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"Love that oughte ben secree": Secrecy and Alternate Endings
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“Love that oughte ben secree”: Secrecy and Alternate Endings in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*

by Dyani Johns Taff

This article examines the power dynamics of erotic secret-keeping and revelation in Geoffrey Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde. Chaucer uses competing discourses of secrecy (fin’amors, romance, fabliau, and epic history) in order to draw attention to the fantasies in which his characters—and by implication his readers—indulge about alternative actions within and endings for the narrative. While the critical discussion of power and the play of genres in the poem has been robust, scholars have paid less attention to secrecy in Troilus and Criseyde as it underpins Chaucer’s representations of power and use of genres. I argue that the power dynamics of secrecy not only structure the characters’ competing bids for narrative control but also enable Chaucer’s audiences to examine our own impulses and fantasies as we interpret the poem. Discourses of secrecy prompt a consideration of the partial nature of knowledge and show Chaucer grappling with two questions about knowledge and narrative: how do we know what we know about the stories we read, and how does that knowing influence our reading? Chaucer’s characters ask versions of these questions, inviting audiences to ask them as well.

IN book 4 of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Geoffrey Chaucer’s narrator signals a transition from describing the “joie” of Troilus and Criseyde’s courtship and consummation to narrating “how Criseyde Troilus forsook.”¹ For many readers, a central cause of the relationship’s fail-

¹ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 4.2 and 4.15. Future quotations from *Troilus and*

ure is the Trojan parliament's decision to send Criseyde—at her father's request—to the Greeks in exchange for the return of the Trojan warrior Antenor. Troilus witnesses the parliamentary debate after the Greek negotiators propose the exchange, and he hears Hector's emphatic objection to it: "we usen here no wommen for to selle" (4.182). But Troilus remains silent, failing to join Hector in protesting the exchange. Why? Chaucer's narrator gives us one answer: on hearing the news, Troilus "wel neigh deyde. / But natheles he no word to it seyde, / Lest men sholde his affeccoun espye" (151–53). Keeping his love affair with Criseyde a secret—and thereby working "to save hire honour" (159)—is paramount for Troilus, according to the narrator. The narrator also asserts that despite his overpowering "Love" (162), which makes him feel that he would "rather dyen than she sholde go" (163), he will not speak of the affair "Withouten assent of hire" (165) for fear that such "medlynge" (167) will reveal the secret. Following Giovanni Boccaccio's version of this story closely, the narrator depicts Troilus as heeding conventional wisdom about love gossip and quashing his "Love" with his "Resoun" (164).²

The narrator's explanations for Troilus's silence in parliament have felt inadequate to many readers. Some critics accept the narrator's explanations but seem compelled to add to his discussion of Troilus's silence. For example, Robert Costomiris and Tison Pugh both take the narrator at his word, seeing a zero-sum relationship between Troilus's desire to keep Criseyde in Troy and his desire to keep their affair a secret. Pugh takes Troilus's silence as indicating his adherence to the rules of the game of courtly love, whereas Costomiris sees it as indicating his commitment to Criseyde's honor, but both critics engage deeply in explaining that silence beyond the narrator's assertions about Troilus's reasoning.³ Other critics reject the narrator's explanations for Troilus's silence on the grounds that they appear out of place or incomplete in the larger context of the narrative; these critics elaborate on the options that Troilus had beyond either disclosing the secret or losing Criseyde. Both

Criseyde are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by book and line number.

² See Boccaccio, *Il Filostrato*, ed. and trans. Robert P. apRoberts and Anna Bruni Seldis (New York: Garland, 1986), 4.14–16. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of *Il Filostrato* are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by book and stanza number.

³ Costomiris, "Criseyde's Swoon and the Experience of Love in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Renaissance* 65 (2013): 255; and Pugh, "Christian Revelation and the Cruel Game of Courtly Love in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Chaucer Review* 39 (2005): 387.

Jennifer Garrison and Claudia Rattazzi Papka, for instance, question the narrator's information about why Troilus remains silent, positing that he is not telling us the whole story and that Troilus's silence is not the result of his chivalrous, reasonable choice to protect Criseyde's honor but is instead the result of his misguided and self-interested or "overly literal" adherence to rules about erotic secrecy, an adherence that Papka vividly describes as "verg[ing] on the ridiculous."⁴

Troilus's silence—an indication, as these and other critics have argued, of his commitment to *fin'amors* secret-keeping—might appear reasonable and tragic in a less generically complicated text. But in the "inclusive . . . gathering of genres"—to use Barry Windeatt's evocative phrase—that constitutes Chaucer's poem, Troilus's silence jars against Hector's speech, in part because Hector's speech points to conventions of secrecy in other genres—epic and history—and prompts audiences to judge Troilus's secret-keeping not only against the rules of *fin'amors* secrecy but also against the rules that obtain in other genres.⁵ The generic mismatch in book 4 highlights competing discourses of secrecy; as a result, critics question Troilus's silence and imagine alternate endings to the love affair. In her reading of book 5, Papka sees "three 'false endings'—that is, three moments at which the text is marked by the form and tone of finality . . . [and] the expectation of closure is foiled again and again."⁶ I argue that, not only in book 5 but also throughout the poem, Chaucer's focus on the play between keeping and revealing erotic secrets invites readers to repeatedly imagine "false endings" for *Troilus and Criseyde* even though we—like the narrator—know very well how the story ends. Chaucer uses the power dynamics involved in keeping and revealing secrets to make visible authorial manipulations that both gratify and challenge readers' expectations. In what follows, I discuss Chaucer's engagement with traditions of erotic secret-keeping and then offer three examples of characters' uses of the power dynamics of secrecy that prompt the poem's audiences to imagine impossible or foreclosed endings. With Pandarus, readers imagine the revelation of the erotic secret and Pandarus, Troilus, and Criseyde's concomitant public censure. With Troilus, audiences imagine the lovers' elopement and

⁴ Garrison, "Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and the Danger of Masculine Interiority," *Chaucer Review* 49 (2015): 333; and Papka, "Transgression, the End of Troilus, and the Ending of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Chaucer Review* 32 (1998): 271.

⁵ Windeatt, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 176.

⁶ Papka, "Transgression," 269.

escape from Troy. With Criseyde, we imagine the lovers' tragic death. In each case, the characters articulate imperatives of secrecy—from disparate, sometimes mismatched genres—that motivate their choices and make the imagined endings impossible, and in each case, Chaucer uses the imagined endings and clashing imperatives to prompt readers to examine our own desire to gain access to secrets and to fantasize about alternate endings. A focus on secrecy in *Troilus and Criseyde* enables a reading of some of the poem's humorous and troubling moments as revealing erotic affairs to be always socially and politically contextualized, no matter how secret and private they seem. The moves to keep and to reveal secrets in the poem establish knowledge as steadfastly partial and limited, even when we feel as though we are in on the secret.

