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The Three Worlds of Love in *Troilus and Criseyde*

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Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*¹ has long been read as a Christian work about how to transcend earthly love to achieve eternal bliss in heaven with the Christian God, but equally important and little discussed is its portrayal of the changing nature of love as it unfolds in several different kinds of worlds. In the *Troilus*, Chaucer has successfully thematized the idea of transcending worldly joys and sorrows through the structural device of three worlds. The three lovers, Troilus, Criseyde, and Diomedes, must travel through three very different worlds of love: the Trojan world as an ideal one of medieval courtly love, the Greek camp as a world of expedient love between the victor and the vanquished, and the eighth sphere both as an antiworld in which earthly values must be rejected and as a divine world in which celestial love of God may be achieved. The goal may well be transcendence of earthly love for heavenly bliss, but the two earthly worlds in the *Troilus* represent equally necessary and desirable steps in a human process that forces the characters to contextualize their moral choices in ways that deny any earthly world of moral absolutes. Looking at the *Troilus*'s worlds of love as a human progression through states of love offers us insights into the poem without our having to engage in the seemingly endless critical debate over the characters' moral worth.² We may instead analyze the poem through its structural schemata, with the Trojan world representing earthly happiness, the Greek

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camp demonstrating its transience, and the celestial world representing the embracing of the antiworld of *contemptus mundi* and God simultaneously.

Chaucer's narrator maps the moral geography of love in the *Troilus* as he warns the audience that different countries have different rules for love, different routes to travel to the same destination:

For every wight which that to Rome went

Halt nat o path, or alwey o manere;

Ek in som lond were al the game shent,

If that they ferde in love as men don here,

As thus, in opyn doying or in chere,

In visityng, in forme, or seyde hir sawes;

Forthi men seyn, ecch contree hath his lawes.

Ek scarsly ben ther in this place thre

That have in love seid lik, and don, in al;

For to thi purpos this may liken the,

And the right nought, yet al is said or schal;

Ek som men grave in tree, some in ston wal ... (2.36-49)

The world Chaucer describes in Troy prescribes that lovers there must conduct themselves in certain ways, but that

those same ways could spoil the game for lovers in other lands. Using a rich image of engraving on a tree or in a stone wall heightens the tension between growth through stages of love and permanence in human relationships.³ This passage is more descriptive of well-known love conventions than prescriptive that the right way to love is the courtly-love way of *Troilus and Criseyde*. The Troy love affair is an example of ideal courtly love, and the Greek-camp love affair a less ideal but more realistic yet not despicable kind of love, both of which could eventually result

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in successful passage through various stages of earthly love to divine joy with God. Chaucer successfully demonstrates the efficacy of earthly love, along with the need to transcend it, by rendering the characters as sympathetic as possible and the circumstances which victimize Troilus and Criseyde as extenuating as possible.

Although the historical basis of courtly love has been questioned,⁴ its conventions at least are discussable as a literary situation in which Chaucer places Troilus and Criseyde. These conventions are most clearly stated in Andreas Capellanus's prescriptive treatise on the *Art of Courtly Love*. They include treating courtly love as a religion, one which ennobles and purifies the lovers and includes sexual gratification but one which can never succeed in the framework of a marriage. The lady must enter the affair reluctantly but be true to it forever more. Because it is illicit, the love affair must be kept secret from all except the best friends of the lovers. Although a woman's status in public is subservient, her private status with her lover is superior; the lover must continually be at his lady's service. He may also behave in a rather silly fashion fainting, raving, or becoming speechless at the most importune times a case of love sickness which fits Troilus exceedingly well.

Chaucer experimented with courtly love in his *Knight's Tale*, but it presents only one earthly world, and the three lovers, Palamon, Arcite, and Emelye, have only one kind of love relationship. In the *Troilus*, we discover two earthly worlds and a heavenly antiworld: three lovers again, but also three worlds of love in which to travel.

