in the underworld he

attempts the most sympathetic of his speeches, but ultimately stumbles to excuse himself from guilt instead of properly apologizing and expressing concern for Dido.

Nowhere does Aeneas provide false flattery, but then again nowhere does Aeneas provide any flattery. And so, interestingly, what Ovid and Chaucer have done by reinventing Aeneas as a deceptive lover is to give him a more common, and therefore comfortable, male, manipulative role. More shocking is the *Aeneid's* reality, in which Aeneas is simply mute, apathetic, and not even self-seeking and exploitive of Dido. Whereas Dido (but perhaps really Cupid) is the aggressive, instigative force in Virgil, Chaucer and Ovid begin to switch responsibility to Aeneas, thereby increasing our sympathy for Dido. Yet what they actually achieve, when we consider the original source, is to call attention to their own deceptions (which Chaucer is certainly self-conscious of throughout *The Legend of Dido*, especially during the cave-marriage scene, in which he blatantly contradicts his source). And ultimately, the authors cannot escape Aeneas' discomfiting, pervasive, and unrelenting silence. In Ovid, Dido's amplified cries fall against an even quieter vacuum as her voice is the only one we hear; and in Chaucer, in the moment of Dido's final, dramatic plea, when she begs to leave with Aeneas (a possibility she proudly rejects in the *Aeneid*) and implores him to stay on the behalf of their unborn child, no response is given, and immediately in the next paragraph Aeneas slips silently away to Italy. Again, the widow's lamentation only amplifies the warrior's silence.

To give any real consolation to Dido, it seems, Ovid and Chaucer would have to provide Aeneas with a voice that proves his genuine affection for her. But this is not a voice with which their Aeneas is capable of speaking; rather, his silence begins to define the hero, and with every one of Dido's cries we only continue to feel the absence of his voice. The

Dido story has even more layers, since Dido is a historical figure, according to many ancient and medieval sources, who never met Aeneas in real life, and actually killed herself to avoid marrying a foreign king. If we consider this to be the true story, then the "real" Dido refused to be exchanged, while the fictional Dido exchanged her body, life, and kingdom for unrequited love.

When we consider the changes that Chaucer makes to the characters of Dido and Aeneas, we return to the same question we faced in *Troilus and Criseyde*: is there one true version of this story and these characters, and do these adjustments distort that authenticity? Or is every version of the story to be taken as its own truth, regardless of any previous source? Or can we imagine all the variations of a text as a collective understanding, to which each version adds an equally weighted perspective? We can also consider the moral role of the narrator: Can a narrator be more or less fair to a character by providing more of a voice (as in Dido's case) or less of a voice (as in Criseyde's)? Then again, who are we to judge what is "fair" to a character if she exists as a product of the narrator's story and the artist's imagination? What we know, however, is that in both these cases, the women begin to be defined by the men and the act that caused their sorrow. Dido is now permanently associated with Aeneas and his betrayal, and Criseyde is defined by her exchange to the Greeks, just as the women in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are immortalized alongside the male violence that incited their transformation. Yet if such dynamic variations as Chaucer's can be added to these stories, and the eternal though mutable collective imagining of these characters can be impacted by these changes, then perhaps there is still potential for the women to reclaim their autonomy through future narrations, or at least move away from the violence and objectification that currently define them.

Dante and the fate of Criseyde

Amidst discussions over Criseyde's guilt and debatable blame, we wonder whether she will suffer further punishment within her fictional universe, besides the already harsh epithet of "false" in our world. Moreover, what happens to Criseyde after the fall of Troy? As I've said, where Chaucer chooses to start and end the story is somewhat arbitrary, and yet entirely influences our reception, even if within the fictional realm the story inevitably extends before and beyond the given narration. Chaucer ends his story with Troilus' death and Criseyde submission to Diomedes, but we do not hear what happens to Criseyde after the war. In other versions of the myth, Diomedes sails home, returns to his wife or marries a princess, but there is no further mention of Criseyde. In Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, the first invention of Troilus and Criseyde's love story, Diomedes' future is alluded to at the end of the poem, where he is among the generals who sail home, but again, we hear nothing more of Criseyde (Briseida, in Benoît's version). How, we wonder, can these poets give so much attention to this couple, only to neglect Criseyde after Troilus dies? This kind of abrupt ending is unusual for pagan stories; consider Ovid's characters, whose stories end only after their departure from human life, and the warriors of the Trojan war, who we hear either survive or die, as well as the Trojan women who are murdered, raped, or kidnapped. Here, then, the line of exchanges ends; presumably, Criseyde lives on, but as the daughter of a traitor and ex-girlfriend of a married warrior. Her life could very well be full of more painful exchanges, but her story is cut short. After her treachery, the poets decide that she deserves no more attention. The violent system which inflicted her change in the

first place strikes a final blow as it cuts her perspective from our view entirely. This silencing might be expected in the French story, in which Criseyde is still a relatively minor character, but in Boccaccio and Chaucer, she is a protagonist whose story is still silenced.

By contrast to Criseyde's abrupt ending, we should consider the attention and catharsis Troilus receives in death. Chaucer actually adds this passage from Boccaccio's *Teseida*, where originally the apotheosis is given to Arcite. In Chaucer, Troilus rises to the eighth sphere of heaven, an even unrealistic death for a pagan, since according to Christian belief he should be placed in hell:

And whan that he was slayn in this manere,
His lighte goost ful blisfully is went
Up to the holughnesse of the eighth sphere. (5.1806-1809)

More specifically, Chaucer tells us that Mercury will take Troilus to his eternal resting place, left unspecified. Where does Criseyde go after her death? Chaucer does not specify. If they had stayed together, and died together, perhaps they would have risen to heaven together. Or perhaps Troilus' suffering on earth, due mostly to Criseyde's betrayal, permitted his ascension, regardless of his pagan beliefs. Furthermore, Chaucer tells us that after Troilus dies he reflects back on the trivial woes of man:

And in hymself he lough right at the wo
Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste,
And dampned al oure werk that soloweth so
The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,
And sholden al oure herte on heven caste. (5.1821-1825)

Not only does Chaucer provide Troilus a satisfying afterlife, but he also provides him the insight to dismiss the worries of mankind, most importantly including those of this story. Perhaps even Troilus and Criseyde's love can be reduced to "blynde lust" when set beside

eternal love found in heaven. If earthly life is so unimportant compared to the greater intentions of God, then why are we even meant to hear this story?

