

The new idiom and rhythm are there  
 Not subject to calamity or tied by time  
 But expressing in terms of the known  
 The language of the peripheries of speculation,  
 The harmony of the inner and outermost spheres.

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## CHAU CER

### (1) TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

THE bibliography which Chaucer might be said—from a modern viewpoint—to have omitted to append to his work, the references to sources which he might have subjoined as notes to his poems had he been modern enough to follow a recent procedure, would be most extensive—and as distracting in effect perhaps as the notes to the *Waste Land* have proved. The detective work which this omission has provoked reveals that almost every other line in Chaucer has been deliberately lifted from somewhere or other and that it frequently happens that lines from quite diverse sources adjoin each other. Yet this diversity of origin is invariably quite unfelt in the result which is neither Machaut nor Deschamps, Dante nor Boccaccio, but something distinctly Chaucer. It is this Chaucerian character which is the object for the critic's attention and from the elucidation of which the critic ought not to allow himself to be distracted. If Chaucer is not only quite distinct from but greater than any of his 'sources'—except, of course, Dante—that greatness evidently resides in this Chaucerian character which may so easily be lost sight of in the excitement of the hunt for 'sources.'

I would not be thought to wish to belittle the work that has been done to show Chaucer's direct indebtedness, for example, to Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun and the *fabliaux*, to Machaut and Deschamps—his French contemporaries—to Ovid and Virgil and other Latin poets either directly or as already mediaevalized in the *Roman d'Eneas* and the *Ovide moralisé*, to the *Roman de Troie* of Benoit de Sainte-Maure, to Cicero and Boethius, to numerous mediaeval Latin books—including books on astrology, alchemy, physics, medicine which Chaucer was evidently thoroughly acquainted with—to the *Nova Poetria* of Geoffrey of Vinsauf the rhetorician, to Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch. It establishes the really important fact that (since European poetry of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had its *locus* in Tuscany and Provence, Italy and France) Chaucer's appearance as a great European in English (for Chaucer is of England and very individually so) was conditioned by an enormous labour of assimilation and adaptation impossible to any poet who did not possess in himself quite extraordinary genius. I have no doubt that something of critical value might be gained from a line-by-line comparison between Chaucer

and his 'sources,' but the risks are considerable and the ultimate fruit perhaps not worth the immense labour spent. Such an investigation points beyond the bounds not only of what is readily practicable but of what is relevant to criticism, which is necessarily concerned primarily with what is, however it arrived at being so; and that, in this case, is not any of the 'sources' listed, nor even a combination of them, but Chaucer, whom it seems sensible therefore to approach directly. My approach will therefore be that of the general reader of poetry for whom one or two remarks of Mr. Eliot's about Dante have seemed more freshly to illumine Chaucer—that is, to be more relevant to criticism of Chaucer—than anything that has been written more ostensibly about Chaucer.

What may at first disconcert the general reader coming from the English poetry of the great period—the seventeenth century—is that in Chaucer there are not the ambiguities of phrase there are in Shakespeare, Donne and Marvell. Chaucer's phrases are disconcertingly direct to a reader accustomed to the complexities, the incrustations of meaning involved in Shakespearean metaphor. Similes, not metaphors, are what are important in Chaucer, but these are seldom ambiguous and are often simply aids to the visualization which is important for allegory and, for that very reason, important even in such of Chaucer as is not classifiable as allegory. The reader might easily be deceived into supposing that no profundities comparable to those of Shakespeare are concealed within this crystal clearness and directness of phrase. But if here there are few phrases that are metaphorical in the Shakespearean way, that may be because the poem as a whole is—to borrow from Mr. Eliot on Dante—itself a kind of metaphor; again I think not only of those poems which are classifiable as allegories, but of those much more Chaucerian poems which it is not so simple to classify.

The account of Chaucer according to which he progressed from allegory to realism tends to be misleading. His most realistic poems—which are also his best poems—have not entirely, or even essentially, escaped from allegory, but are rather extensions of allegory on to the realistic plane of his observation. Realism is not at all incompatible with allegory as we are apt to imagine. Mediaeval allegory and personification supplied Chaucer's observation with a guiding method and his judgment with an initial scale of moral values which his observation gradually clarified and which clarified his observation. Underlying the realism remain the allegorical and moral patterns. The poems gain in profundity and variety from the mutual enrichment of these multiple layers of meaning, though the Chaucerian phrase in itself is to the end remarkable for its crystalline and limpid simplicity.

Chaucer again may seem pale and insipid—prosaic almost—by comparison with the hyperbolic splendours of Elizabethan rhetoric. There is no exaggeration in Chaucerian art. For there is art—very deliberate and laboriously acquired art rigidly economized and disciplined—behind this wonderful simplicity and naturalness. The simplicity and naturalness are those which belong to the profoundly civilized and must not be mistaken for the unsophisticated naivety

the Romantics sought after. Beside that simplicity the Elizabethan pompous magnificence often looks barbaric. Professor Manly in his valuable pamphlet, *Chaucer and the Rhetoricians*, indicates how thoroughly grounded Chaucer was in the mediaeval 'rhetoric' which he was sufficiently skilled in, and conscious of, to parody in the *Nonne Preestes Tale*. But this 'rhetoric'—often at its most noticeable a series of *exempla*—leaves the simplicity and directness of Chaucerian phrase intact. There is no resemblance between it and the Elizabethan poetic 'rhetoric.' Here we are using 'rhetoric' in two quite different senses.