In the courtly-love world of Troy, the relationship between lovers Troilus and Criseyde extremely intricate as Troilus pursues

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Criseyde and she yields to his love. Troilus, the haughty knight who scoffs at love, first encounters Criseyde in the temple and is immediately struck by the arrow of the god of Love, who is angry at Troilus's pride and presumptuousness against love (1.183-217, 271-73). Note that Troilus makes no Voluntary decisions about his love for Criseyde he is victimized by the god in keeping with the convention (described at length in popular works such as *The Romance of the Rose*, especially the section by Guillaume de Lorris which Chaucer translated). Troilus "'Wax sodeynly moost subgit unto love" (1.230) although he thought there could be nothing "ayens his wille that shuld he herte stere" (1.228). We are told that this worthy king's son, a fierce and proud knight (1.225-26), ponders how best to work his way into Criseyde's heart:

Thus took he purpos loves craft to suwe,

And thoughte he wolde werken pryvely,

First to hiden his desir in muwe

From every wight yborn, al outrely, ...

And over al this, yet muchel more he thoughte

What for to speke, and what to holden inne;

And what to arten hire to love he soughte,

And on a song anon-right to bygynne,

And gan loude on his sorwe for to wyne; (1.379-390)

In perfect courtly love form, Troilus determines to use love's craft to win Criseyde's love without anyone else knowing it. He vows to himself that he will serve Criseyde always: "'But as hire man I wol ay lyve and sterve'" (1.427). And all this occurs before he has even been introduced to Criseyde.

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Troilus becomes one of the best warriors not because he hates the Greeks, but because he wants Criseyde to appreciate his renown (1.474-81). When he reluctantly confides in Pandarus, Pandarus becomes the courtly-love intermediary and takes over the plotting to gain Criseyde for Troilus. Thus Pandarus becomes the chief manipulator of Criseyde in this love relationship, and Troilus can rise from his bed of woe to become ennobled by his love. Troilus can then play the "leoun" (1.1074) and

becom the frendliest wight,

The gentilest, and ek the moost fre,

The thriftiest and oon the best knyght,

That in his tyme was or myght be.

Dede were his japes and his cruelte,

His heighe port and his manere estraunge,

And ecch of tho gan for a vertu change. (1.1079-85)

Fortune, Pandarus assures Troilus, may make joys pass, but so too will sorrows (1.846); so Troilus should expect his winning of Criseyde to end his woe. What Pandarus does not suggest, of course, is that Troilus should also be wary of the passing of that joy and should therefore anticipate the second sorrow of the loss of Criseyde. It is not, however, one of the tenets of courtly love to anticipate the loss of a lover, and Troilus adheres to those rules religiously. Shepherd sums up Troilus:

We are told he is handsome, young, fresh, strong, resolute in action and successful in war.... He suffers "this wondrous maladie" to perfection. He swoons, he weeps, he languishes. He is properly passionate, both masterful and humble in the

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consummation of his love.... He is indeed the ideal young male character, quick, proud, active, passionate, easily cast down, resolute when his course is clear, delighted by success, impatient of delay psycho-biologically, the perfect specimen.⁵

Troilus is perfectly molded to thrive in the ideal but unrealistic world of courtly love.

Criseyde, on the other hand, is a more complex character. She looks and behaves like the ideal courtly heroine, but her situation in the Trojan world is at times perilous as she finds herself at the mercy of the Trojan leaders or is manipulated by Pandarus and, to some extent, Troilus in their pursuit of her. As a result, she is extremely careful, pondering every move even when her choices are limited. Long before Troilus encounters her in the temple, we learn that she has seen trouble in her life: "that she forsook [Troilus] er she deyde" (1.56), that her father Calkas deserted her and Troy for the Greek camp (1.64-94), and that she dreads for her life as a result (1.95), that she is a widow without a friend to whom she can confide her sorrows (1.97-98), and that this "hevenyssh perfit creature" (1.104) has had to go on her knees to Hector for protection. Yet she qualifies as a courtly beloved in all other aspects. In the temple, she stands still and alone in her widow's weeds (1.178-79), radiating "Honour, estat, and wommanly noblesse" (1.287). Troilus keeps staring at her, but she apparently does not even notice him.