Though we are never told specifically of Criseyde's fate after death, she herself alludes to a potential fate in Book 4. Describing her desired punishment should she betray Troilus, Criseyde asks that Juno place her alongside Athamas in the pit of hell:

For thilke day that I for cherisyne
Or drede of fader, or for other weight,
Or for estat, delit, or for weddyng,
Be fals to yow, my Troilus, my knyght,
Saturnes doughter, Juno, thorough hire might,
As wood as Athamante do me dwelle
Eternalich in Stix, the put of helle! (4.1534-1540)

By referencing Athamas, Chaucer evokes the punishment of the falsifiers in Dante's *Inferno*. In Dante, Athamas is described as an analogy before we see the forgers and oath-breakers whom Virgil and Dante actually encounter. We hear how Athamas, engulfed by rage, murders one of his children, and incites his wife to drown herself with the other child:

"Let's spread the nets so I can trap
the lioness with her cubs as they go past!"
Then he reached out and with pitiless claws
he seized the one who was called Learchus,
whirled him round and dashed him on a rock (Inferno 30.7-11)

We then meet the falsifiers and their punishments, including Gianni Schicchi who suffers from rabid madness and Sinon who is plagued with "putrid fever." Chaucer, invoking this circle of the *Inferno*, invites us to ask whether Criseyde deserves such punishment, and if so, how exactly she will be punished. Interestingly, Criseyde does not merely ask to be put in this circle of hell, but to be put in this circle of hell by "Juno, thorough hire might." Criseyde is not only asking to be put in this circle, but also to be cursed with Juno's rage (as was Athamas) to commit a crime that would secure her place there. Juno famously despises

the Trojans, and tempting her might all the more seal Criseyde's fate. Again, whether she deserves this fate is a question left unanswered, though Criseyde, not having read Dante, would not know the horrible specificity of her oath.

Furthermore, now that Chaucer has raised Dante in our minds, we can consider the types of transformations in Dante alongside those of Ovid and Chaucer. If Ovid's metamorphoses seem cruel, then Dante's are horrifying. In Ovid, characters lose their human form, and therefore their autonomy, but at least persevere in the living world, often with their human minds inside alien forms, and are reincarnated through other forms, serving future generations some use. Certain metamorphoses feel more unjust than others, such as Syrinx and Daphne, who do nothing more than inadvertently catch the attention of gods, but they at least provide other living creatures some joy (even if unwillingly). By contrast, Dante's punishments are steeped in justice, and are in fact created as exact repercussions for sins. But his metamorphoses serve only the purpose of punishment, and have no extension to those still living besides threatening them with potential repercussions. For example, within the eighth circle of fraud we find the thieves who are punished by eternally repeating metamorphoses. Dante even compares his images directly to Ovid, claiming he doesn't "grudge" the Latin poet's imaginings, "for never did he change two natures, face to face,/ in such a way that both their forms/ were quite so quick exchanging substance" (30.100-102). In this circle, Dante indeed shows us rapid and constant exchanges. We see Vanni Fucci turn to ashes, Agnello combining forms with a six-legged reptile, and Buoso exchanging forms with four-legged Francesco. Therefore Dante shows us the destruction, combination, and exchange of form, and the images are graphic if not perverse. The poet clearly explains how the process strips the characters of their

identity; Agnello, for example, becomes an eerie combination that no longer fits the natural world:

Four separate limbs combined to form two arms.
The thighs and calves, the stomach the chest,
Turned into members never seen before.
All trace of their first aspect was erased
And the unnatural figure seemed both two
And none and lumbered off at its slow pace (Inferno, 25.73-78).

Agnello is “both two and none,” so grossly disfigured that he barely qualifies as a *thing* at all. The thieves, having stolen from others, are now robbed of their previous bodily form, and must relive its theft repeatedly. In the *Inferno*, change and exchange serves no greater purpose than punishment. Only in *Purgatorio* do we see productive change, transformations that allow sinners to finally redeem themselves. In Chaucer, compared to the *Inferno*, exchanges and changes are set in a chain reaction: the exchange of Helen incites a war which provokes Criseyde’s exchange to the Greeks, inciting her psychological change of heart. So, within Chaucer’s pagan world, changes and exchanges occur similarly to more within Ovid’s world. But Chaucer does not let us escape the Christian punishments at stake in this story, even if he only once briefly alludes to Dante in Book 4. We are forced to question whether Criseyde’s crime warrants the kind of punishments that haunt Dante’s lower circles, or if her change is merely the result of her forced exchange, and she thus deserves a less cruel fate. Unfortunately, Criseyde is accurate in prophesying the eternal literary use of her name when, in Book 5 she claims, “unto the worldes ende,/ Shal neyther ben ywritten nor ysonge,/ No good word” (5.1058-1060). So perhaps she also accurately determines her eternal punishment. Then again, good words *have* been written about Criseyde, so perhaps Criseyde’s prophecies are less correct than we assume.

Another allusion in Chaucer's Book 4 invites us to compare the destinies prescribed by Dante and Ovid to Criseyde's fate. Before Criseyde is handed over to the Greeks, she and Troilus meet to lament her departure and comfort each other before their separation. The scene begs for so much pity that it borders on exaggeration, and the couple nearly commits a tragic dual suicide, as Troilus mistakes Criseyde's faint for death, reaches for his sword, and gives a farewell speech before Criseyde awakens just in time. Just before this pitiful near-death scene, as the two embrace each other in sorrow, Chaucer compares the couple to Myrrha:

So bittre teeris weep noughte, as I fynde,
The woful Mirra thorough the bark and rynde –
That in this world ther nys so hard an herte
That nolde han rewed on hire peynes smerte. (4.1138-41).