The elements of Chaucer's mature art are present from the beginning, and are perhaps more recognizable there, in the early allegories, than in the great poems. The conventional figures and types first exhibited in the allegories become more and more particularized, and thus individualized, as Chaucer's poetry matures and the realism of his personal observation and unrivalled experience of his world is grafted on to them. The figures of Ydelnesse and of Mirthe in the first part—the Chaucerian part—of the English version of the *Romaunt of the Rose* have implicit in them several of the later 'characters'.<sup>1</sup> Here, for example, are some basic traits of the appearance of the Prioress (though she is, as a whole, perhaps nearer Curteisye than Ydelnesse):

Hir nose of good proporcioun,  
 Hir yen greye as a faucoun. . .  
 With litel mouth, and round to see:  
 A clove chin eek hadde she.

But Ydelnesse is so much a generalization that she is basically many other diverse Chaucerian ladies. Mirthe equally is the generalized basis not only of the young Squier but of the various other Chaucerian young bachelors—and indeed of some of the young women as well.

As round as appel was his face,  
 Ful rody and whyt in every place,  
 Fetys he was and wel beseye,  
 With metely mouth and yen greye;  
 His nose by mesure wrought ful right;  
 Crisp was his heer, and eek ful bright.

Visualization, which is obviously of primary importance in these personifications, was to remain important in the later 'characters'; the similes—

As round as appel was his face. . . .

Hir heer was as yelowe of hewe  
 As any basin scoured newe

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<sup>1</sup>Compare *The Compleynte unto Pite*:

And fresshe Beautee, Lust and Jolitee,  
 Assured Manner, Youthe and Honestee.

The 'assured Manner' belongs also to Criseyde and to several of the young women of the *Tales*.

—are directly aimed at producing this visualization. Even more distinctly the elements of the satiric portraits of ecclesiastics that enliven the *Canterbury Tales* are already present in the second part of the *Romaunt of the Rose*. The Monk, the Friar and the others are potential in Fals-Semblant.

Amour. 'Thou prechest abstinence also?'

F. Sem. 'Sir, I wol fillen, so mote I go,  
My paunche of gode mete and wyne,  
As shulde a maister of divyne;  
For how that I me pover feyne,  
Yit alle pore folk I disdeyne.

'I love bet the acqueyntaunce  
Ten tymes, of the king of Fraunce,  
Than of pore man of mylde mode,  
Though that his soule be also gode . . .  
Let bere hem to the spitel anoon,  
But, for me, comfort gete they noon,  
But a riche sike usurere  
Wolde I visyte and drawe nere;  
Him wol I comforte and rehetē,  
For I hope of his gold to gete . . .  
I rekke not of pore men,  
Hir astate is not worth an hen.  
Where findest thou a swinker of labour  
Have me unto his confessour?

The more vigorous realism in this part of the poem:

But Beggars with these hodes wyde,  
With sleighe and pale faces lene,  
And greye clothes not ful clene,  
But fretted ful of tatarwagges,  
And highe shoes, knopped with dagges,  
That frouncen lyke a quaile-pype,  
Or botes riving as a gype

—belongs both to allegory and to the observed world. The realistic phantasmagoria is grouped and ordered according to a pattern of personified virtues and vices. The Sins of Coveityse and Glotony—as when Fals-Semblant speaks of 'fyn vitaille,'

That we, under our clothes wyde  
Maken thurgh our golet glyde,

(the phrase recurs in the sermon on 'glotony' in the *Pardoner's Tale*) stand out from the rest as they continue to do throughout Chaucer. The disenchanting intelligence present in this part of the poem is to become (one feels) incorporated in Chaucer's superior intelligence. The presence of this maturer intelligence forces a revision of the values of the first part of the poem, submitting love ('It is a sykenesse of the thought') and the courtly convention to the criticism of Raisoun.

For to gete and have the Rose  
Which maketh thee so mate and wood  
That thou desirist noon other good.

No 'good' other than 'to gete and have the Rose' has been proposed in the first part. There is thus in the second part a shift of values resulting both from a sceptical attitude to love and from a realization that there are other values. The fact that a section (Fragment B) of this part of the translation is certainly not Chaucer's does not, I think, affect this argument.

If we look through such poems as *The Boke of the Duchesse*, *The Parlement of Foules* and *The Legend of Good Women*, we observe a deepening humanization of the allegorical designs, but the original allegorizing, personifying impulse equally continues. The man in black in *The Boke of the Duchesse* slips back or is extended—according to the point of view—from being a person into being at the same time a personification:

For I am sorwe and sorwe is I.

Though *The Boke of the Duchesse* is almost entirely translation, it is impossible to mistake in it already the characteristic Chaucerian tenderness:

. . . for be it never so derke  
Me thinketh I see hir ever mo.

In *The Legend of Good Women* the Chaucerian knowledge of the human heart is already profoundly there. It shows itself in the descriptions of Lucretia and of Tarquin unable to get her image out of his mind:

Th' image of her recording alwey newe;  
'Thus lay her heer, and thus fresh was her hewe;  
Thus sat, thus spak, thus span; this was her chere,  
Thus fair she was, and this was her manere.'  
Al this conceit his herte hath now y-take.  
And, as the see, with tempest al to-shake,  
That, after whan the storm is al ago,  
Yet wol the water quappe a day or two,  
Right so, thogh that her forme wer absent,  
The plesaunce of her forme was present<sup>2</sup>—

and in the human feeling, delicately rendered because delicately understood, when Medea says:

Why lyked me thy yelowhe heir to see  
More than the boundes of myn hoestee,

and in the peculiar naivety of Pyramus and Thisbe:

Thus wolde they seyn—'allas! thou wikked wal'—

which contrasts with, and yet belongs to the same world of primary feeling as, the brutality of their end:

And at the last her love than hath she founde  
Beting with his heles on the grounde,  
Al blody, and therwith-al a-bak she sterte,  
And lyke the wawes quappe gan her herte—

while the celebrated description of Ariadne deserted (2185-98)

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<sup>2</sup>There is a rough draft of this theme, which we find recurring, in *Anelida and Arcite* (133 *et seq.*).

which has so appealed to the romantic taste of a later age gains—by comparison with the equally brilliant ‘tapestry piece’ of Dido and Aeneas passing to hunting (1188–1211)—a third dimension from its conveyance of the feeling of loss at the heart of the distraction, and the consequent tact, as well as sympathetic accuracy, with which distracted human behaviour is rendered. These passages could all be paralleled in the *Canterbury Tales*; even the same phrases keep recurring.

Chaucer, as initially a *trouvère*, is evidently thoroughly exercised and accomplished in metrical skill. But the suppleness of life—the speaking voice—is there early (at least to judge by the poems that survive in the canon) especially in dialogue. The bird ‘flytings’ of the *Parlement of Foules* illustrate that allegory is not incompatible with dramatic dialogue.

‘Lo here! a parfit reson of a goos!’  
 Quod the sperhauk; ‘never mot she thee!  
 Lo, swich hit is to have a tonge loos’ . . .  
 ‘Now fy, cherl!’ quod the gentil tercelet,  
 ‘Out of the dunghil com that word ful right,  
 Thou canst noght see which thing is well be-set:  
 Thou farest by love as oules doon by light . . .  
 ‘Ye! have the glotoun fild ynogh his paunche,  
 Then are we wel!’ seyde the merlioun;  
 ‘Thou mordrer of the heysugge on the braunche . . .

The lesser poems (and some of the greater too) are on the whole felt to be too diffuse, but the tone is often pleasantly intimate and humorous. They are composed evidently for a leisurely, as well as leisured, gossiping society. *The Hous of Fame* is probably the most garrulous. How far the garrulity here is that of conscious self-dramatization—the eagle of the poem is correspondingly garrulous—is hard to say. This informal poem must not be read solemnly. To have in higher admiration Morris and the pre-Raphaelites when reading it (as some of the commentators seem to have had) might be fatal to it—unless it were fatal to the pre-Raphaelites. Even the way the comparison with Dante is made is apt to be misleading as well as damaging. There is, of course, a correspondence in the design and even—as in Chaucer’s poetry in general—in the actual handling of the words, at least when compared with Shakespeare’s. The similes are clarifying—often visually.

But as a blinde man stert a hare . . .  
 . . . and ful eek of windowes  
 As flakes falle in grete snowes . . .  
 The halle was al ful y-wis  
 Of hem that writen olde gestes  
 As ben on treës rokkes nestes . . .  
 As men a pot-ful bawme helde  
 Among a basket ful of roses.

But Chaucer is putting this design and method which he shares with Dante—and may here have partly adapted from Dane—to a

different use. In spite of what has been said about it being a failure to scale the Dantean heights—Dante being in any case wrongly, of course, associated with the Miltonic sublime—the poem is quite unpretentious in tone and belongs to the realm of the fantastic serio-comic. Allegory need not be solemn; it is here, at its more relaxed, burlesque in a personal way (as when Chaucer borne upwards in the eagle's talons wonders

Wher Joves wol me stellifye  
or in such an aside as  
As fyn as ducat in Venyse  
Of whiche to lyte al in my pouche is?)

But at its more serious and responsible—and important—it is more gravely ironic.

But what art thou that seyst this tale,  
That werest on thy hose a pale,  
And on thy tipet swiche a belle!  
'Madame,' quod he, 'sooth to telle,  
I am that ilke shrewe, y-wis,  
That brende the temple of Isidis  
In Athenes, lo, that citee.'  
'And wherfor didest thou so?' quod she.  
'By my thrift,' quod he, 'madame,  
I wolde fayn han had a fame,  
As other folk hadde in the toun,  
Al-though they were of greet renoun  
For hir vertu and for hir thewes;  
Thoughte I, as greet a fame han shrewes,  
Thogh hit be but for shrewednesse,  
As gode folk han for goodnesse;  
And sith I may not have that oon,  
That other nil I noght for-goon.  
And for to gette of Fames hyre,  
The temple sette I al a-fyre.

There allegory and ironic contemplation of human folly are one.

'What?' quod I. 'The grete soun,'  
Quod he, 'that rumbleth up and down  
In Fames Hous, ful of tydinges,  
Bothe of fair speche and chydinges,  
And of fals and soth compounded . . .  
Nay, dred thee not therof,' quod he,  
'Hit is nothing wil byten thee:  
Thou shalt non harm have, trewely.'

Fame—one of the primary objects of human folly—is as air and vanity. The fantastic again, as in the following description of a true and a false rumour meeting, is an element of the irony:

And somtyme saugh I tho, at ones,  
A lesing and a sad soth-sawe,  
That gonne of aventure drawe  
Out at a windowe for to pace;

And, when they metten in that place,  
 They were a-chekked bothe two,  
 And neither of hem moste out go;  
 For other so they gonne croude,  
 Til eche of hem gan cryen loude,  
 'Lat me go first!' 'Nay, but lat me!  
 And here I wol ensuren thee  
 With the nones that thou wolt do so,  
 That I shal never fro thee go,  
 But be thyn owne sworn brother!  
 We will medle us ech with other,  
 That no man, be he never so wrothe,  
 Shal han that oon of two, but bothe  
 At ones, al beside his leve,  
 Come we a-morwe or on eve,  
 Be we cryed or stille y-rouned.'  
 Thus saugh I fals and sooth compounded  
 Togeder flee for oo tydinge.