Before we see Criseyde next in her home (2.85ff), we have learned through Pandarus that she has "good name and

wisdom and manere ... ek gentillesse" (1.880-81), that Pandarus has never seen anyone

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"more bounteous

Of hire estat, n'a gladder, ne of speche

A frendlyer, n'a more gracious

For to do wel, ne lasse hadde nede to seche

What for to don;(1.883-89)

Pandarus, who has heard "'Was nevere man or womman yet bigete / That was unapt to suffren loves hete, / Celestial, or elles love of kynde'" (1.977-79), has assured Troilus that Criseyde, because of her beauty and her youth, should love a worthy knight. "It sit hire naught to ben celestial / As yet, though that hire liste bothe and kowthe; / But trewely, it sate hire wel right nowthe / A worthy knyght to loven and cherice, / And but she do, I holde it for a vice" (1.983-87).

Criseyde's realistic world view exceeds Troilus's idealistic fixation on courtly love. We soon learn that she is happy to live the widow's life of contemplation (2.114-20), that she is very afraid of the Greeks (2.124), and that she praises Troilus, whom Pandarus has told her is "'worthy Ector the secoude, / In whom that alle vertu list haboude, / As alle trouth and alle gentilles, / Wisdom, honour, fredom, and worthinesse'" (2.158-61). Although Criseyde praises Troilus and seems most impressed with his combination of "gret power and moral vertu," she weeps when Pandarus advises her to love Troilus, saying that Pandarus should rather forbid her such a love (2.407-15). When Pandarus threatens that both he and Troilus will die from her cruel refusal, she, "the ferfulleste wight / That myghte be" (2.450), capitulates, saying only that she will try to please Troilus short of loving him to keep Pandarus from dying (2.465ff). Criseyde clearly states that she is choosing the lesser of two evils: "'Of harmes two, the lesse is for to

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chese;/ Yet have I lever maken hym good chere / In honour, than myn emes lyf to lese'" (2.470), thus qualifying her as the reluctant beloved in the courtly love world. Yet her behavior bridges both this ideal world of love and the more pragmatic one in the Greek camp.

Unlike Troilus, yet true to courtly love conventions for a beloved, Criseyde does not fall in love "sodeynly" (2.673). She argues in an elaborately formal way with herself. First she reasons in favor of the relationship, saying that she cannot grant him love (2.703) but that it would be an honor to be friends (2.705-06) and that he might resent her if she flees (2.708-14). Then she reasons against the affair, saying that she is a free woman, uneager for a new husband who might be either "'ful of jalousie, / Or maisterfull, or loven novelrie'" (2.755-56). Even after Criseyde decides that her honor and name would be safe (2.757-63), she worries about her jeopardized security (2.773), the stormy life of love (2.778), the wicked tongues of people, and the falseness of men who stop loving their beloveds (2.785-91). Finally, she decides: "'He which that nothing undertaketh, / Nothing n'acheveth, be hym looth or deere'" (2.807-08). Chaucer underscores Criseyde's acceptance of the relationship only after intense argumentation by means of her dream that evening in which her heart is violently but passively and painlessly exchanged with an eagle's (read Troilus's) (2.925-31). This dream signifies Criseyde's acceptance of the courtly love relationship but dramatizes her passive role in its development.⁶

Chaucer has established Criseyde as a courtly heroine, yet one with a reasoning ability and life experience unlike that of his first courtly heroine, Emelye. Shepherd sums up Criseyde succinctly:

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Criseyde is ... the unlucky beloved. She embodies the virtues that all heroines of romance exemplify, the beauty of figure, face, and hair; discretion, fairspokenness, kindness in word and thought, a dignity, and liveliness and gentility, sentimentality and fearlessness (79).

Wetherbee, while not as sympathetic as Shepherd toward Criseyde, stresses that she is greatly influenced by circumstances, guided by the need to protect her substantial material interests, and unlikely to "enter willingly into a love relationship on any but her own terms. In the end, Pandarus, circumstances, and love itself have their way with her; [she] could not have escaped her situation ... any more than Troilus" (183). Taylor places Chaucer's emphasis on showing that Criseyde is "far less impassioned than Troilus, who descends into idolatry ... becomes a slave to his cupidity, and as a result he is responsible for his own downfall. The poet specifically implies that Troilus's substitution of a false love, Criseyde, for the true love, God, or the *summum bonum*, brings him to his ruin."⁷