Myrrha appears in Ovid as a young girl who deceptively seduces her father, is banished and turned into a tree, eventually giving birth to Adonis through the bark while crying tears that turn to myrrh. In Dante, she is placed among the falsifiers, where Criseyde asks Juno to place her if she betrays Troilus. Here, Chaucer compares Myrrha to both Troilus and Criseyde, not solely Criseyde, and we wonder why he didn't choose another more direct comparison, say Pyramus and Thisbe (whose own tragic love scene is nearly enacted in the following lines). Instead, he chooses a girl whose story is complexly both revolting and sympathetic, whose sin we admonish but whose suffering we pity. As Chaucer references a morally complex metamorphosis before Criseyde is handed over to the Greeks, we are further prepared to meet her exchange and change with pity as well as disappointment. Just as Myrrha's punishment, assigned to her by both Ovid and Dante, feels excessively cruel, so should assigning Criseyde to eternal damnation, even if the judgment takes place outside her fictional world. Since Chaucer does not specify Criseyde's fate in either life or

afterlife, in a sense he provides her the potential freedom to improve her circumstances, perhaps even redeem herself. If such a possibility for transformation seems too strained, then at the very least her legacy rests in the hands of readers now, who must decide whether or not to read Criseyde as solely a falsifier cast along with the others eternally assigned the same title.

In an essay on Criseyde's promises, Elizabeth Allen discusses the protagonist's plea to be placed in the eighth circle of hell with Athamas and Myrrha. Allen raises the idea that since Criseyde's oaths are steeped in Ovidian language and allusions, they carry Ovidian implications, including the inherent mutability in Ovid's stories: "Much as she intends to be faithful, Criseyde's promises raise the possibility that her meaning might be reversible, too. Indeed, metamorphosis, that incarnation of change, provides an unstable locus for a rhetoric of perpetuity: the past harbors not only idyllic pastoral love affairs but also destructive and tragic stories" ("Flowing Backward to the Source," 698). As Allen argues, Criseyde's oaths are tragically destined to be broken, which we as readers acknowledge from the poem's onset. Yet the oaths are also coated with other Ovidian stories, which themselves represent tragic mutability. One might argue that Criseyde is merely tempting fate by arrogantly evoking these images and believing that her story will end without a similar tragic reversal. But Allen sympathetically, and I believe correctly, asserts that these promises actually reveal Criseyde's human and realistic experience of the present: "By holding at bay the inevitable knowledge of the end that looms throughout the poem, Criseyde's oaths emphasize human response to circumstances from within, during their development, when actors are most ignorant of ends and when both past and future possibilities seem most open" (685). Though we unfairly know her story's outcome, and

can judge Criseyde before she herself realizes her betrayal, these pleas remind us of how genuinely Criseyde believes in her own intentions, and furthermore how tragic it is that her circumstances force her to turn back on herself.

Benoît and Joseph of Exeter—comparative exchanges

Looking more in depth at Benoît's *Roman de Troie*, we can see how other versions of the Trojan War myth, and more specifically the story of Troilus and Criseyde, impact our reception of Chaucer's poem. The *Roman de Troie* is significant as the first version of Troilus and Criseyde's romance, but it also provides valuable contextual information about the entire Trojan War myth. Since Benoît narrates an expansive story of the war within its larger historical context, we receive the Troilus episode in the environment of other crucial exchanges. Benoît begins the story with Jason and Medea, an exchange story itself; Medea's father promises Jason the Golden Fleece only after he has completed three tasks. Medea betrays her family by helping Jason accomplish these tasks, hoping that in exchange he will love her and take her away with him. After Jason wins the Golden Fleece, he does steal Medea away, but eventually he leaves her for another woman, causing us to question whether he only ever views Medea as a valuable resource rather than a lover. Medea exchanges herself and her family for an unfaithful husband, and a stream of violence follows after Medea realizes Jason's infidelity, murdering their children in her madness.

Benoît then details Hesione's capture by Telamon, placing this exchange as the catalyst for Priam's desired revenge, and by extension Paris' capture of Helen. Therefore we see more complicated layers of exchange at play within the violent social system, which

Chaucer does not address in his own poem, though he does claim the larger story is “well-wist,” and there seems to be little need for expansion (1.57). Of course, one could argue, this historical chain of exchanges is so long that to begin at the first would be nearly impossible. In any case, the French romance reminds us how pervasive this theme of violence and exchange is throughout the entire mythical history.

In Benoît, as the Trojans respond to the Greeks capturing Hesione, we see the double standards at play throughout these exchanges. When Hesione is abducted by Telamon, Priam heavily laments her capture and derides Telamon for making her his concubine instead of his wife: “E s’il a femme l’esposast,/ Ja guaires donc ne m’en pesast;/ Mais puis la tint en soignantage,/ Co fu grant duel e grant damage” [And if he were to marry her/ I would feel little sorrow/ But he held her as a concubine/ It was a great sorrow and a great harm] (lines 2800-4, SATF). Seeking revenge, he appeals to his fellow Trojans, using Hesione as an example of all the men and women whom the Greeks have ravished: “Tote ont destruite la contree/E ma seror en ont menee” [They have destroyed the country and they have taken my sister] (lines 2909-10, *Le Livre de Poche*). However, considering the exchanges throughout even only this romance, let alone the larger pagan myths in general, Priam appears to be pleading for a protocol that nearly no one follows. For example, when Paris later captures Helen, there is no mention of marriage between them; of course, she is already married, but if the Trojans intended to keep her, then one might think that talk of marriage would surface. When the Trojans keep women as concubines, as do the Greeks, why are they less accountable? Throughout medieval literature, the Greeks are depicted as immoral compared to the Trojans; and according to the accounts we are given, we see little evidence to reject this claim. Paris promises to be Helen’s “ami” and “espos”

[spouse], and although he never marries her, he at least attempts to be her friend; the distinction then seems to lie in the willingness of the abducted woman, whether she marries or not (4744, Livre de Poche). However, we should also note that we are given a biased account, at least in Benoît's version; he never shows us any conversations between Telamon and Hesione, which could hypothetically unfold similarly to Paris and Helen's exchanges (though we will see later that this is not the case in other versions of the myth).