The expository, explicatory passage in which the eagle like a 'clerk' (or a modern professor of physical science) informs Chaucer how sounds travel to Fame's House, besides being excellent parody—intellectual pomposity and pedantic portentousness conveyed in the rhythm—enforces the recognition of vanity, the sense of emptiness, which is the basis of the irony. The high wisdom of the mediaeval poet, hostile to all forms of illusion and delusion ('fantasye')—

'O Crist,' thoughte I, 'that art in blisse,  
 Fro fantom and illusioun  
 Me save!' and with devocioun  
 Myn yën to the heven I caste,

is related to his clarifying power. Chaucer's growing rationalizing faculty and his inherited religious feeling—at its highest—are not antagonistic.

There is nothing in later English poetry so diffuse that is at the same time of such ultimate complexity—and fineness of quality—as *Troilus and Criseyde* except the magnificently, insolently slapdash *Don Juan*. But, whereas Chaucer's poem means that Chaucer belonged to his great spiritual civilisation, Byron's is the work of an independent aristocratic spirit disdainful of a civilization recognized as inferior. Chaucer's poem contrasts in its diffuseness with the verse tales of Crabbe the best of which are successes of concentration allied to wit. The comparison of *Troilus and Criseyde* with the eighteenth-century novel is not altogether fortuitous, though the sophistication of its verse corresponds to a sophistication of mind superior to that of an eighteenth-century novelist. Both were composed for an audience prepared—and at liberty—to linger with the tale; in contrast to the Elizabeth play in which the 'strong necessity of time' compelled events of great magnitude and moment into 'the two hours' traffic of the stage' and in which, therefore, every spoken phrase had to count enormously. Though the verse of *Troilus and Criseyde* is serenely accomplished and at ease, it is

scarcely more concentrated than the prose of a novel, and the poem's complexity cannot begin to be felt in a phrase and seldom in any single short passage. Any analysis—any attempt to sound the poem's death and disentangle its rich variety of meaning—necessarily involves simplification which cannot, in this case, immediately be corrected by the quotations.

The most tempting, and the most risky, of these simplifications is to consider the poem as built upon contrasts between three 'characters'—Troilus, Criseyde and Pandarus. Yet this method has, in this particular case, such obvious advantages that in spite of the risk—that of reducing the variety of the poem to three 'psychological studies'—it is substantially the method I shall, with certain modifications and safeguards, adopt. I shall endeavour to keep in mind that the Troilus, Criseyde and Pandarus 'characters' are elements in the poem, each being associated or identified with a distinct group of values, and I shall proceed by examination of particular passages hoping that thus the complexity of the poem will less elude us. No one short passage will yield such a harvest as a passage of Shakespeare or a poem of Marvell or Donne—or, for that matter, of Pope, Blake, Hopkins, Yeats or Eliot. But by examining at various places the poetry, which is all that exists in some sense objectively, I shall hope to reach out to the general design without losing contact with the varying stream of the actual poetry.

The Pandarus element is the most important if we consider that it is its presence which most affects the poem's meaning. The first entrance of Pandarus (Book One, stanzas 79 *et seq.*) shows him a goliard—in the clash between the sacred and profane a protagonist of 'jolytee' and 'lustiness' and disrespectful of 'holinesse.'

God save hem that bi-seged han our toun,  
And so can leye our jolytee on presse,  
And bring our lusty folk to holinesse!

Though he ostensibly mistakes the cause of Troilus' trouble, it is explained that he understands his friend's nature very well and is proceeding diplomatically. Yet for all his superior worldly wisdom he is a comic figure and remains in some respects an inferior and himself despised of women—

Thou coudest never in love thy-selven wisse;  
How devel maystow bringen me to blisse?

—his practical wisdom being (as Troilus thinks) a matter of 'proverbes' and 'olde ensamples,' such as might have been acquired from the books studied in the schools, rather than of successful personal experience.

Nor other cure canstow noon for me.  
Eek I nil not be cured, I wol deye;  
What knowe I of the quene Niobe?

Lat be thyne olde ensamples, I thee preye.

But Troilus is at the same time revealing his own drooping proclivity ('Eek I nil not be cured, I wol deye') as well as suspected limitations of Pandarus.

In Book Two (stanzas 12 *et seq.* and stanzas 157 *et seq.*) Pandarus and Criseyde, uncle and niece, unfold in association with each other. When Pandarus calls, Criseyde and two other ladies—the serious background of their own lives being the siege of Troy—are listening to the story of the Siege of Thebes being read to them by a maid, and at once there is all the appearance of a clash in the mockery that breaks out when, noticing the book, he asks:

'For goddes love, what seith it? tel it us.  
Is it of love? O, some good ye me lere!'  
'Uncle,' quod she, 'your maistresse is not here!'  
With that they gonnen laughe.