Trying to assess blame to any of these characters seems to miss the critical mark. Cupidity in the lover is a necessary part of the courtly love convention, as is passivity in the beloved. That Criseyde is a much more complex and sympathetic character than necessary for an ancient story of love betrayed is testament to a larger theme: establishing a positive earthly love experience between two good characters as a desirable stage in life's journey through various worlds of love to attain eternal bliss with God. The same effect could have been achieved had Troilus betrayed Criseyde, with Criseyde transcending the strictures of earthly

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love. Most important in tracing the development of earthly love between Troilus and Criseyde is that it blossoms into a full-blown love affair which everyone celebrates as long as it lasts on its idyllic plane in the courtly-love world of Troy. Only when external circumstances interfere in the idyll does the love affair collapse.

Although Criseyde eventually accepts Troilus' s love wholeheartedly, she remains outwardly the reluctant heroine until the consummation scene nearly a year later. Even so, she knows that her joy is transient: "O brotel wele of mannes joie unstable / With what wight so thow be, or how thow pleye, / Either he woot that thow, joie, art mutable, / Or woot it nought; it mot ben oon of tweye" (3.822-23). The practical Criseyde can understand there is no true happiness in this world (3.836), a concept the idealistic Troilus cannot grasp until after his death. Again, we see Criseyde bridging worlds of earthly love, poised between stages but rejecting the permanence of courtly love.

No matter how one might want to caution about the narrator's subjectivity in this poem, in the consummation scene we all celebrate the ideal of courtly love with the narrator, Troilus, and Criseyde, however temporarily:

And now swetnesse semeth more swete,

That bitterhesse assaied was byforn;

For out of wo in blisse now they flete;

Non swich they felten syn that they were born

Now is this bet than bothe two be lorn.

For love of God, take every womman heede

To werken thus, if it comth to the neede. (3.1219-25)

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Chaucer, through his narrator, urges all women to love men for the love of God. In other words, earthly love is a necessary step to love of God.⁸

From the beginning of *Troilus and Criseyde* through the third book, Chaucer has developed an ideal of earthly love in a positive way by giving equal stature to both his main characters. Not until external circumstances intervene do we begin to discover Criseyde' s flaws and Troilus's unyielding moral virtue, not until she is physically removed from the world of courtly love to the second of Chaucer's worlds in this poem, the Greek camp of Diomedes and the pseudo-courtly love of expediency.

We first hear of Diomedes, the lover in Chaucer's second world, at the beginning of Book IV, when the narrator blames Fortune for Troilus's fall from her wheel: "From Troilus she gan hire brighte face / Awey to writhe, and tok of him non heede, / But caste hym clene out of his lady grace, / And on hire whiel she sette up Diomedes" (4.8-14). But we do not encounter Diomedes until Criseyde is transferred to the Greek camp in Book V. Note that once again Chaucer elicits sympathy for the characters by limiting their responsibility for their actions. Troilus is not responsible for what happens to him: he fell in love with Criseyde at the whim of the god of love, and she is taken from him at the whim of Fortune. Circumstances combine to force the lovers to separate. Diomedes is merely the recipient of good fortune in being the one to lead Criseyde into the Greek camp. Troilus understandably takes no aggressive action to save Criseyde from going to the camp against her will; he is the ideal courtly lover and follows its dictates religiously. These dictates force him to remain quiet when Criseyde's fate is being decided by the Trojans because of his vow to keep their love affair a secret and the

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absolute necessity to protect her reputation and name. According to the courtly love code, he is powerless to do anything without her permission.

Courtly love cannot survive when Fortune in the guise of politics and war conspires to destroy the lovers' idyllic world, and Criseyde knows this. But she is taken involuntarily from Troilus. And Troilus, silently, true to the code to the last, hands Criseyde over to the Greek world of expedient love, over to Diomedes, in the third year of their love (5.7). "Ful redy," we hear, "was at prime Diomedes, Criseyde unto the Grekis oost to lede" (5.15-16). And full ready is Diomedes to take advantage of his good fortune in being the first Greek to welcome Criseyde to her new home. A man like Diomedes, a king's son and a warrior second only to Achilles, understandably would have a right to show interest in an unmarried woman of Criseyde's station, were she not already accounted for in love. But Diomedes is no courtly lover. He is not bound by any such dictate as, "Thou sbalt not knowingly strive to break up a correct love affair that someone else is engaged in" (Capellanus, 81). Diomedes has his own set of rules. He lives in a pseudo-courtly but more realistic world of tents and temporality and expediency, and he leads Criseyde "by the bridel" into his world of expedient love. From their first moment, Diomedes assumes the role of Criseyde's protector.