Even if Paris treats Helen better than Telamon treats Hesione, the conversations between Paris and Helen depict their romance as less than equal, as much as the Trojans blame the Greeks for disrespecting their women. During Paris and Helen's first encounter in the temple, we are convinced of their clear and mutual affection: "El veeir e el parlement/ Qui il firent assez briefment,/ Navra Amors e lui e li/ Ainz qu'il se fussent departi" [The looks and the few words that they exchanged quickly, it sufficed for Love to wound the one and the other before they separated] (4355-4358, Livre de Poche). But, once Paris takes Helen on board his ship, along with other Greek prisoners, Helen understands the reality of their romance and ultimately her loss of freedom. She laments that her escape allowed the abduction of the other couples aboard the ship, and asks that they be reunited. Though Paris insists that he will obey all her "ordres," Helen blatantly acknowledges her helplessness against him: "[...] Se je desdi e je refus/ Vostre plaisir, poi me vaudra;/ Por ce sai bien qu'il m'estovra, Voile o ne voile, a consentir/ Vostre buen e vostre plaisir" [(...) getting in the way of your desires would not be useful to me: I will have to, whether I want to or not, as I well know, do whatever pleases you] (4758-62, Livre de Poche). Later she bursts into tears, and Paris "reconfortee" [consoles] her, but we are not convinced that she is content with her decision to leave Greece. Again, if a Greek queen is

ultimately powerless in the hands of the Trojans, how legitimate were Priam's demands that the Greeks treat his sister with the upmost respect? Seeing Helen's treatment, we can hardly assume that Benoît's Hesione is either treated better or worse.

Both the Greeks and Trojans further the chain of exchanges and hypocritically treat women disrespectfully. We should, however, consider another source, which depicts these exchanges with less ambiguity, and with a clearer bias against the Greeks. Joseph of Exeter was a Latin poet from England in the twelfth century, who looked towards the works of Dares and Dictys (the supposed eyewitness accounts of the Trojan war) for his Latin poem *The Iliad of Dares Phrygius*. Chaucer was familiar with Joseph of Exeter as well as the supposed sources Dares and Dictys. Joseph's account is more frank and overtly partial than either Benoît's or Chaucer's, and therefore casts an interesting judgment on these exchanges. First, Joseph describes the abduction and marriage of Hesione as a clear rape; he even depicts the wedding scene of Telamon and Hesione, and provides Hesione's viewpoint, a perspective we do not see in either Benoît or Chaucer. After a lengthy description of the wedding's extravagant festivities and excessive debauchery, he turns to the alienated and dejected Hesione:

The palace again resounded with applause, and the happy plebs chimed in with festive din. Hesione alone troubled the guests with her grim expression [...] She thought of herself as raped, and sorrowfully mourned her fate. (Whenever the court applauded her, she feared as a prisoner the name of queen.) She did not believe that she was marrying as a free woman, but that she would go timidly and under order to the marriage-bed that had been forced on her. (18)

Joseph explicitly describes Hesione's suffering and unwillingness; though she will soon be a queen, she views herself as a prisoner, and is appallingly caught in the middle of an exuberant celebration in her honor. In Benoît, Telamon keeps Hesione as a concubine, for

which Priam scorns him; but in Joseph's version, the marriage between Telamon and Hesione is arguably more shocking, as Hesione finds herself formally and strictly attached to her kidnapper. Joseph then alludes to Hesione's future son by Telamon (Ajax in Joseph's account), a relentless warrior who will slaughter her own people: "Alas, poor girl, she could not see the future, could not see what a savage enemy she would bear against the grandsons of her father" (18). Horrifically, her own child by Telamon will go on to kill her family, and she finds herself the involuntary mother of a monster.

Furthermore, Joseph of Exeter shows another less ambiguous exchange as we see Helen unremorseful and completely willing to submit to Paris, unlike in Benoît, where she regrets her decision to leave Greece and recognizes her lack of freedom with Paris. Paris impatiently storms into Helen's compartment while they are still sailing back from Greece, and defiles the sanctity of both the ongoing religious ritual and the greater sanctity of his religion in general:

Savagely he threw the festive temples into confusion. Nothing deterred him – not presiding Hymen, not the sanctity of a married woman, not the courtesy his hosts had showed him, not the grim watching presence of Jove, the avenger of evil. (35)

With such aggression, we expect a brutal rape, similar to what we saw at Hesione's wedding, but instead we hear that Helen willingly embraces Paris: "And so Paris raped – or rather was raped by – Helen, who held out her hands and welcomed him with her smiles" (35). Paris' blasphemous savagery transfers to Helen, who becomes not only a consort in the rape, but arguably (from the narrator's perspective) its executor. Unlike in Benoît, Helen's cooperation in her abduction is fully established, and she has no hesitations or regrets. Therefore, for Joseph of Exeter, both the Greeks and Trojans are lustful and

disrespectful, but the Trojans at least conspire with their abducted women, while the Greeks completely disregard female autonomy.