It is plain they regard him as a buffoon. In the love-war opposition Criseyde and her ladies thus appear to take their stand resolutely on the side of the serious public business of war. But this clash between uncle and niece is more apparent than real. There is more identity of instinct and temperament than at first appears. The flippant, disrespectful tone of Criseyde's—

How the bisshop, as the book can telle,  
Amphiorax, fil thurgh the ground to helle

is goliardic; Pandarus persists—enforcing the books-life opposition—

Quod Pandarus, 'al this knowe I myselve,  
And al th'assege of Thebes and the care;  
For her-of been ther maked bokes twelve;—  
But lat be this, and tel me how ye fare';

and finally he introduces, with some chance of ultimate success, the theme not only of 'Throw away your books,' but, more recklessly, of 'Throw away your widow's weeds':

Do wey your book, rys up, and lat us daunce,  
And lat us don to May som observaunce.

Pandarus is, in advice to another, the protagonist of the worldly life and the joy of the natural heart as opposed to book-learning, the widow's seclusion and religion. The offer of this life appeals to Criseyde's womanish instinct as the false note in her over-emphatic reply betrays. The exaggerated holiness and pretence of outraged decorum turn into perhaps not wholly unconscious burlesque.

It sete me wel bet ay in a cave  
To bidde, and rede on holy seyntes lyves:  
Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves.

Yet she persists in simulated misunderstanding. Pandarus hints that he knows something that would be good news to her if she knew. To those in the besieged city good news could only mean, one might suppose, one thing; and so, returning to the theme of besieged cities, Criseyde responds:

For goddes love; is than th'assege awaye?  
I am of Grekes so ferd that I deye.

There are the additional ironies that Criseyde's virtue is being besieged though she does not yet fully realize it, and perhaps (for I suppose the reader was presumed already to know the original

story) that it was a Greek, Diomede, who finally won—or betrayed—her. Pandarus ingeniously arouses his niece's curiosity without satisfying it (stanzas 18–21), introduces Troilus' name and praises (stanzas 22 *et seq.*), reiterates the theme of—

But yet I seye, aryseth, lat us daunce,  
And cast your widwes habit to mischaunce:  
What list yow thus your-self to disfigure?—

and enforces his offer of a fuller life with the eternal plea of the brevity of life, reminding her how beauty succumbs to age (stanza 57). The surprising life-likeness of the leave-taking when Pandarus is about to tell her finally the name of her lover—

With that she gan hir eyen down to caste,  
And Pandarus to coghe gan a lyte—

seems to arise from the mutual recognition that neither has been so innocent as, when playing their parts, they have seemed. Pandarus moves—returns, rather—into the sphere of a closer intimacy. When he gazes on her she asks

Sey ye me never er now?

Criseyde's mask—that of the pious widow—further disintegrates under the shock of Pandarus' revelation that the young prince is her lover. Criseyde is a figure viewed periodically under a comic (even satiric) light partly reflected from the fully comic Pandarus and searchlighting her frailties and refuges of self-deceit.

(Stanza 66) And if this man slee here him-self, allas!  
In my presence, it wol be no solas.  
What men wolde of hit deme—

(Stanza 72) 'Can he wel speke of love?' quod she, 'I preye,  
Tel me, for I the bet me shal purveye.'

(Stanza 78) For man may love, of possibiltee,  
A womman, so, his hearte may to-breste,  
And she nought love ayein, but if hir leste.

Much of Criseyde is of course the conventional mediaeval satire against women; but the life-likeness proceeds from Chaucer's profound knowledge.

When Pandarus again visits his niece (Book Two, stanzas 157 *et seq.*) as the bearer of a letter from Troilus he first obtrudes his own 'hopeless passion'—

I may not slepe never a Mayes morwe;  
I have a jolly wo, a lusty sorwe—

but his woe is 'joly,' his sorrow 'lusty,' and burlesques Troilus'; his joyous animality ensures his persistence as a comic figure, burlesquing the tragic Troilus.

'Now by your feyth, myn uncle, 'quod she, 'dere,  
What maner windes gydeth yow now here?  
Tel us your joly wo and your penaunce,  
How ferforth be ye in loves daunce.'  
'By god,' quod he, 'I hoppe alwey bihinde!  
And she to-laugh, it thoughte hir herte breste,

Quod Pandarus, 'loke alwey that ye finde  
Game in myn hood. . . .'

The fantastic image of the ship guided by the wind sets the tone. Love here is spoken of in the ancient figure of a dance, with Pandarus in the role of the parodying clown, the satyr burlesquing the dance of love, yet consciously an inferior—

I hoppe alwey behinde.

Criseyde's common humanity ('Go we dyne') brings her down sufficiently to Pandarus' level to talk with him easily in the intimacy of the uncle and niece relation—

With that they wenten arm in arm y-fere  
In-to the gardin from the chaumbre doun.

(With Troilus also Pandarus is a familiar, but in their case a contrast of opposites emerges). After the long talk in the privacy of the garden—

Therwith she lough, and seyde, 'go we dyne.'  
And he gan at him-self to jape faste,  
And seyde, 'nece, I have so greet a pyne  
For love that every other day I faste'—  
And gan his beste japes forth to caste;  
And made hir so to laughe at his folye,  
That she for laughter wende for to dye.

—Pandarus again plays the buffoon, provoking his niece's laughter at his own expense ('gan at him-self to jape faste') with the profane tongue-in-the-cheek gesture ('every other day I faste') so that it is lowering for Criseyde to laugh so immoderately at him as she is accustomed to do. (Helen is similarly lowered in Pandarus' talk—'For she may leden Paris as hir leste'). There is still more 'game' between uncle and niece (Stanza 169)—

Er he was war, she took him by the hood,  
And seyde, 'ye were caught er that ye wiste.'

But behind these frivolous disguises and gambollings the contrivances of the love intrigue set in motion by Pandarus ('But god and Pandare wiste al what this mente') work.