In their respective worlds, Diomedes and Troilus enjoy similar stature. But their rules of love differ. Diomedes enjoys the same social status in his world as Troilus does in Troy. Troilus is a fierce, proud knight and a worthy king's son, but so too is Diomedes, who, we hear, is also "in his nedes prest and corageous, / with stern vois and myghty lymes square, / Hardy, testif, strong, and chivalrous / Of

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dedes, like his fader Tideus ... [and] of tonge large" (5.800-04). Diomedes, however, takes charge in the love arena while Troilus seeks an intermediary to further his cause. Diomedes knows more than the basics in the craft of love (5.89) while Troilus shows his ignorance, the result of mocking love for so long before he saw Criseyde. Diomedes woos Criseyde indirectly by trying to ease her distress (5.110) and by offering her friendship as a brother (5.128-34), knowing that he will gain nothing if he is too forward (5.99-103). But Troilus and Pandarus knew no such subtlety of approach: they demanded love of Criseyde or threatened to die (2.963).

Criseyde, especially in her plight, has no reason to suspect the motives of Diomedes, who offers himself only as her protector: "'Yeve me youre hond: I am, and shal ben ay, / Gcd helpe me so, while that my lyf may dure, / Youre owene aboven every creature'" (5.152-54). But Diomedes does promise, "'Thus seyde I nevere er now to womman born; / For, God myn herte as wisly glade so, / I loved never wooman here bi-forn / As paramours, ne nevere shal no mo'" (5.1515-57), so that Criseyde knows he is unattached. These lines curiously echo those Criseyde spoke to Troilus earlier: "'Thus seyde I nevere er this [For I am thine] ne shal to mo'" (3.1515). Both statements seem sincere. I find no evidence in the poem that either Criseyde or Diomedes is lying; even though she has been married before, courtly love conventions preclude the possibility of love within the marriage. Even though Diomedes knows more than the basics about love, Chaucer is ambiguous about his use of them.

While Troilus and Criseyde spend the first nine days of their separation grieving for each other, the pragmatic Diomedes ponders how best to win Criseyde (5.771-77), deciding it does no

harm to try: "For he that naught n'asaieth, naught n'acheveth" (5.784-85). Again Diomedes's words curiously echo those spoken earlier by Criseyde as she decides not to oppose Troilus's love for her: "He which that nothyng undertaketh, / Nothyng n'acheveth, be hym looth or deere" (2.807-08). Is Chaucer placing Criseyde's words, which show her willingness to undertake the affair with Troilus, into the mouth of Diomedes to underscore that now *he* is the one willing to pursue the affair and that she is completely passive in the event? Diomedes, once again reminding himself that he is no fool, knows well that wise folks say he cannot win a "wight in hevynesse" (5.786-91) but exclaims at the idea of conquering "swich a flour / From hym for whom she morneth nyght and day" (5.792-93). After all, the narrator tells us, Criseyde is "Tendre-herted" and "slydyng of corage" (5.825). She can hardly, then, match wits with the smooth lover Diomedes.

The reality of the Greek-camp world strikes Criseyde as she realizes that her father will never willingly let her return to Troy (5.687). Although she struggles to keep her foothold on the bridge to the courtly world in Troy by vowing to sneak back, she is devastated by Diomedes when he tells her to forget whomever she loves in Troy because he and all the city shall soon be destroyed by the Greeks' wrath (5.876). But he smoothly assures her that she can find a more perfect love in a Greek, saying he himself would rather serve her than rule all of Greece (5.920-24). Lest we think that Diomedes's world view of love is too expedient and coarse, Chaucer's narrator hastens to add that Diomedes has feelings proper to a lover:

And with that word he gan waxen red
 And in his speche a litel wight he quok,
 And caste asyde a litel wight in his hed,

And stynte a while; and afterward he wok,
 And sobreliche on hire he threw his lok,
 And seyde, "I am, al be it yow no joie,
 As gentil man as any wight in Troie." (5.925-31)

True, this lover moves more aggressively than the courtly lover Troilus has, but Chaucer portrays him as nonetheless sincere and even makes him suffer some of the physical maladies of courtly lovers. Above all, Diomedes is persistent and in control, unlike the true courtly lover Troilus.