THE OPERATIONS OF SECRECY

Although secrecy is, as Pugh argues, the “chief rule” of the *fin'amors* game, breaking this rule—by telling friends about your love or by writing love poetry—is equally vital to the genre.⁷ Before Troilus reveals the cause of his lovesickness to Pandarus, the narrator emphasizes that Troilus fears his own ability to keep the secret. Explaining that Troilus thinks about “wyse” (1.742) proverbs counseling men to avoid revealing secrets, the narrator describes Troilus's—and perhaps his own—conviction that anything that “toucheth love . . . oughte ben secree; / For of [a man] it wol ynough out sprynge, / But if that it the bet governed be” (1.744–46). The narrator describes the amorous secret as having a kind of agency: without discipline, erotic secrets will “out sprynge” of their keepers. Troilus attempts and fails to “govern” his secrets during his conversation with Pandarus. His failure to keep his love affair secret from Pandarus and Pandarus's comical, relentless prodding and physical shaking of Troilus to dislodge the secret remind readers that without a Pandarus—a voyeur, a viewer—and without a narrator or author who knows the secret, the poem about the love affair does not exist. Were Troilus's love to actually remain a secret, the narrator and we readers would never learn of it.

⁷ Pugh, “Christian Revelation,” 382. On the *fin'amors* tradition and *Troilus and Criseyde*, see also Christopher Stampone, “Choreographing *Fin'amor*: Dance and the Game of Love in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *Chaucer Review* 50 (2015): 393–419; and Corinne Saunders, “Love and the Making of the Self: *Troilus and Criseyde*,” in *A Concise Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Saunders (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 134–55. Saunders provides an excellent summary of “the critical debate that has accompanied the concept of a literary mode of *fin'amors*, redefined love or ‘courtly’ love” (136).

Dante Alighieri's narrator in the *Vita nuova* does not fail, as Troilus does, to keep his love secret: despite friends "pieni d'invidia" ("full of malicious curiosity")⁸ who see "nel viso tante de le sue insigne" (4; "so many signs [of Love] so clearly marked on [the narrator's] face," 8), he writes, "io sorridente li guardava, e nulla dicea loro" (4; "I would look at them and smile and say nothing," 8). He becomes "fraile e debole" (4; "weak and frail," 7) because of his secret love but maintains that secrecy as well as the transcendent "beatitudine" (12; "bliss," 17) and divine visions it affords him. And yet the lover also constantly and subtly reminds readers that his secret-keeping enables and indeed gives rise to his *writing* of the text itself. After describing the "anguish" that awakens him from a "vision" of bittersweet love, he writes, "propuosi di fare uno sonetto, ne lo quale io salutasse tutti li fedeli d'Amore; e pregandoli che giudicassero la mia visione, scrissi a loro ciò che io aveva nel mio sonno veduto" (3; "I decided to compose a sonnet addressed to all of Love's faithful subjects; and, requesting them to interpret my vision, I would write them what I had seen in my sleep," 6). Although Dante's lover succeeds in obscuring the identity of his love object from public view, he also fully reveals his descriptions of Beatrice and the anguish and spiritual, transcendent bliss of his love for her to his readers as the impetus for and content of his poetry.⁹

In the proem to *Il Filostrato*, by contrast, Boccaccio's narrator rejects painful, secret love. The narrator asserts, "prima proposi di ritenere del tutto dentro dal tristo petto l'angoscia mia" (proem, p. 10; "I first proposed to keep my anguish completely within my sad breast," p. 11). But he soon realizes that his anguish would vanquish "le forze [sue], già debolissime divenute, che morte senza fallo ne seguirebbe" ("[his] powers, already become very weak, so much that death would follow without fail from it"). For Boccaccio's lover, erotic suffering kept secret produces not transcendence but death. While one might argue that Boccaccio's narrator fails to achieve spiritual transcendence by refusing to die for his secret love, the narrator himself frames it quite differently. He chooses "mut[are] proposito" ("to change[] [his] proposal") and dis-

⁸ Dante, *Vita nuova*, in *Opere di Dante Alighieri*, ed. Fredi Chiapelli, http://alighieri.letteraturaoperaomnia.org/alighieri_dante_vita_nuova.html, chap. 4. English translation from Mark Musa, trans., *Dante's Vita nuova* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 7. Future quotations from the *Vita nuova* are from these editions, with Chiapelli cited parenthetically by chapter and Musa's translations by page.

⁹ On the connection between love poetry and transcendence, see Jill Mann, "In Defence of Francesca: Human and Divine Love in Dante and Chaucer," *Strumenti Critici* 28 (2013): 16–17 and 24–26.

close his love. He refuses death and decides “cantando narrare li [suoi] martiri” (“to relate [his] sufferings in song”) in order that he might live and serve his paramour, a choice that, to the narrator, “quasi da nascosa divinità spirato” (“seemed inspired by a secret divinity”). Dante’s narrator requires secrecy in order to effect his transcendence, but his narrations and poems undermine that secrecy by revealing the love affair to the reader. Boccaccio’s version makes explicit this implied requirement for disclosure; the narrator resolves to love secretly but ends by choosing to tell all, and at least allegedly receives divine inspiration to create a “picciolo libro, in testimonianza perpetua” (proem, p. 12; “a little book, in perpetual testimony,” p. 13) to his unrequited, secret but also necessarily *not* secret erotic suffering.

Love in the style of Dante and Boccaccio, then, “oughte ben secree,” but simultaneously requires disclosure. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer represents sociopolitical and religious pressures that govern Pandarus, Troilus, and Criseyde’s competing desires to keep the love affair secret and, at the same time, to disclose it. Their machinations exemplify what Karma Lochrie has called the “operations of concealment.”¹⁰ Lochrie emphasizes that studying the content of secrets themselves yields much less insight about medieval concealment practices and medieval culture more broadly than studying “technologies of secrecy.”¹¹ She argues that “if we take secrecy to mean intentional concealment that structures social and power relationships, it is apparent enough how insignificant actual secrets are by comparison. . . . [S]ecrecy always serves the dual purpose of constituting one set of knowledges, discourses, or social agents and also disempowering others.”¹² This “dual purpose” whereby secrecy both empowers and disempowers agents, structures relationships between, for example, penitents and priests or gossips and those who would silence them. For Lochrie, secrecy is a “technology” used for hegemonic and oppressive aims, but one that also enables resistance and engenders pleasure in the play between revealing and not revealing illicit knowledge.¹³ Lochrie illuminates medieval discourses of secrecy that constantly define and redefine who can do and say what in the culture, who can control whom, and whom and how one can love. Pandarus, Troilus, and Criseyde employ “operations of concealment”

¹⁰ Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 51.

throughout Chaucer's poem, and these operations structure their relationships to each other as well as the social and political consequences of their decisions to keep or reveal erotic secrets.