Pandarus' visit to Criseyde the morning after the lovers, through his agency, have been brought to bed (Book Three, stanzas 223-225) has a broad, ribald quality in painful disenchanting contrast to the confused mystic-physical rapture of the lovers' union. Pandarus' coarse obscene aspect is obtruded—

Seyde, 'al this night so reyned it, alas!  
That al my drede is that ye, nece swete,  
Han litel layser had to slepe and mete;  
Al night,' quod he, 'hath reyn so do me wake,  
That som of us, I trowe, hir hedes ake.'

And ner he com, and seyde, 'how stont it now  
This mery morwe, nece, how can ye fare?'  
Criseyde answerde, 'never the bet for yow,  
Fox that ye been, god yeve your herte care!

God helpe me so, ye caused al this fare,  
Trow I,<sup>8</sup> quod she, 'for alle your wordes whyte;  
O! who-so seeth yow knoweth yow ful lyte!'

With that she gan hir face for to wrye  
With the shete, and wex for shame al reed;  
And Pandarus gan under for to pryde,  
And seyde, 'nece, if that I shal ben deed,  
Have here a swerd, and smyteth of myn heed.'  
With that his arm al sodeynly he thriste  
Under hir nekke, and at the laste hir kiste.

The fox image belongs to the unsophisticated, rustic-comic beast-fable *milieu*, and, as an image of the betrayer, merges into the progressive disillusion—related to a succession of betrayals—that is the process of the poem.<sup>8</sup> The deterioration of Pandarus as a character here—his grossness brought to notice, and the suggestion of his need for vicarious compensation for his own failure in living—is not what is being primarily observed but, like the deterioration of Falstaff as a character in *Henry the Fourth, Part Two*, is rather an aspect of the poem's development. Two elements have been forced into conflict at this point—chivalric quasi-religious love idealism and an element of the real that that idealism has ignored or at least failed perfectly to assimilate. That element is felt as brutal fact in the painful disillusionment that follows its obtrusion.

But though in certain respects Pandarus seems to represent human nature's inferior possibilities, he represents in other respects important human values as well. It is not only that his principal motive—if we are to accept what is again and again repeated—is pity for Troilus, so that when at last he is confronted with the collapse of the fabric of the lovers' paradise he has so laboriously and cunningly contrived for Troilus and Criseyde he becomes himself pitiable without ceasing to be rather despicable.

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<sup>8</sup>The betrayal theme crops up frequently. Criseyde's father, Calkas, is a traitor ('him that falsely hadde his feith so broken' . . . 'hir fadres shame, his falseness and tresoun'). She is exchanged for Antenor who is thus introduced into the town he is to betray. She recognizes Pandarus as in his advice a traitor to her ('For of this world the feith is al agoon' . . . 'This false world, alas! who may it lere'). Pandarus recognizes himself as a traitor to his niece (Book Three, stanzas 39-40). When he tells Criseyde, falsely, that Troilus supposes her false there is (for the reader who knows the story) irony in her exclamations (Book Three stanzas 140-160)—

Horaste! alas! and falsen Troilus—  
and again (stanza 151) in

Now god, thou wost, in thought ne dede untrewed  
To Troilus was never yet Criseyde.

The great betrayal of the poem is of course Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus. But Criseyde herself is betrayed first by Pandarus and lastly by Diomedes. And there are numerous self-betrayals.

In-to the derke chaumbre, as stille as stoon,  
 Toward the bed gan softly to goon  
 So confus, that he niste what to seye;  
 For verray wo his wit was neigh awaye.

It is that in contrast to Troilus' his is the rational mind and Troilus' capacity—that of a devotee of the courtly love convention—for self-delusion as well as for self-pity is shown up. Troilus' trick of 'fantasye' which already begins to break wantonly loose in Book Four at the prospect of parting—

. . . but down with Proserpyne,  
 Whan I am deed, I wol go wone in pyne;  
 And ther I wol eternally compleyne  
 My wo, and how that twinned be we tweyne—

infects Criseyde also (stanzas 112–113), and swept away in his harmony of grief she enters equally into his ritualization and donning in fancy the trappings of woe

. . . my clothes everichoon  
 Shul blake been . . .

dramatizes herself with him as types and symbols of eternally complaining lovers—

For though in erthe y-twinned be we tweyne,  
 Yet in the feld of pitee, out of peyne,  
 That hight Elysos . . .  
 As Orpheus and Erudice . . .

This is (continuing to put it in terms of 'character') certainly going beyond her own nature, and is therefore merely fanciful and in addition an indulgence under an external influence. But Pandarus' rationalism stands its ground and confronts Troilus' fantastic and insidious grief, and in two neighbouring passages in Book Five (stanzas 43–46, and 52–58) these opposing attitudes are forced into bold contrast. Troilus' grief in some of its exaggerations has already not been free from hints of unconscious self-caricature—

And graspe aboute I may, but in this place  
 Save a pilowe, I finde noght t'embrace.

Whether it is that Troilus' complainings have been excessive, or because of the presence of Pandarus in the background, or because there enters in the consideration that the prospect before Troilus was as yet only a ten days' separation if Criseyde were to prove true, as he evidently had no right to suppose she would not, the gravity of that image is not so secure as, in its context, Ariadne's—

She groped in the bed and found right noght.

The addition of that 'save a pilowe' tilts the balance.