Criseyde, trapped as she is yet longing for Troilus, cautions Diomedes: "'But as to speke of love, ywis,' she seyde, / 'I hadde a lord, to whom I wedded was, / The whos myn herte al was, til that he deyde; / And other love, as help me now Pallas, / Ther in myn herte nys, ne never was. / And that ye ben of noble and heigh kyrnede, / I have wel herde it tellen, out of drede'" (5.974-80). She tells him that she would rather complain and make woe until she dies (5.984), just as she earlier told Troilus the same thing. We cannot be sure whether she speaks of her dead husband or of Troilus as her dead lord, but the odds favor Troilus. Only after Diomedes's startling news does Criseyde realize her real predicament and know she must accept a new world in the Greek camp (5. 1023ff).

Only in light of her vanquished state does Criseyde begin to think of a relationship with "sodeyn" Diomedes, just as she earlier considered one with a sodeyn Troilus. And yet it is not a cold-hearted betrayal. Uppermost in her mind are the "perel of the town, / And that she was allone and hadde nede of frendes help" (5.1025-27). Surely it is no coincidence that Criseyde spends this entire poem in two different worlds in need of protection from friends through no fault of her own. Chaucer's underscoring of the

difficulty of her situation excuses her infidelity to Troilus. The poet creates an infidelity, yet we do not think ill of the

characters who progress through the worlds of love on their way to God.

Criseyde herself condemns the infidelity. She abides by the rules of courtly love and must condemn her own action (5.1050-55), no matter how extenuating the circumstances which lead her to her decision to accept Diomedes for protection. As Andreas Capellanus states:

God forbid that we should ever declare that a woman who is not ashamed to wanton with two men should go unpunished.... After a woman has indulged the passions of several men everybody looks upon her as an unclean strumpet unfit to associate with other ladies.... A true lover can never desire a new love unless he knows for some definite and sufficient reason the old love is dead (162-63).

Certainly Diomedes does not condemn Criseyde for betraying Troilus. He says, pragmatically, that whoever she loves is as good as dead. In effect, Diomedes' world destroys Criseyde's former one, in both war and love. Also, the development of Criseyde's relationship with Diomedes was not all that "sodeyn"; some two years pass from the time Criseyde first enters the Greek camp and she supposedly gives Diomedes her heart, at least according to the Benoit version of the story (Wetherbee, 19).⁹ So, at least in the expedient world of the Greek camp, Criseyde may be excused even by courtly love convention: "When one lover dies, a widowhood of two years is required of the survivor" (Capellanus, 185). Chaucer collapses the timeframe and obscures it by inserting later

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events into the middle of actions occurring in the first weeks of Criseyde's time in the Greek camp in keeping with the primary theme of demonstrating the inevitability of loss in all earthly love relationships, an inevitability which makes chronology irrelevant.

Whether Criseyde really gave Diomedes her heart is also of secondary importance in the larger concerns of this story; the status of her heart remains, appropriately, in question. The narrator never says Criseyde gave Diomedes her heart, as she clearly gave it to Troilus. Yet Criseyde considers that she has been false to Troilus and blames herself:

"Allas for now is clene ago

My name of trowth in love, for everemo!

For I have falsed oon the gentileste

That evere was, and oon the worthieste!

Allas! of me, unto the worldes ende,

Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge

No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende

... But syn I se ther is no bettre way,

And that to late is now for me to rewe,

To Diomedes algate I wol be trewe." (5.1054-71)

Criseyde says her name is ruined until the world's end, but perhaps that world is only the Trojan one of courtly love, which cannot last, rather than both her worlds. Chaucer here highlights the impermanence of all earthly relationships which break down no matter how sincere the vows of eternal fidelity. We know Criseyde does not have the courage to remain faithful to Troilus until she dies; she has shown she cannot resist two lovers already. Robert ApRoberts discusses Criseyde's status as the perfect courtly heroine in Books I-IV who is not tested for her fidelity, so we should not be

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surprised by her infidelity or expect steely courage of her in Book V (383-402). Yet we can have sympathy for the choice a woman caught between two worlds makes, almost against her will. Criseyde herself recognizes that there is no better way for her to choose.