The choices that Chaucer's characters make about secrecy are also structured by genre. As Windeatt argues, Chaucer "combin[es] various genres" within *Troilus and Criseyde*: "[t]he effect of such a combination of genres is that in interrelating they modify and comment upon each other in an inclusiveness which allows for multiple viewpoints and denies any dominating single perspective or interpretation."¹⁴ The genres of the poem do not sit passively side by side, but actively "comment" on one another, creating mismatches and friction.¹⁵ For Timothy Arner, the genres of the poem are not all given equal status: he describes *Troilus and Criseyde* as a "lament for the inherent failure of the genre of romance to speak directly to the political concerns of its day" and argues that "[t]he poem's explicit focus on the romance hero Troilus . . . masks alternative modes of generic discourse and narrative trajectories."¹⁶ While I agree that Chaucer ridicules the efficacy of the romance genre, I do not see romance as "mask[ing]" other generic modes. Rather, Chaucer highlights alternative genres and "narrative trajectories," making them sometimes startlingly visible. In playing one genre off of another, as Monica E. McAlpine contends, Chaucer "make[s] us aware of the story as a made thing, shaped by cultural and literary traditions and by the countless decisions of many 'auctors.'"¹⁷ In my reading of the poem, Chaucer marks each character's articulations of her or his desires for secrecy or revelation as belonging to distinct genres. Pandarus's voyeurism links him to *fabliau*.¹⁸ Troilus's songs and his lovesickness—which he endeavors to keep secret and which both incapacitate him and drive

¹⁴ Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 138–39. For a fascinating discussion of the proverb as a genre within *Troilus and Criseyde* that can "comment" (*ibid.*, 139) on the larger poem, see Nancy Mason Bradbury, "The Proverb as Embedded Microgenre in Chaucer and *The Dialogue of Solomon and Marcolf*," *Exemplaria* 27 (2015): 55–72. Bradbury also usefully challenges the idea that genres can "mix" or "combine," arguing for the utility of seeing micro-genres as "embedded" within a larger work, because of the way that this concept enables us to see a proverb or song as complete and distinct from the larger work but also able to change the meaning of that larger work (64).

¹⁵ Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 139.

¹⁶ Arner, "Chaucer's Second Hector: The Triumphs of Diomedes and the Possibility of Epic in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Medium Aevum* 79 (2010): 69.

¹⁷ McAlpine, *The Genre of "Troilus and Criseyde"* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 46.

¹⁸ See Gretchen Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); and Robert Levine, "Pandarus as Davus," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 92 (1991): 463–68.

him to various actions—are marks of *fin'amors*.¹⁹ Criseyde's focus on reputation and her desire for news of the Greek threat in book 2 mark her words and actions as "epic history"; that is, as concerning the martial and political events of the Trojan war.²⁰ These genres "interrelate" but also "modify" each other, as Windeatt has shown, and they also create friction, especially when a character primarily associated with one genre speaks words or performs actions associated with another. Competing expectations about how epic characters or *fin'amors* characters ought to behave, and in particular how their stories often end, create a disjunction—by turns humorous and tragic—between the endings that Chaucer prompts readers to imagine or desire and the endings that readers also know will come to be, based on their prior knowledge of the story of the love affair and the fall of Troy. Chaucer, as McAlpine asserts, "shuns pretensions to omniscience . . . embrac[ing] instead . . . limited vision and persistent fallibility."²¹ Yet Chaucer also repeatedly represents—and parodies—"pretensions to omniscience" in the narrator's and characters' words. Chaucer draws our attention both to the "operations of concealment" that his characters employ and to his own operations of concealment as an author who manipulates genres to gratify and undercut our expectations about his character's actions. As we navigate between Chaucer's genres, we reflect on both readers' and characters' desires to access the social, political, or religious knowledge that the operations of secrecy have concealed.

PANDARUS: IMAGINING CENSURE

Pandarus's manipulative use of secrecy invites readers of the poem to imagine the public censure that would result from the revelation of Troilus and Criseyde's affair and of Pandarus's role in it. Although many readers, in the tradition of Robert Henryson, dwell on Criseyde's public censure after her betrayal of Troilus, Pandarus imagines stories about

¹⁹ For a few useful examples of the large body of work on Troilus's relationship to the *fin'amors* genre, see Pugh, "Christian Revelation"; Saunders, "Love and the Making of the Self"; and Stampone, "Choreographing *Fin'amor*."

²⁰ Arner, "Chaucer's Second Hector," 69. Arner uses the phrase "epic history" in his discussion of Troilus and Diomedes; for my purposes, it is useful because it indicates the overlap in subject matter and generic rules between epic and history. See also Catherine Sanok, "Criseyde, Cassandra, and the *Thebaid*: Women and the Theban Subtext of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 20 (1998): 41–71; and Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

²¹ McAlpine, *Genre*, 46.

the loss of reputation not only for Criseyde but also for Troilus and himself, and his stories diverge radically from what happens in the larger narrative of Chaucer's poem. Pandarus's winking, suggestive jokes, and his obsession with creating a secret erotic tryst—not only for Troilus and Criseyde's pleasure but also for his own—reveal his adherence to *fabliau* rules and bawdy jokes, even when he asserts his "entente" (2.580) to nobly aid Troilus and to protect Criseyde's reputation.²² Shortly after cajoling Troilus into revealing the cause of his lovesickness, Pandarus—in the middle of his pages-long comic, self-deprecatory, proverb-laden lecture about how to properly conduct a love affair—assures Troilus that he will keep the secret of Troilus's love for Criseyde very carefully and that he will work "to maken a good ende" (1.973) of the affair, both for Troilus's "comfort" (1.945) and for his own:

For bothe yow to plesse thus hope I
 Hereafterward; for ye ben bothe wyse,
 And konne it counseil kepe in swych a wyse
 That no man shal the wiser of it be;
 And so we may ben gladed alle thre.