Troilus' grief produces actual dreams and nightmares ('dredful-lestest things') and, in the first of the two contrasting passages Troilus gives Pandarus instructions as to his funeral—

But of the fyr and flaumbe funeral  
 In whiche my body brenne shal to glede,  
 And of the feste and pleyes palestral

At my vigile, I pray thee take good hede  
That al be wel; and offre Mars my stede,  
My swerd, myn helm, and, leve brother dere,  
My sheld to Pallas, that shyneth clere.

The poudre in which myn herte y-brend shal torne,  
That preye I thee thou take and it conserve  
In a vessel, that men clepeth an urne,  
Of gold, and to my lady that I serve,  
For love of whom thus pitously I sterve,  
So yeve it hir, and do me this plesaunce,  
To preye hir kepe it for a remembraunce.

For wel I fele, by my maladye,  
And by my dremes now and yore ago,  
Al certainly, that I mot nedes dye.  
The owle eek, which that hight Ascaphilo,  
Hath after me shright alle thise nightes two.  
And, good Mercurie! of me now, woful wreche,  
The soule gyde, and, whan thee list, it fecche!

Poetry has here her tragic buskin on. The 'rhetoric,' however, is not stylistic—not a matter of poetic diction or figurative exaggeration. It is the contemplated mood which in itself is one of such fantastic self-dramatization—the warrior slain by love—as to tremble in melancholy panoplied magnificence on the edge of the comic. The effect of these melancholy heroics is melodramatic—tragic rather than tragic—the pageantry and posturings of tragedy without a *motif* sufficiently justified, as yet, by anything that has happened.<sup>4</sup> The melting self-pitying mood which has engendered these flamboyant extravagances has been encouraged, if not induced, by conformity to the convention of the complaining lover. Pandarus' reply—that of a rationalist—is impressively wise by comparison (stanzas 47 *et seq.*)—

That it is folye for to sorwen thus,  
And causeless . . .  
I can not seen in him no remedye,  
But lete him worthen with his fantasye.

He asks (stanza 48)—

If that thou trowe, er this, that any wight  
Hath loved paramours as wel as thou?

That would be the mature attitude, if it could have been Troilus'—for of course it is all very easy for Pandarus to talk—the realization that he himself is not the only sufferer; that there have been others.

Then follows—significantly on the lips of Pandarus—the essenti-

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<sup>4</sup>Contrast *Legend of Philomela*—

But at the feste redy been, y-wis,  
The furies three, with alle hir mortel brond.  
The owle al night aboute the balkes wond.

The tragic solemnity here is not modified by the context.

ally Chaucerian, and what we, perhaps, without having any solid right to do so, think of as in the best sense modern, passage on dreams. It is a triumph of the rationalizing intelligence—a clarifying of ignorance and dispersing of superstitious fears—and identical with a clear and rational self-knowledge.

Thy swevenes eek and al swich fantasye  
Dryf out, and lat hem faren to mischaunce;  
For they procede of thy malencolye,  
That doth thee fele in sleep al this penaunce.  
A straw for alle swevenes signifaunce!  
God helpe me so, I counte hem not a bene,  
Ther woot no man aright what dremes mene.

For prestes of the temple tellen this,  
That dremes been the revelaciouns  
Of goddes, and as wel they telle, y-wis,  
That they ben infernals illusiouns;  
And leches seyn, that of complexiouns  
Proceden they, or fast, or glotonye.  
Who woot in sooth thus what they signifye?

Eek others seyn that thorough impressiouns,  
As if a wight hath faste a thing in minde,  
That ther-of cometh swiche avisiouns;  
And othere seyn, as they in bokes finde,  
That, after tymes of the yeer by kinde,  
Men dreme, and that th'effect goth by the mone;  
But leve no dreem, for it is noght to done.

Wel worth of dremes ay thise olde wyves,  
And troweliche eek augurie of thise foules;  
For fere of which men wenen her lyves,  
As ravenes qualm, or shryking of thise oules.  
To trowen on it bothe fals and foul is.  
Allas, alas, so noble a creature  
As is a man, shal drede swich ordure!

Pandarus is here a wise, as well as confident, doctor of the mind.  
The sequent invocation to live and to enjoy—

Rys, lat us speke of lusty life in Troy—

even if Pandarus' particular conception of life and enjoyment is a crude one, is at least preferable, one might venture to think, to the dreams and self-pitying fantasies on which Troilus feeds his heart. The wisdom that is identified with Pandarus here is thus not a purely negative scepticism but carries with it a positive acceptance of life and a confident promise of possible ultimate self-mastery. But here we are admittedly at the upper limits of the human wisdom identified in this poem with Pandarus.

Having viewed the most important Pandarus element first in relation to Criseyde, second in relation to Troilus, we have, in a progress towards completeness, also to consider the poem as far as possible apart from Pandarus, and more particularly the lovers.

The lovers were (we happen to know) pre-existent and belong basically—even Criseyde—to the courtly love convention. But even here that knowledge of the heart in which Chaucer's wisely tolerant and humane genius consists—for his tolerance, his catholicity of sympathy, is that of a superior understanding—triumphs. It is this Chaucerian knowledge which I propose particularly to notice though this will finally involve taking some account of the basic conventionality and of Chaucer's attitude to it. Chaucer, especially in the last book, provides an imaginative appreciation and yet non-appreciation—for such sympathetic understanding does not preclude criticism but rather involves it—even of the courtly love convention as it flowers banefully in its unlucky devotee.