The critics discuss in great depth Criseyde's extenuating circumstances. Wetherbee points out, "The fine syntactic and verbal ambiguity of 'giltless, I woot wel, I yow leve' conveys a hint that Criseyde feels herself to be guiltless in leaving Troilus, that in some irrational way she has managed to reassure herself of her essential innocence" (Wetherbee, 193). While Wetherbee does not subscribe to Criseyde's innocence, he does make a case for minimizing our continuation of her: "Though Chaucer makes plain the limitations of her character, he also makes plain the social constraints and precarious circumstances that have compelled her to meet the world on its own terms and to rely so largely on her sexual attractiveness to make her way" (194). The questions are, *which* world does Criseyde meet, and on whose terms?

Donaldson sees it a little differently, blaming "men practicing politics" for the situation she finds herself in, rather than fate, as the narrator suggests. He emphasizes her powerlessness:

One might suppose that some narrators would have perceived that if you treat a woman as a pawn, limiting her moves as severely as a pawn's, you cannot expect her to show the virtue of a queen, who can go in any direction: if the move open to the pawn is one that previously brought her security she can hardly be blamed for making it again (11).

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ApRoberts sees Criseyde's infidelity as demonstrative of necessary change in life. All humans are faithless creatures, and Chaucer creates one who is as desirable as possible and yet unfaithful:

Her earlier perfection makes us view her sin as part of the inadequacy and the transience which belong to all earthly things. Her weakness is one of the forces, like Fate and Fortune, which bring about change. Human love cannot withstand these forces. It is inadequate and transient.... The highest earthly happiness, as Boethius would say, ... is subject to the change which comes to everything that 'suffreth temporel condicion' (Boethius, Book V). (ApRoberts, 395-96)

Criseyde serves as the cause of Troilus's second sorrow, the loss of her love, but Chaucer does not set up a despicable love relationship for Criseyde and Diomedes. Rather, he creates a second kind of earthly love, one which is less ideal than the one enjoyed by Troilus and Criseyde in their blissful courtly world, but one which suits the conditions extant in such an uncertain and brutally real environment as the Greek camp. Diomedes is not a bad character, and Criseyde's sin becomes understandable in the light of her circumstances. In the Greek-camp world, Chaucer conflates the love relationship he gives us in the Trojan world into a more expedient but equally necessary stage of love for his characters to experience, a world facilitated and molded by war and politics, but one which is no more nor less permanent than the courtly kind. Chaucer's accomplishment is in

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showing that all earthly love relationships must end in transcendence to eternal bliss with God. He demonstrates this transience of earthly love clearly by developing first a courtly love relationship between Troilus and Criseyde, then a pseudo-courtly one between Diomedes and Criseyde.

Only after Achilles slays the woeful Troilus can Troilus embrace the antiworld he enters by rejecting worldly values; he "fully gan despise / This wrecched world, and held al vanite / To respect of the pleyn felicite / That is in hevne above" (5. 1816-19). Troilus finally realizes that blind lust cannot last and that we should set our hearts on heaven. The narrator urges all "yonge fresshe folkes ... Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte / And of youre herte up casteth the visage / To thilke God that after his ymage / Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire / This world, that passeth soone as floures faire" (5. 1835-41). The poem seems suddenly to burst open as a profoundly Christian work; that is, it does if the audience has not been alert to the hints that abound in the poem to promise this very ending, with Troilus finally transcending both earthly worlds, his bliss in the world of Troy and his woe caused by Criseyde's removal to a world in which he cannot survive, the world of the Greek camp.