Furthermore, Joseph's depiction of Helen is less sympathetic than Benoît's, and depicts her lust as a result of the violence in which she was conceived. In the catalogue of characters, Joseph shortly describes most of the actors; for example he only discusses Paris' beauty and briefly mentions that he is "eager for authority" (41). Helen, however, receives the most extensive description, more than double the others in length. The narrator describes her beauty in detail, but also how "the itching of her tender liver tickled too voluptuously, and destroying the honours of the reputation she had had won, polluted the glory of her natural love" (44). He then blames Helen for the destruction that her lust incites, even though no such blame was mentioned alongside Paris: "Thus this one part of Helen ruined the whole of her, brought about the clash of kingdoms, and roused the whole world to disaster" (44). Interestingly, Joseph says that Helen inherits her wantonness and elusive shape-shifting from her father, Jove, who raped Leda: "But Helen had drunk more deeply of starry Jove, and through all her limbs there breathed the milk-white lies of the swan that had deceived her mother" (44). The swan guise that Jove assumes in order to rape Leda remains in traces on Helen and accounts for her own lustful inclinations. As with Hesione and her son Ajax, so Leda gives birth to a daughter who inevitably resembles her father, and who engages in acts that she herself abhors. Violence not only inflicts pain and sorrow on its victims; it also quite literally breeds violence in this story.

Examining the treatment of abducted women in these sources, we find conflicting viewpoints, but are still aware of some underlying truths. One of these is the ultimate inequality between the abducted women and their "lovers," even if in some portraits, some

women seem more equal to their lovers than in others. But in both Troy and Greece, women are either taken against their will, or held as unequal—not able to marry, in the least. Considering this theme in Chaucer, we can again question whether the Greeks or Trojans treat Criseyde more fairly—whether Pandarus’ deceptions are better than Diomedes’. Furthermore, if Troilus were Greek, and Criseyde traded away from Diomedes to him instead, we would be less critical of her psychological change, even though the involuntary system of exchange would remain intact. As well, there is no mention of marriage between either Troilus and Criseyde or Diomedes and Criseyde. We know that Troilus and Criseyde presumably cannot marry as Troilus is a prince and Criseyde the daughter of a traitor, and Criseyde suffers the same problem in the Greek camp, being merely the daughter of a turncoat, while Diomedes is a Greek war hero. Each side views these women as unfit for marriage, but then spurns the other side for dismissing their own women. In Chaucer’s poem, Troilus is concerned that Calchas will force Criseyde to marry: “Ye shal sek sen, youre fader shal yow glose/ To ben a wife” (4.1471-2). And though Troilus offers to run away with Criseyde (an idea that she rationally objects) they clearly cannot marry and live in Troy together considering their respective backgrounds. Later, in Chaucer’s Book V, the topic briefly arises between Diomedes and Criseyde:

[...] he [Diomedes] so descendeth down
To axen hire if that hire straunge thoughte
The Grekis gise and werkes that they wrought;
And whi hire fader tarieth so longe
To wedden hire unto som worthy wight. (5.859-863)

Diomedes asks Criseyde her thoughts on the Greeks and why her father has waited so long to marry her off, and while clearly Diomedes is interested in whether Criseyde intends to marry, he is not necessarily interested in marrying her himself. We might even read that

Diomedes "descending" down to ask her this question alludes to the hierarchical division between them which would prevent marriage anyway. Chaucer leaves out further investigation into the complicated position of Criseyde, who like Hecuba, is not fit to marry the other side but still feels obliged to become something of a concubine to survive within the Greek camp.

The wider lens of the *Roman de Troie* allows us to ask pertinent questions about the social structure of exchanges. But the interior romance of Troilus and Criseyde within the story also reveals psychological nuances that add perspective to Chaucer's version. To begin, Benoît gives little attention to the development of Troilus and Criseyde's relationship, and starts the romance after Criseyde has already been offered in exchange for Antenor. At this point, Benoît asserts their intimacy but shows us few intimate details between the lovers. He provides much more detail later on between Criseyde and Diomedes, though he still harshly comments on Criseyde's infidelity. Therefore the reader is less prepared to sympathize so strongly with Troilus and to oppose Diomedes; this is of course vastly different from Chaucer, who gives the most detail to the early romance of Troilus and Criseyde, and seems to purposefully give too little detail to Diomedes and Criseyde. Benoît also immediately attaches Criseyde's inconstancy to her character, and though Chaucer as well prefaces his story by revealing Criseyde's eventual infidelity, Benoît spends a proportionately large amount of time describing Criseyde's faithlessness. He describes how "Son duel avra tost oblié,/ E son corage si müé/Que poi li iert de cels de Troie" [she will soon forget her pain and so change her feelings that she will care very little for the Trojans] (13431-3, *Livre de Poche*). And then he extends this inconstancy as a stereotype of all

women, excluding Eleanor of Aquitaine. So Benoît oddly gives little justification for Troilus and Criseyde's love, but asks the readers to judge Criseyde harshly and immediately.

Later in the poem, however, Benoît provides Criseyde with more speech to justify her actions, whereas, as previously discussed, Chaucer provides her with very little self-justification. Chaucer acknowledges that time has passed in the Greek camp, but since we hear so little exchange between Diomedes and Criseyde, we feel as though she converts to loving him rather suddenly. Then within the Greek camp, Criseyde barely addresses her love for Troilus, though the narrator assures us that she definitely feels guilty. In Benoît, by contrast, Criseyde laments in depth, explaining how miserable she has been in the camp, proclaiming that "Morte fusse piece, ce crei/Se n'eüsse merci de mei" [I would have died a long time ago, I think, if I hadn't had pity for myself] (20295-6, *Livre de Poche*).