(1.990–94)

Pandarus praises Troilus and Criseyde's wisdom and restraint, remarking that they are so "wyse" that they will keep their secret in "swych a wyse" that "no man shal the wiser of it be." Pandarus's play with the word *wise* here underscores his play with the love secret itself. Troilus and Criseyde are "wyse" to the affair, but "no man shal" know about it, except Pandarus (and the reader). And, Pandarus adds, such wise secret-keeping ensures that they "may ben gladed alle thre." Pandarus works for Troilus and Criseyde's pleasure, and he remarks on *their* aptitude for keeping the affair a secret, but he also implies his own adeptness at the "operations" of secrecy and says that conducting the affair will give him pleasure just as it will Troilus and Criseyde. He handily

²² For more on *fabliau* and the discomfort that Pandarus creates in the poem, see Gretchen Mieszkowski, "Chaucerian Comedy: *Troilus and Criseyde*," in *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior, Its Meaning, and Consequences*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 462 and 458. For a discussion of the history of the *fabliau* genre and of how nineteenth-century scholars, ahistorically, applied the term *fabliau* to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, see Joseph A. Dane, "The Wife of Bath's Shipman's Tale and the Invention of Chaucerian *Fabliaux*," *Modern Language Review* 99 (2004): 287–300. On Chaucer's use of *fabliau* more broadly, see also John Finlayson, "The Merchant's Tale: Literary Contexts, the Play of Genres, and Institutionalized Sexual Relations," *Anglia* 121 (2003): 557–80; and Richard F. Green, "Troilus and the Game of Love," *Chaucer Review* 13 (1979): 201–20.

turns the two of “yow” into “thre,” indicating the need for a go-between in the love affair and foreshadowing the uncomfortable “thre” in the consummation scene, which, as Gretchen Mieszkowski argues, “triggers issues not only about dirty uncles who like to watch their nieces having sex, but also about the legitimacy of the readers’ pleasures in a love story like this one.”²³ Though he vows to keep Troilus and Criseyde’s love secret, and though he praises their ability to do so as well, Chaucer marks Pandarus’s speech as belonging to *fabliau*, not *fin’amors*. Instead of endorsing a view of Troilus and Criseyde’s noble “love that oughte ben secree,” Pandarus’s speech focuses our attention on his voyeuristic motives and on the pleasure of the machinations of erotic secret keeping.

As Pandarus and Troilus begin the elaborate series of moves and countermoves that get Criseyde into bed with Troilus, they both strenuously assert that what Pandarus is doing for the lovers is *not* the behavior of a pimp. Pandarus says he has played the part of one who “maken wommen unto men to comen” (3.255), but he is quick to insist that he has done so not “for coveitise . . . / But oonly for t’abregge that distresse / For which wel neigh thow deidest” (261–62). He stresses that the chivalrous and friendly motivation for his actions—the truth of which he swears before “God, that al woot” (260)—makes his actions “cleene” (257) and not bawdy. But immediately following this assertion, Pandarus enumerates what might happen if the secret gets out:

[W]ere it wist that I, thorough myn engyn,
 Hadde in my nece yput this fantasie,
 To doon thi lust and holly to ben thyn,
 Whi, al the world upon it wolde crie,
 And seyn that I the werste trecherie
 Dide in this cas, that evere was bigonne,
 And she forlost, and thow right nought ywonne.
(274–80)

Pandarus rushes ahead of the narrative, beyond the yet to be realized consummation, to imagine the consequences of the revelation of his sexy secret. If “al the world” found out that Pandarus was playing the bawd or go-between for Troilus and Criseyde, he says, he would be accused of the “werste trecherie,” Criseyde would be “forlost,” and Troilus would be deemed a loser. But, readers might ask, if Pandarus’s intentions for the affair make it noble, as he argues, and if it is “swich an

²³ Mieszkowski, “Chaucerian Comedy,” 476.

heigh matere" that he exhorts Troilus to "holden secree" (286), then why dwell on the ridicule and disaster that Troilus and Criseyde—but *especially* Pandarus—would suffer if the secret love were to be revealed? We are invited to conclude that the "heigh matere" is only high and noble because it is *secret*. To return to Lochrie's language, the "content" of the secret here—the illicit love affair—is of less consequence than the elaborate "operations of concealment" that Pandarus sets up, ostensibly for Troilus and Criseyde's pleasure but certainly also for his own.

Though he repeatedly stresses the importance of keeping the affair secret, Pandarus lingers on lengthy descriptions of what will happen if the secret does get out, perhaps indicating his pleasure in or fascination with the salacious details of illicit affairs made public. After imagining his own defamation, he imagines Criseyde's by elaborating on the "wise clerkes" proverb that "firste vertu is to kepe tonge" (292–93). Pandarus can think of "A thousand olde stories" that feature "wommen lost through fals and foles bost" (297), but does not stop at mentioning these many tales. Instead, he goes on to lament the evils of wagging tongues, and then—pedantically—to define for Troilus what an *avauntour* is and does:

Avauntour and a lyere, al is on;
As thus: I pose, a womman grante me
Hire love, and seith that other wol she non,
And I am sworn to holden it secree,
And after I go telle it two or thre—
Iwis, I am avauntour at the leeste,
And lyere, for I breke my biheste.

(309–15)

Pandarus—despite praising Troilus for his wisdom and discretion—dwells on maids ruined by boasters' words, going so far as to give Troilus a for-instance, just to be sure that he knows exactly what it would mean to break his "biheste." Troilus objects to Pandarus's implication that he needs education about the dangers of failing "to kepe tonge":

But here, with al myn herte, I the biseche
That nevere in me thow deme swich folie
As I shal seyn: me thoughte by thi speche
That this which thow me dost for compaignie,
I sholde wene it were a bauderye.
I am nought wood, al if I lewed be!
It is nought so, that woot I wel, parde!

(393–99)

Troilus asserts that “by [Pandarus’s] speech” about illicit love and the activities of “avauntours,” listeners would assume that Pandarus is indeed engaged in “bauderye” for Troilus. Troilus echoes at least one possible conclusion of the reader: Pandarus—despite his protestations—does in fact want to be a bawd and constructs his elaborate arguments to the contrary as part of a comic mode that we see through and laugh at. Troilus perhaps recognizes Pandarus’s exhortations to keep the secret as part of the *fin’amors* secrecy imperative, but Pandarus repurposes the erotic secret for his own *fabliau*-driven ends. His lengthy discourse about ruined reputations and the revelation of erotic secrets foregrounds his unsettling interest in imagining Criseyde’s censure. As we laugh at the disconnect between Pandarus’s titillating justifications of the need for erotic secrecy and Troilus’s devotion to *fin’amors* secret-keeping, Chaucer’s text also prompts us to examine our own impulse—as readers with prior knowledge of the story’s ending—to rush ahead of the narrative and imagine both the consummation and the tragic end of the affair: we are potentially as guilty as Pandarus of fantasizing about the tragic exposure of Troilus and Criseyde’s secret affair or about Criseyde’s betrayal.