In the end, Troilus loses what he once considered most important: Criseyde and her earthly love, but he gains bliss with God in the eighth sphere by leaving the earthly worlds of love behind and entering the antiworld of *contemptus mundi*. Criseyde loses what she once considered most important: her name and her reputation, but she adapts herself practically to whatever circumstances befall her. Diomedes never really gains Criseyde's heart, but he does win her body. He seizes love in a pragmatic and realistic fashion, knowing its temporality. In

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the end, none of Troilus's virtue and faithfulness on earth, none of Criseyde's vows or unfaithfulness, none of Diomedes's aggressiveness matters so much as the larger concerns of the poem: recognizing the mutability of all human activity and the necessity of placing earthly joys and sorrow in the context of their temporality. In the *Troilus*, Chaucer lays bare the goodness and foibles of three distinctive characters progressing through three different worlds of love; one of these characters learns in the course of the poem to leave earthly happiness behind and to embrace *contemptus mundi* and God simultaneously.[10](#)

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Notes

1. Quotations from *Troilus and Criseyde* are from F. N. Robinson, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd ed.; citations are by book and line number.

2. Critical opinion of the three lovers tends to be polarized. Some critics depict Criseyde as a weak, lying woman who perfidiously betrays a morally virtuous Troilus. Some justify Criseyde's actions and portray Troilus as rather more silly than "sely." Diomed generally is categorized either as a very positive or as a very negative character, rarely as a balanced one. My own critical stance treats Troilus as an ideal courtly lover who suffers the loss of earthly love as proof of the transience of all earthly joys and sorrows and the permanence of heavenly bliss with God. Criseyde becomes the means of Troilus's learning this lesson, but her guilt is ameliorated by her circumstances. Diomed performs as an efficient pseudo-courtly lover who seizes opportunity when it presents itself. Alice R. Kaminsky's *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde and the Critics* summarizes the critical stances. See 121-38 for discussion of Troilus criticism, which "gives us a flat, uninteresting knight, a sinner, a noble courtly or married lover, a courtly Boethius, a tragic intellectual Hamlet-like figure, a comic fool, and a psychologically disturbed hero..." (138). See also the extensive discussion of Criseyde criticism, 144-65, which makes of her everything under the sun. Finally, see Kaminsky's discussion of Diomed, 165-67 and 203, interpreted either as a "verray gentil parfit knight" (Paul Edmonds) or the "most openly malevolent influence on Criseyde" (Stephen Knight).

3. I am grateful to Allen J. Frantzen for suggesting this relationship to me.

4. Chief among detractors of the theory is D. W. Robertson, according to Kaminsky (122), but many, beginning with C. S. Lewis, embrace it (123).

5. G.T. Shepherd, "Troilus and Criseyde," in *Chaucer and Chaucerians*, 65-87. See also Winthrop Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets*, especially chapter two, in which he argues that Troilus's experience "conforms to the classic pattern of human love delineated in the Roman de la Rose," 28.

6. See Joseph E. Gallagher, "Criseyde's Dream of the Eagle: Love and War in *Troilus and Criseyde*," 118 for an interesting suggestion that this dream also presages Diomed's more aggressive love of Criseyde. Also see Mark Lambert, "Troilus, Books I-III: A Criseydan Reading," in *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde*, 105-25.

7. Willene P. Taylor, "Supposed Antifeminism in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and its Retraction in *The Legend of Good Women*," 4. Taylor credits D. W. Robertson for this idea.

8. Shepherd suggests that the love of Troilus and Criseyde has been treated "as a real good," and that throughout the poem Troilus is "a figure not merely of potential, but of realized worth and 'troughe,'" 67. See also Monica McAlpine, *The Genre of Troilus and Criseyde*, for her discussion of the nature of Troilus's love: "If Troilus had been a Christian, he might have made a confession of love in which, like Dante in another comedy, he would have traced the fire

of his love for God to its origin in the fire of his love for a woman. .," 180-81.

9. See also Benoit de Sainte Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*; E. Talbot Donaldson, "Briseis, Briseida, Criseyde, Cresseid, Cressid: Progress of a Heroine," in *Chaucerian Problems and Perspectives*, 1-12. See also Gretchen Miezakowsky, *The Reputation of Criseyde (1155-1500)*, 71-153, on which Donaldson bases much of his article.

10. I here acknowledge the invaluable critical and editorial advice I received from both Allen J. Frantzen and Michael Masi in their readings of my essay.