Furthermore, she admits to her confusing and unstable feelings, and doubts the sincerity of her emotions: "[...] La ou sis cuers seit point tiranz,/Trobles, doutos ne repentanz,/Ne puet ester sis cuers verais " [(if someone's heart) is a bit wayward, hesitant, doubt-filled and repentant, this heart cannot be sincere] (20311-3, *Livre de Poche*). Whether or not her feelings for Troilus are actually diminished, Criseyde ultimately reasons that Troilus is not in the Greek camp, and that regardless of her emotions they cannot be together. Finally, Criseyde wishes that God be favorable to Troilus, and also asks that "Deus m'en doinst joie e bien avoir,/E si resjoïe Troïlus" [God make it so that I obtain joy and happiness and that the same goes for Troilus] (20340-40a). Chaucer, though he excludes much of this speech, does include something similar to this final sentiment, after Criseyde gives her comparatively brief justification for changing her feelings:

Yet prey I God, so yeve yow right good day,
As for the gentileste, trewely,

That evere I say, to serven feythfully,
And best kan ay his lady honour kepe (5.1074-7)

Oddly, Criseyde merely wishes that God gives Troilus a good day; Troilus expresses the same sentiment at the end of his letter to Criseyde, but after a stream of romantic language (5.1411). Criseyde duplicates his polite remark, but in a letter excessively and strangely formal. She also prays that Troilus faithfully serves and best keeps his lady's honor. Who is the lady? Herself, or some future lover of Troilus? And why does Criseyde suddenly adopt such an off-putting proper tone? And interestingly, compared to Benoît's Briseida, Criseyde only asks for Troilus' happiness, not her own. Again, Chaucer gives Criseyde less space to justify herself, and a strangely reductive voice after a lengthy romantic poem.

Benoît scorns Criseyde harshly for her treachery, but provides her ample speech to justify herself. Chaucer, by contrast, attempts to excuse Criseyde's infidelity, or at least sympathize with her, but then silences both her contemplations and her apologies to Troilus. Douglas Kelly discusses Benoît's conflicting perspectives on Criseyde, which we can apply to Chaucer as well. In his essay, Kelly describes the "major discrepancies between narrator and narrative" in *Roman de Troie*: "Although Benoît as narrator proclaims upon Briseida's arrival in the Greek camp that in less than four days she will no longer yearn for Troy [...], he is wrong" ("The Invention of Briseida's Story," 235). In fact, as Benoît later shows us, Criseyde longs for Troilus for longer than "than sixteen months, eighty three days." Furthermore, Kelly comments on how in Benoît "the sense of time passing is enhanced by interlacing her story with battles and truces that may last days or even months and with the parallel story of Achilles and Polyxena" (235). This time extension does not occur in Chaucer; in fact Chaucer provides very little narrative in Book 5 outside the speeches of Troilus and Criseyde, and therefore even though he acknowledges that time

has passed before Criseyde pledges her love to Diomedes, her transformation seems hurried. Again, why does Benoît's narrator, who scorns Criseyde, provide evidence of her complexity, while Chaucer's narrator, who sympathizes with her, excludes these crucial details?

When considering Benoît alongside Chaucer, then, we wonder why Chaucer's narrator, who seems more sympathetic to Criseyde in general, quiets the Criseyde of tradition in the moment of her treachery. Perhaps Chaucer means for us to read Criseyde here as Troilus reads Criseyde's final letter, which he finds "al straunge" and "like a kalendes of chaunge" (5.1632 and 1634). Her last letter is vague, brief, and amiable but not romantic, and even includes an odd excuse for her writing badly: "Ne nevere yet ne koude I wel endite" (5.1628). We have learned in Book 2 that Criseyde has never written a letter before her romance with Troilus, and then feels insecure about her writing, but presumably her writing skills have improved since then (2.1213). If she were truly unable to write passionately, there would not be much of a romance between Troilus and Criseyde to begin with, considering their relationship is built on the exchange of letters. She therefore returns to treating Troilus formally and timidly as she does at the beginning of their relationship. Criseyde's last letter is so strange that it even evokes the question of censorship; maybe Diomedes is pressuring her to write the letter, ending all previous affairs. When prefacing the letter, the narrator includes one of his frequent ambiguous judgments, saying that Criseyde writes to Troilus out of "routhe – I take it so," purposefully leaving the question of intent open, and allowing us to wonder whether there are stronger motivations, such as an overbearing Diomedes, which actually spurs this letter writing (5.1587-8). If we accept that Criseyde's letter is somehow censored, either directly or indirectly by Diomedes, then in a

similar fashion, Chaucer's narrator seems to censor Criseyde's thoughts, reducing her complicated emotions to dismissive forgetfulness. Looking towards Benoît, we see that narrative censorship and distortion plagues Criseyde throughout her literary history, even if it assumes various forms.

As we view Chaucer's poem alongside Benoît's, we are increasingly aware of the complexities that Chaucer adds to the foundational story of Troilus and Criseyde. Chaucer's poem, devoted entirely to the couple, develops their relationship and individual personalities, forcing us to understand the story's originally prescribed moral judgments as more multi-dimensional and complicated than we first imagine. But, as we have seen, Chaucer also leaves out important details, and in such a lengthy poem, we wonder if his exclusions are nearly as important as his inclusions. One such detail in Benoît, which both Boccaccio and Chaucer leave out of their renditions, is an extensive description of a magical cloak that Criseyde wears. There are many reasons why Chaucer may have left out this cloak, and we cannot conclude that that he did so for any specific purpose, but we can still analyze the exclusion in the context of the other differences between Chaucer and Benoît. As we will see, in Benoît the cloak serves to protect Criseyde and link her to her father, while in Chaucer we encounter a more vulnerable and isolated Criseyde who functions within an arguably more realistic world. There is a brief mention of a cloak in Chaucer, when in Book 3 Pandarus throws a "furred cloke" over nervous Troilus before he sends him through the trapdoor to await Criseyde (3.738). Later, when Troilus comically faints before he and Criseyde make love, Pandarus rips the cloak off him, and we might guess that the fur coat has actually overheated Troilus, causing him to faint. As Pandarus' attempt to "protect" Troilus backfires, we see another implication of gender reversal, similar to other moments

in *Troilus* previously discussed; in Benoît, Criseyde wears a protective, magical cloak, but in Chaucer, Troilus needs the protection. As we examine the role of Benoît's cloak, we should keep in mind that Chaucer constantly undermines objects which intend to serve unrealistic purposes, such as Pandarus' fur cloak which only overheats Troilus.