TROILUS: IMAGINING ELOPEMENT

If Pandarus’s discussion of erotic secret-keeping prompts us to imagine Criseyde’s betrayal and defamation, Troilus’s—especially in book 4—prompts us to fantasize about the lovers’ elopement as an alternative to the tragic ending. The secret would be revealed, but the lovers would escape the immediate consequences of censure by creating physical distance between themselves and those to whom the secret knowledge would have been revealed. Troilus clings to the *fin’amors* idea that his love for Criseyde “oughte ben secree”: after standing “astoned” (1.274) and “al awshaped” (316) gazing at Criseyde in the temple, he resolves that, “Lest it were wist on any manere syde, / His woo he gan dissimilen and hide” (321–22). Troilus worries repeatedly about the dangers of revealing his secret, and in the face of Pandarus’s aggressive prodding, maintains that he “hide[s] it for the beste” (581); Pandarus counters, asserting “Ne do thow nevere swich a crueltee / To hiden fro thi frend so gret a care!” (586–87). Troilus eventually capitulates and breaks his vow to “hide” his love; Chaucer does not allow Troilus to remain like Dante’s narrator, silently smiling and keeping his secret from prying friends. Nor is Troilus like Boccaccio’s narrator, who choseth to reveal

his love in poetry. Pandarus interrupts Troilus's resolve to silently love Criseyde from a distance, as we have seen, with *fabliau* and challenges the *fin'amors* secrecy imperative, changing what it means to "hide" love.

While Pandarus's speeches almost always read as *fabliau*, and while Troilus's are primarily marked as *fin'amors*, after the consummation scene Chaucer has Troilus speak as a character from "epic history" and as a pseudo-Boethian philosopher.²⁴ The uncomfortable conjunction of these disparate genres highlights the limits of the *fin'amors* genre, as several critics have argued.²⁵ But the generic friction also invites consideration of a parallel between the way that genre constrains Troilus's decisions and the way that social and political conditions constrain the production of the poem. When Pandarus suggests that Troilus ought to "Go ravysse" (4.530) Criseyde and take her "out of towne fare" (531) in order to save her from being given to the Greeks for Antenor, Troilus responds not by referencing his own "payne" or Criseyde's "honour," but rather by arguing that since Troy is now at war as a result of the "ravysshyng of wommen so by myght, / It sholde nought be suffred me to erre, / As it stant now, ne don so gret unright" (548–50). In the next stanza, he considers asking his fathers "grace" (555) in the matter, but considers it impossible: "For syn my fader, in so heigh a place / As parlement hath hire eschaunge enseled, / He nyl for me his lettre be repeled" (558–60). Troilus carefully considers the political ramifications of attempting to prevent Criseyde's departure but concludes that no course of action would enable him to keep Criseyde *and* protect the "townes goode" (553). In the following stanza, Troilus returns to his *fin'amors* concerns, wishing to avoid "violence" that would "hire herte . . . per-turbe" and to protect "hire name" and "[h]ire honour" (561–67). Yet for the first two stanzas of his reply to Pandarus, Troilus fears neither death

²⁴ Arner, "Chaucer's Second Hector," 69. I focus in this section on Troilus's switch to the epic history mode, because a discussion of Troilus's engagement with Boethian philosophy is beyond the scope of this article. It is worth noting, though, that Troilus's foray into the philosophical genre presents another kind of secrecy operation: in his paraphrase of Boethius (4.958–1082), Troilus emphasizes confusion about the extent of God's knowledge, asserting that "Ne God may nat deceyved ben, parde" (975). As Saunders reminds us, Troilus "the fatalist" misses some of the key aspects of Boethius's philosophy: "Troilus never discovers Boethius's answer to the problem of reconciling free will and predestination, that God, situated beyond time, sees all at once, past, present and future, even while man, within the temporal world, acts through his own free will" (Saunders, "Love and the Making of the Self," 143). Troilus's fatalism itself indicates his partial knowledge and the way that his (human) incapacity to know *everything* shapes what he chooses to do.

²⁵ See, for example, Arner, "Chaucer's Second Hector"; Garrison, "Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*"; Mieszkowski, "Chaucerian Comedy"; Pugh, "Christian Revelation"; and Saunders, "Love and the Making of the Self."

from the emotional intensity of his love nor humiliation or dishonor from the revelation of his relationship with Criseyde. Rather, he fears the political consequences of “ravysshyng of wommen” and of disobeying an order “enseled” in “parlement.”²⁶ In *Il Filostrato*, Troilo refuses to take Criseida away because he recognizes that doing so would jeopardize the return of Antenor and other men to the city; but if it were not for Antenor’s situation, Troilo asserts, “I would not care about breaking faith; rather I would do it [i.e., ‘ravish’ (4.65) Criseida], whatever might happen” (4.67). Chaucer excises Troilo’s conditional willingness to “break faith” with his father and his city by abducting Criseida and replaces it with a fuller, more explicit connection of Troilus’s love affair to the rape of Helen that brought about “al this werre” (4.547). Troilus refuses to abduct Criseyde to save her, rejecting a romantic narrative wherein Troilus would play the part of Lancelot or Tristan, rescuing his illicit lover from mortal danger and attempting to escape with her.²⁷ He also rejects the epic narrative of ravishment, refusing to play Paris’s part. In this moment, he recognizes that despite all of his secrecy and effort to hide the love affair—to cut it off from the public world—the actions of lovers shape and are shaped by political and social forces.²⁸

²⁶ As Garrison and others have pointed out, Troilus’s views on trafficking in women are inconsistent: for Garrison, Troilus’s “recognition” that abduction is violent, morally questionable, and politically dangerous “is fleeting. Troilus is more than willing to engage in a politically dangerous exchange of women when he wants to show Pandarus that he regards him as being as noble as himself. . . . Troilus . . . famously offers to give [Pandarus] any of his female relatives in exchange [for his help with Criseyde], notably including Helen (III, 407–13)” (Garrison, “Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” 337). I am arguing that part of what may make Troilus’s concerns about violent abduction seem “fleeting” here is the generic mismatch between these stanzas and many of his other speeches.

²⁷ In the consummation scene, Chaucer’s narrator compares Troilus and Criseyde’s entwining to the “wodebynde” (3.1231) or honeysuckle winding around the hazel, an image associated with the story of *Tristan and Isolde*. He does not explicitly reference the story in book 4, but contemporary readers might have known it well enough to compare Troilus to Tristan.