In Benoît, before Criseyde (Briseida in his version) prepares to leave Troy, we hear that she puts on a beautiful cloak made of a precious fur that has "toute la palette de couleurs" [all the palette of colors] in the world. We hear that everyone who sees the cloak marvels at its beauty, and the narrator explains its appearance and origins for several paragraphs. We first hear that Calchas has received the cloak from "Un saive pöete indien,/Qui o Calcas le Troien/Ot este longement apris/Li enveia de son país" [an Indian sage, who had learned for a long time from Calchas the Trojan, sent it to him from his land] (13353-6, *Livre de Poche*). The cloak's exoticism, it being sent all the way from India, adds to its allure and mysticism, as the medieval East is commonly associated with the foreign and supernatural. Calchas' connection to this foreign land then increases his alienation from both Troy and the Greek camp, which is already evident because he is a seer and traitor. Calchas, functioning in a spiritually-enhanced world with perceptions of the future, is isolated from and scorned by his peers, and Criseyde meets similar social pressure by association. By wearing this cloak, Criseyde orients herself closer to her father, and becomes a conspirator in his magical powers, which have caused his abandonment of Troy and her forced departure in the first place. In Chaucer, we do not see any Calchas-associated attributes in Criseyde; she never functions within a magical world, and she certainly cannot foresee the future (or why else would she wish damnation on herself if she

betrays Troilus). Interestingly, then, in Benoît we see a tighter connection between Criseyde and the prophesying that ultimately spurs her trade to the Greeks.

Benoît further explains the cloak's origins by detailing how exactly the fur is caught. The fur belongs to an animal called the "dindialo," an exotic beast from the Orient. The race who captures the dindialo is also exotic, a dog-human hybrid that appears in several other Western and Eastern medieval texts: "Genz salvage d'une encontree/Qui Cenocefali ont non/Lait sunt e d'estrage façon/Cil en prenent, mes ce est tart" [A savage people of a country called the Cynocephali—they were ugly and very strangely made—catch [the dindialos] (but at the price of long patience)] (13372-5, *Livre de Poche*). In other medieval accounts, the Cynocephali are barbaric creatures that eat men yet have human intelligence. This eerie monster illustrates the medieval exoticization of the East and of the "other" in general, which are met with both fear and appreciation by the West. Calchas, connected to these monsters, is further distanced from his countrymen, and placed peripherally outside normal, Trojan (and Greek) society. Even if there is a supernatural layer within the Trojan and Greek societies (the gods and goddesses being the key example), Calchas' supernatural is a *different* supernatural, one where the accepted and understood functioning of inhuman entities is abandoned. Even if their deities incur a certain amount of chaos and unexpectedness, the Greeks and Trojans are accustomed to the limits of that spiritual influence, and can justify the unnatural accordingly. Other, alien forms of mysticism, magic, and religion appear dangerous and terrifying by contrast.

Benoît then explains how the Cynocephali capture the dindialos, and the hunting scene provides a dynamic comparison to Criseyde's upcoming exchange. The Cynocephali

and the dindialos live in an excessively hot climate with no shade, and so the Cynocephali conceal themselves in boughs and lure the beasts to them:

Mes li monstre, li averser
Preient les reins del balsamer,
Lor cors en coevrent e lor braz,
Ne funt ne pieges n'autres laz.
E la beste, qui n'est pas sage,
Vient a la fueille e a l'onbrage ;
Ne siet sa mort ne sen encobre :
Broste, puis si s'endort en l'onbre
Ci la tue, qui mainte feiz
En est des qu'a la mort destreiz,
O ars o esteinz de cholor.

[These evil monsters take balsam boughs and cover their bodies and arms—they do not use other traps or nets—and the beast, who is not very clever, approaches the branches and shade. She does not see the death that awaits her. She grazes, then falls asleep under the shade, and the man who kills, often dies too, burned or asphyxiated by the heat.] (13379-89, Livre de Poche)

As the Cynocephali disguise themselves to bait and capture the dindialos, we are reminded of the various Ovidian myths involving deceit and the trapping of innocent victims. Most notably Zeus in his various forms offers false comfort and security to innocent girls who are then seized and raped. So the Cynocephali deceive and murder the precious dindialos, although they also often fall victim to their disguise, “burning or asphyxiating by heat.” This cruel process compares easily to Criseyde’s exchange to the Greeks, who will trap her in their camp and provide her with the false illusion of security. Diomedes offers protection and comfort, and Criseyde is lost and overwhelmed in the foreign camp just as the dindialo is tired and overheated. Diomedes ultimately abandons Criseyde, but only after he has had his sexual fill, and Criseyde is presumably left tainted and alone once Diomedes deserts her. Hunting language in general tends to describe the hunted as feminine, as here the dindialo is described as an “elle,” and we are reminded how male courtiers often take an approach

similar to hunters when seeking the consent of a woman (and are often impatient enough to “make their kill” without consent). Criseyde’s entrapped position is a reflection of the beast’s murder, but she also participates in the violent practice of the Cynocephali by wearing the cloak. If the narrator is aware of the hunting process, then we can assume that Calchas is too, and Criseyde might be as well. By participating in the hunt, even if by blind extension, Criseyde reveals herself part of a larger violent system, of which she reaps certain benefits, even if she also becomes a victim herself. Furthermore, as Criseyde physically adorns the cloak that her father gave her, she allows herself to be trapped by Calchas, even if this is not her desire. She ultimately submits to her father’s wishes, and aligns herself with him by wearing a present that represents his foreign and ostracized position in society, as well as the violence underpinning all these exchanges.

Chaucer excludes the cloak from his poem, and Criseyde leaves for the Greek camp unprotected by any magic. While we cannot conclude that Chaucer left the cloak out of his poem on purpose, we can observe that in general, Chaucer is somewhat skeptical of magic. In the unfinished *Squire’s Tale*, for example, hope of a magical adventure is crushed at its abrupt ending, the marvelous objects he presents in the story’s beginning receive no further attention, and what appears magical is rationally explained, leaving readers disillusioned and perhaps disappointed. If Chaucer means to leave magic out of his romance, we can question what impact this exclusion has on his world, and what his scarcity of magic means in the context of the mythical and literary history that he is working with. First, the cloak in *Benoît* serves as a tangible association between Calchas and Criseyde, and without such an object Chaucer’s Criseyde is less visually attached to her father. We can then view Chaucer’s Criseyde as less isolated from Trojan society, with no

residual effects of her father's strange and treacherous ways. However, this also means that we see her as more isolated from her family, and therefore more vulnerable to society as a whole. Of course, Pandarus and Troilus do provide her emotional support, but they are ultimately unable to defend her from being traded. Criseyde is then caught between a father who has betrayed her people, and her people who are not fully her people (since they are not her family). In Benoît, the cloak provides ample evidence of her further connection to Calchas, while in Chaucer, Criseyde remains bare and susceptible, without any magical protection, but at least less attached to a character who is reviled by both Trojans and Greeks.

Benoît's cloak, and Chaucer's exclusion of it, reminds us then of just how vulnerable Criseyde is within Chaucer's poem. In the story's beginning, we find Criseyde quite strong and independent, especially considering the historical context. As a widow (though she is interestingly a maiden in Benoît's invention), Criseyde has financial independence and sexual experience, and as previously discussed, Troilus often assumes the role of the innocent lover, especially during their first sexual encounter. But as the story progresses, and Criseyde finds herself in the inescapable position of being traded to the Greeks, and her social rank cannot save her, we see how weak any woman is in this society. One scene in particular shows the reality of Criseyde's vulnerability, and causes us to not only sympathize with her powerlessness but to detest the society which places her in such a position. In Book 4, after the characters learn of the intended trade, Pandarus visits Criseyde and sees the extreme physical and emotional damage she has suffered:

Hire face, lik of Paradys the ymage,
Was al ychaunged in another kynde.
The pleye, the laughter, men was wont to fynde
On hire, and ek hire joies everichone,

Ben fled; and thus lith now Criseyde allone.
Aboute hire eyen two a purpre ryng
Bytrent, in sothfast tokenyng of hire peyne,
That to biholde it was dedly thyng. (4.864-871)

As we have seen throughout the poem, Criseyde's exchange inflicts visible "chaunge." Her face, once like "Paradys," undergoes something of a Fall, and all her once tangible joy flees. Her eyes bear "a purpre ryng," implying she has been crying so hard that she resembles a victim of physical abuse. The image is so dire that the narrator describes it as "dedly thyng"; life leaves Criseyde as she contemplates her ultimate weakness and her bleak future of dependency.

Perhaps the most poignant description, however, is that we now see "Criseyde allone"—bare and susceptible. Here is Criseyde without any adornments, without her strong and independent personality, without support from companions, stripped down to her fundamental self. Benoît's Criseyde, though emotionally distraught and still ultimately as weak, at least has a protective cover, one that is beautifully embellished and that can conceal her interior emotions. Chaucer's Criseyde is physically worn down, with no magical cloak to enhance her image. Magic provides the possibility that circumstances will change against unreasonable odds; Benoît's Criseyde, whose father has magical objects that we as readers encounter, perhaps has better odds of escaping or coping with her unfortunate situation. Chaucer's Criseyde, by contrast, does not live in a world where magic will somehow protect her from the suffering she is about to face. This causes us to ask why Chaucer is reluctant to incorporate magic in his works, and how he manages to write within a tradition that so often relies on the supernatural. In most stories about the Trojan War, we run into the deities and see their influence throughout necessary events. Certain elements of the overarching story are inseparable from the immortals, such as Paris'

reward—Helen, after he judges Venus to be the most beautiful of the goddesses. Why does Chaucer leave out the gods in his poem, aside from allusions and evocations? We see that characters within the story are also reluctant to attach themselves too closely to the supernatural; both sides spurn Calchas, viewing him as an outcast, even if his prophesying is correct and he is closer to the divine. Perhaps Chaucer shies away from magic for the same reasons that the other characters shy away from Calchas; magic and the supernatural reduce human nature by implying a greater force, intangible and incomprehensible to mankind. Reality has no such easy explanation, at least from the human perspective. Furthermore, why would a narrator who already foresees the events of his own story, and therefore holds the most power over his reader, relinquish that role to a character within the story? By removing magic from the myth, Chaucer places himself somewhat at odds with tradition; but he also enables us to sympathize with his characters on a more human level, and increases our dependency on the narrator himself.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay we have seen how *Troilus and Criseyde's* system of exchanges echoes the physical changes of the *Metamorphoses*, and how this system compares to others within medieval literature. The changes and exchanges throughout these works illustrate a powerful reaction against violence, in which victims inevitably lose their autonomy as well as aspects (or the entirety) of their humanity. Chaucer's changed narration reinforces the ties between exchange and change, and we are led to larger questions about fiction and literary tradition as a whole. Through these meditations,

Chaucer reminds us that literature is also susceptible to a kind of violent system that exchanges the "real" or human for the artificial. Criseyde cannot be merely summarized by her epithet; if she is a human character she must be more complicated than simply "false." The violent system of exchanges places her humanity at stake; but ultimately she can persist, not completely metamorphosed, but still retaining some autonomy, through this complicated and intricate text. As any romance does, the poem reminds us that mutability is inevitable, love is transitory, and we "love what vanishes."¹ But unlike other romances, the poem shows us how the human reconstruction of mutability, through a violent and aggressive system of change and exchange, ultimately threatens the lovers the most.

¹ "Man is in love and loves what vanishes," from W.B. Yeats' "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," 1921

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