²⁸ Writing of William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*—a play that differs significantly from Chaucer’s poem but that also, I would argue, draws on a discourse of illicit love similar to that which shaped Chaucer’s text—Valerie Traub asserts, “To the extent that [Romeo and Juliet’s] erotic love is given expression in spheres untouched by the [Capulet and Montague] feud—the balcony, the bedroom, the abbey, the tomb—they succeed. But the tragedy of the play is precisely the futility of such a desire: each space of transcendent love is ultimately shown to be contained within, and even invaded by, the dominant ideology and effects of masculine violence” (*Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* [New York: Routledge, 1992], 2). Troilus and Criseyde, like the Shakespearean lovers who come after them, express their transcendent erotic love in spaces carefully insulated from “al this werre” and from the prying eyes and tongues of their society. Troilus’s remarks, surprising because they are *not* marked as *fin’amors*, make

Some critics have argued that Troilus's dogged adherence to *fin'amors* codes of honor and secrecy makes him neglect his duties as a soldier and citizen of Troy. For example, Garrison is surely right that "Troilus's seemingly private love has tangible effects on the full range of Trojan society, effects that demonstrate the social power of Troilus's interiority."²⁹ Garrison argues that those effects are damaging; she asserts that Troilus "desperately wants to maintain the illusion that his interiority is separate from the social world" and that, in order to uphold the illusion, Troilus often chooses "inaction" over an exercise of his "political authority" in saving Criseyde from exchange.³⁰ I read Troilus's inaction in books 4 and 5 as the result of competing, generically differentiated motives for secret-keeping, not—or not only—as a bid on Troilus's part to maintain the social privilege accorded to *fin'amors* lovers. It is worth noting that when he argues with Pandarus against abducting Criseyde, Troilus elevates concern for the "townes goode" and for his lady's "honour" above his personal erotic desires. Though, as we have seen, he remains puzzlingly silent during the meeting of parliament—perhaps silenced because of his inability, at that moment in the poem, to act outside of the *fin'amors* genre—at this later moment Chaucer gives him two stanzas, marked as generically distinct, in which he articulates discourses of secrecy that are different from those of the *fin'amors* genre. In these stanzas, Troilus recognizes that the time to contest parliament's—and his father's—decision to exchange Criseyde has passed; speaking out now, according to his logic, would be against the "townes goode." He maintains the secret of his love at this moment in the poem not because doing so will gain him social cachet but because doing so will prevent him from intervening—perhaps disastrously or selfishly and also perhaps ineffectually—in political events that his family and peers have already set in motion. We can assert—with Garrison and others—that Troilus's logic here is not sound and that he could wield his political power for his personal desires without disclosing his secret. But to make such an assertion moves beyond the specificity of Troilus's objections; whether he is wrong or not, he articulates social and political pressures that silence him and prevent him from publicly advocating to keep Criseyde in the city. He later tries to convince Criseyde to willingly run away with him, public opinion be damned (4.1499–526), but before

us suddenly aware, to use Traub's words, of "the futility of such a desire" (2) divorced from the social and political forces of the larger world that Chaucer creates for them.

²⁹ Garrison, "Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," 332.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 333 and 334–35.

fantasizing about and arguing for that romantic ending, he maintains the *fin'amors* concept that keeping the love affair secret will protect Criseyde's "honour" and simultaneously asserts that keeping his private desires secret is for the "townes goode." Chaucer sets Troilus's epic or historical assertions directly beside his *fin'amors* assertions, reinforcing from different genres the necessity of absolute secrecy. In that reinforcement, Chaucer invites readers—and Garrison takes up this invitation—to question the political and social pressures that Troilus articulates for *both* genres and to imagine alternative actions or endings outside the textual details of the poem.

CRISEYDE: IMAGINING DEATH

Criseyde often suffers as a result of other characters' control of secret knowledge, but she also makes decisions based on considerations of what might happen if the erotic secret of her affair were to become public. Criseyde's decisions about keeping or revealing secrets are linked to fear—first to her fear for her city's and her own safety from the Greeks, then to fear about her reputation and about the consequences of her position as a political bargaining chip in negotiations between the Trojans and the Greeks. Audiences are invited, with Criseyde, to imagine death as a release from these fears: the erotic secret might or might not be revealed after a tragic double suicide, but in either case, the lovers would escape, physically, the censure that would come from the revelation. Troilus, the narrator, and Pandarus use the verb *hiden* a total of nine times in book 1, each time with reference to Troilus's secret love, and each time foregrounding the play between secrecy and revelation that constitutes the pleasure and pain of *fin'amors* love. In contrast, the verb *hiden* does not appear at all in book 2, and appears only once in book 3, in Troilus's address to "blake nyght" (1429), which, he notes, is made "by God this world to hide / At certeyn tymes" (1430–31). Criseyde's sparring with Pandarus in book 2, instead of circling around the verb *hiden*, hinges on Pandarus's assertions about what he has to "telle" Criseyde and her exhortations for him to "come of, and telle me what [the secret] is" (310).³¹ When we meet Criseyde, she is reading about Thebes, and as

³¹ The verb *tellen* is far more common—because of useful phrases like "he tolde," "she tolde," "the storie/auctor telleth us"—than *hiden*. Chaucer uses *tellen* thirty-one times in book 1, forty-nine times in book 2, thirty-five times in book 3, twenty-one times in book 4, and fifty-two times in book 5, so no major, obvious patterns of use emerge from a simple count. It is interesting to note, though, that of the forty-nine uses of *tellen* in book 2, eigh-

Catherine Sanok argues, Criseyde has “a deep sense of the significance of the war to her personal situation.”³² Indeed, she often redirects Pandarus’s focus on joking and *fabliau* back to the Trojan social and political situation. As they circle around Pandarus’s secret, Criseyde guesses at its content: “is than th’assege aweye? / I am of Grekes so fered that I deye” (2.123–24). Criseyde speaks as a character from epic or history; that is, as one who is concerned with the fate of her city and her people. She appears—to use Sanok’s word—“incredulous”³³ that anything could be “bet” (2.128) than news of the war. While Pandarus steers their conversation toward “wordes glade, / And frendly tales, and . . . merie chiere” (148–49), Criseyde interrupts and turns again to the war and to the deeds of the city’s hero: “Of this and that they pleide . . . / Tyl she gan axen hym how Ector ferde, / That was the townes wal and Grekes yerde” (150, 153–54). Criseyde’s questions mark her desire to focus on Troy’s pressing martial problems, but Pandarus immediately uses Criseyde’s mention of Hector to turn the conversation back toward his “entente.” He segues smoothly from praising Hector into praising “ek his fresshe brother Troilus” (158). Criseyde remains deeply concerned with her city and the war until Pandarus forces her attention elsewhere. Her shock and anger at Pandarus after he reveals the “thing” (126) he came to tell her underscores the clash between her investment in martial and political topics and Pandarus’s investment in *fabliau*.

Criseyde asserts that she feels as though she will “deye” from her fear of the “Grekes”; her invocation of death as a means of demonstrating the intensity of her fear is reasonable, given the army that surrounds Troy. As Sanok reminds us, Criseyde “attributes the threat of death to military violence, not erotic desire.”³⁴ Only after the consummation scene does Criseyde describe her love for Troilus as inspiring a potentially lethal emotional intensity. The narrator and Troilus, on the other hand, cannot stop describing the intensity of Troilus’s emotions in the language of death.³⁵ When he first sees Criseyde, the narrator tells

teen (37%) occur during Pandarus and Criseyde’s first conversation at her house, and another ten (20%) occur during their next encounter, in which Pandarus thrusts Troilus’s letter into Criseyde’s bosom.

³² Sanok, “Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*,” 67. For the critical debate about what book Criseyde is reading, see, for example, Sanok, “Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*,”; Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject*; and Dominique Battles, *The Medieval Tradition of Thebes: History and Narrative in the OF Roman de Thèbes, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

³³ Sanok, “Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*,” 67.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ See Tison Pugh, *Chaucer’s (Anti-)Eroticisms and the Queer Middle Ages* (Columbus:

us that “sodeynly hym thoughte he felte dyen, / Right with hire look, the spirit in his herte: / Blissed be Love, that kan thus folk converte” (1.306–8). Seeing Criseyde’s eyes makes Troilus feel love so powerfully, according to the narrator, that he feels close to death. When he hears the Greek ambassadors ask for Criseyde in exchange for Antenor, the narrator writes that “he . . . with tho wordes wel neigh deyde” (4.151). Troilus flees to his room and—as at several other points in the poem—flings himself on his bed, “Ful lik a ded ymage, pale and wan” (235). From his prostrate position, he cries out “O deth, allas, why nyltow do me deye?” (250). In book 1, Pandarus acknowledges and is moved by Troilus’s pain, but in book 2, he aligns his own emotional state and mortality with Troilus’s. He uses this alignment to manipulate Criseyde into taking pity on Troilus and doing what he asks when he orchestrates the consummation scene. When he first reveals Troilus’s love to Criseyde, Pandarus exclaims, “Lo, here is al! What sholde I moore seye? / Doth what yow lest to make hym lyve or deye. / But if ye late hym deyen, I wol sterve” (2.321–23). Pandarus threatens Criseyde with the knowledge that her refusal to return Troilus’s love will kill “The noble Troilus” and then adds the threat of his own death. His threats place her in a double bind, as many critics have discussed.³⁶ If she chooses to love Troilus, she risks her reputation and chastity. If she chooses not to, Troilus (the second best warrior in Troy) and Pandarus (her uncle) will die. Given Pandarus’s repeated interest in women destroyed by “avauntours” of real or imagined love affairs, Criseyde may also consider that refusing to love Troilus could lead Pandarus or Troilus to make false public claims about her, endangering her reputation despite her refusal to engage in an illicit love affair. Troilus participates in this manipulative discourse, continuously repeating that his emotional and physical wellbeing depend on Criseyde’s “mercy” (3.99). Pandarus’s words and actions call our attention to the social power afforded to him by the secrecy operations of illicit love; he uses this power violently against Criseyde. The play between erotic secrecy and revelation slides rapidly into ominous manipulation, and we are jolted into a critique of several genres of secret-keeping.

Ohio State University Press, 2014), 98–101. For Pugh, the obsession with the language of death indicates a commingling of *eros* and *thanatos*; Troilus combines his desire for his beloved with his desire for death.

³⁶ See, for example, Pugh, “Christian Revelation”; Saunders, “Love and the Making of the Self”; and Cathy Hume, *Chaucer and the Cultures of Love and Marriage* (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2012).

The language of fear and death haunts the characters' decisions in book 4 about whether and how to keep their erotic intrigues secret. In books 1–3, Troilus, Pandarus, and Criseyde's assertions that they will die are primarily rhetorical and hyperbolic. In book 4, Chaucer—with Troilus's extreme lamentations and Criseyde's swoon—explores and parodies his characters' desires to actually, physically die as a result of the pain of separating from one another. As Judith Weiss has argued, the medieval swoon, "where it is not a sign of religious ecstasy . . . is a recognized response to overwhelming grief or physical pain, sympathetically received; it is closely associated with death, which on occasion is mistaken for it."³⁷ At the end of the thirteenth-century romance *La Chastelaine de Vergi*, the lady dies of a broken heart, and as Weiss points out, "In [Marie de France's] *Yonec* . . . the lady faints over her wounded lover on his bier, later faints on his tomb, then dies."³⁸ Troilus takes Criseyde's swoon for death and draws his sword, swearing to "folwe hire sone" (4.1176); in this scene, Chaucer echoes romantic swoons from older stories and mimics but truncates the story of Pyramus and Thisbe.³⁹ Overcome with woe and the thought of leaving Troilus, Criseyde says,

"O Jove, I deye, and mercy I beseche!
 Help, Troilus!" And therewithal hire face
 Upon his brest she leyde and loste speche—
 Hire woful spirit from his propre place,
 Right with the word, alwey o poynt to pace.
 And thus she lith with hewes pale and grene,
 That whilom fressh and fairest was to sene.

(4.1149–55)

Criseyde's words and actions in book 4—in contrast to those from book 2—mark her as a character from romance, and Troilus responds to her swoon in generic kind. He examines her and, seeing that "She

³⁷ Weiss, "Modern and Medieval Views on Swooning: The Literary and Medical Contexts of Fainting in Romance," in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 123.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁹ See Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject*, 127; and James W. Spisak, "Chaucer's Pyramus and Thisbe," *Chaucer Review* 18 (1984): 204–10. Spisak argues that in *The Legend of Good Women*, "Chaucer took the basic details of [Ovid's] Pyramus and Thisbe myth without embellishing them. Instead he changed the frame device, shifting the reader's attention from the metamorphosis to the canonization of Thisbe" (205). In *Troilus and Criseyde*, the myth is referenced much less explicitly, with Thisbe's death less ambiguous and with, of course, a truncated ending.

cold was, and withouten sentement" (1177), he takes her physical appearance as "a pregnant argument / That she was forth out of this world agon" (1179–80). Troilus draws his sword and cries, "Criseyde, o swete herte deere, / Receyve now my spirit!" (1209–10); he is poised to enact Pyramus's suicide, but suddenly, "as God wolde, of swough therwith sh'abreyde" (1212). As Lee Patterson notes, "What had promised to be an ending . . . is revealed instead as anticlimactic repetition."⁴⁰ Instead of dying deaths that would allow the lovers to "be victims of historical circumstance who would exemplify the treachery of the world without being themselves subject to censure," they awaken.⁴¹ Chaucer represents them instead as negotiating their allegiances to Trojan citizenship as they consider keeping or revealing their secret. Weiss finds "in the romances of Chrétien [de Troyes] some scenes where swoons are depicted with tongue in cheek."⁴² Chaucer follows both Ovid and Chrétien in bringing humor into this scene, inviting us to laugh as he diverts both lovers from the romantic death for erotic secrecy that they both seem to desire.⁴³

WHAT IF? ENDINGS AND THE DESIRE TO KNOW

Throughout *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer uses the machinations of secrecy to prompt readers to imagine a series of endings for his characters that are not possible within the generic and narrative constraints of the poem: with Pandarus, we imagine Criseyde's titillating—at least for Pandarus—defamation in the wake of a nonexistent betrayal by Troilus. With Troilus, we imagine the lovers' escape, through ravishment or elopement, from the political necessity of Criseyde's exchange. Indeed, as Criseyde looks "rewfully . . . upon Troie" (5.729), she too wishes for this ending, saying, "Allas, I ne hadde trowed on youre loore / And went with yow, as ye me redde er this!" (736–37). With Criseyde, we imagine a tragic double suicide wherein Troilus and Criseyde enact Pyramus and Thisbe's ending, escaping in death from both Criseyde's betrayal and Troy's destruction. But Chaucer truncates these fantasies,

⁴⁰ Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject*, 128.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴² Weiss, "Modern and Medieval Views," 125.

⁴³ Indeed, Troilus in particular seems confused at a few points about why he *has not* dropped dead of his broken heart: as he laments parliament's decision to exchange Criseyde, he asks, "O wery goost, that errest to and fro, / Why nyltow fleen out of the wofulleste / Body that evere myghte on grounde go?" (4.302–4); and despairing as he speaks with Pandarus, he exclaims, "whi nyl myn herte breste?" (580).

often with comedy and usually with the sudden awareness of our own desire to ask, with the characters, "What if things had been different?" The narrator, too, prompts us to ask "what if?": he repeatedly laments that he has to tell such a sad tale about Troilus and Criseyde's love, but also uses his position outside of their story and his engagement with his "auctor"—that is, his privileged access to knowledge unavailable to other characters in the poem—to judge the choices and events within the story. As the "noyse of peple" (4.183) responds to Hector and clamors to exchange Criseyde for Antenor, the narrator comments, "O Juvenal, lord, trewe is thy sentence" that a "cloude of errorr" prevents people from being able "to discerne / What best is" (197–201). For, the narrator asserts, though the people "desiren" (201) Antenor, they have made a mistake,

For he was after traitour to the town
Of Troye. Allas, they quytte hym out to rathe!
O nyce world, lo, thy discrecioun!
Criseyde, which that nevere dide hem scathe,
Shal now no lenger in hire blisse bathe.

(204–8)

The narrator blames the people for their political "errorr" in choosing a future traitor over Criseyde. His accusation is, of course, unfair: how could the people have known that Antenor would prove disloyal? But as the narrator indulges in a smug moment of judgment, he highlights the knowledge of subsequent events that enables him to see parliament's decision as a mistake. Despite his criticism, he also underscores the necessity and the risk of making decisions with partial knowledge; the people who speak out in favor of redeeming Antenor do so, because they recognize that Troy needs men and that Antenor "is ek oon the grettest of this town" (192). Their arguments only look foolish from the narrator's perspective. The narrator's exclamation invites us to join him in lamenting the people's "errorr" and in imagining an alternate ending in which the people had listened to Hector and retained Criseyde. Such an ending is not possible given the constraints of the story Chaucer has chosen to tell, and it is not possible given the limited knowledge with which the people in Chaucer's representation of the Trojan parliament make their decisions. We imagine it, nonetheless, along with the narrator, even as his words prompt attention to the mismatch between the people's rational arguments for Antenor's importance and the narrator's knowing assertion of Antenor's future guilt.

Chaucer retells an old story. He plays readers' desires for the ending we want, because we know it is coming—the secret that we are in on—against our desires to see a change, even a radical one. The ending that we know is coming works to prevent “What if?” scenarios, even as the poem's profusion of genres and intertexts raise those very scenarios. Despite the narrator's “heroic struggle with his material”—in McAlpine's words—to protect Criseyde from censure, we are prevented—often by the narrator, in spite of himself—from seeing Criseyde's decision to stay in the Greek camp and ally herself with Diomedes as an appropriate, politically strategic decision.⁴⁴ In adapting Diomedes's wooing of Criseida from *Il Filostrato*, Chaucer cuts Criseida's thoughts about how attractive Diomedes is (6.33), keeping her focus instead on Diomedes's “estat” and on the “perel of the town, / And that she was allone and hadde nede / Of frendes help” (5.1025–27) as the motivators for her attraction to him.⁴⁵ Criseyde has not been able to persuade Calkas to send her back to Troy, as she had hoped (694–98), and her fear prevents her from striking out for Troy at night by herself (701–7). Given these contexts, both of which Chaucer adds to the story, her acceptance of Diomedes's courtship as “frendes help” appears perfectly reasonable. But readers already know the ending of this story, and the narrator repeatedly references her betrayal, refocusing our attention on Troilus's suffering and eventual anger because of his love for Criseyde. When Troilus ascends and laughs, it is perhaps because he is finally free of the constraints of *fin'amors* and his other genres, happy to see how genre shaped what he could and could not do in the story. His perspective shifts and he can envision the whole story, perhaps even more fully than the narrator could and than we readers can with our partial knowledge and generic expectations. The ongoing debate about what Troilus's laugh might mean also points to what we still do not know and cannot know.⁴⁶ Chaucer keeps the meaning of or motivation for Troilus's laugh a secret because, even in his apotheosis, Troilus invites us to consider how much we want to know and how much we still do not and cannot ever know about this story. *Troilus and Criseyde* drama-

⁴⁴ McAlpine, *Genre*, 45.

⁴⁵ On Chaucer's use in 5.995–1099 of Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, see Arner, “Chaucer's Second Hector”; and Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*.

⁴⁶ For a recent take on this debate, see Ben Parsons, “‘Verray goddes apes’: Troilus, Seynt Idiot, and Festive Culture,” *Chaucer Review* 45 (2011): 275–98. See also Mieszkowski, “Chaucerian Comedy”; Papka, “Transgression”; Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject*; Sanok, “Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*”; and Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*.

tizes the emotional highs and lows gained through manipulation—by characters and by Chaucer himself—of the operations of secrecy, setting up and undermining our expectations for the characters and frequently turning our attention to our own desire to fantasize about what might have been and about what we fundamentally cannot know.⁴⁷

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