The image of Criseyde—'in widowes habite blak'—in the temple where Troilus first sees her (Book One, stanzas 24–28, and 39–47) owes something to the goliardic image of the false and profane widow in church. Although she is to be to Troilus, and even partially in basis, the courtly lady her rôle here is not dissimilar from that of the Wife of Bath at the funeral of her fourth husband (*Wyfe of Bath's Prologue*, lines 587–605). Throughout the passage there is the interplay of sacred and profane associations. To the temple (corresponding to a church) have come—

. . . so many a lusty knight,

So many a lady fresh and mayden bright.

It is a pagan festival as Chaucer may have remembered—the sensual note is dominant—and it is also to be a scene in a church satirically observed. Criseyde attracts attention and comment for her beauty. As A is the first letter of the alphabet so she is the first in beauty. There is something equivocal about her concealment under 'hir blake wede'—

. . . under cloude blak so bright a sterre—

that suggests slyness as well as secrecy. Her humility of demeanor may not be a devotional humility but a show of womanly bashfulness arising from consciousness of her femininity, or it may be a pious disguise—

And yet she stood ful lowe and stille alloon,

Bihinden othere folk, in litel brede,

And neigh the dore, ay under shames drede,

Simple of a-tyr . . .

yet she is sure of herself, conscious of the power of her beauty—

With ful assured loking and manere.

With Troilus also, as he leads his 'yonge knightes' up and down in the temple—

Biholding ay the ladyes of the toun—

the religious observances seem to be secondary to the profane interest in women—although he had as yet 'devocioun' (a religious term adopted by the love convention) to no one. If he observed the eyes of any knight or squire of his company rest on any woman

He wolde smyle, and holden it folye.

The irony (taken in relation to what is about to happen) of this tone of superiority, this pride of self-assurance, is that Troilus' innocence is to be proved that of immaturity and—in so far as it is not conventional—his youthful mockery of 'love's servants'—

And seye him thus, 'god wot, she slepeth softe  
For love of thee, whan thou tornest ful ofte!'

is born of inexperience and ignorance. The nemesis of this attitude follows (stanzas 39-47). Troilus 'with-inne the temple . . . pleyinge' is instantly struck—himself changed into the lover of the convention—when his eyes light on Criseyde. But from the beginning his love is secret, clandestine. (A motive suggested at first is that Troilus having mocked at those subject to love is ashamed to confess its influence over himself, but in any case the convention demanded concealment.) Chaucer's knowledge of the heart is never more triumphant than in this handling of a basically conventional situation. The womanishness of Criseyde, her feminine attractiveness, is shown as the source of her hold—

. . . creature  
Was never lasse mannish in seminge.

The wonderful naturalness of her behaviour is itself a slyness and a bait. Troilus—

Gan for to lyke hir mening and hir chere,  
Which somdel deynous was, for she leet falle  
Hir look a lite a-side, in swich manere,  
Ascaunces, 'what! may I not stonden here?'

In the analysis of the birth of love—

And of hir look in him ther gan to quiken,  
So greet desir, and swich affeccoun,  
That in his hertes botme gan to stiken  
Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun—

although he

Was ful unwar that love hadde his dwellinge  
With-inne the subtille stremes of hir yēn—

there is already the kind of analytical insight that is developed and specialized in the poetry of the seventeenth century.

Even in the more decorative description (Book Two, stanzas 86-93) of how Troilus rides in triumph—'so lyk a man of armes and a knight'—up the street and brings Criseyde to her window—the moment corresponding to that in which Troilus first sees *her* in the temple and the first of a series of passings under her window that are stage-managed by Pandarus—the interest is centered in the human feelings involved and particularly in the effect on Criseyde's heart. We preparatorily glimpse the state in which Pandarus has left that heart.

But straught in-to hir closet wente anoon,  
And sette here down as stille as any stoon,  
And every word gan up and down to winde.

Then (stanza 88 *et seq.*)—

But as she sat allone and thoughte thus,  
 Th'ascry aroos at skarmish al with-oute,  
 And men cryde in the strete, 'see, Troilus  
 Hath right now put to flight the Grekes route!  
 With that gan al hir meynee for to shoute,  
 'A! go we see, caste up the latis wyde;  
 For thurgh this strete he moot to palays ryde

For other wey is fro the yate noon  
 Of Dardanus, ther open is the cheyne.'  
 With that com he and al his folk anoon  
 An esy pas rydinge, in routes tweyne,  
 Right as his happy day was, sooth to seyne,  
 For which, men say, may nought disturbed be  
 That shal bityden of necessitee.

This Troilus sat on his baye stede,  
 Al armed, save his heed, ful richely,  
 And wounded was his hors, and gan to blede,  
 On whiche he rood a pas, ful softly;  
 But swich a knightly sighte, trewely,  
 As was on him, was nought, with-uten faile,  
 To loke on Mars, that god is of batayle.

The humanness of Troilus—'an esy pas rydinge'—contrasts with the stiff, artificial impression of the Dido and Aeneas hunting picture in the *Legend of Dido*. Even Troilus' horse, in contrast to Aeneas' 'palfrey paper-whyte,' seems flesh and blood—'and wounded was his hors, and gan to blede.' The effect is more than simply pictorial, more than a visual suggestion of red drops. But there is an element in the passage itself—that represented by 'Mars, that god of batayle'—that the humanness of Troilus contrasts with.

His helm to-hewen was in twenty places,  
 That by a tissew heng, his bak bihinde,  
 His sheld to-dasshed was with swerdes and maces,  
 In which men mighte many an arwe finde  
 That thirled hadde horn and nerf and rinde;  
 And ay the peple cryde, 'here cometh our joye,  
 And, next his brother, holdere up of Troye!'

For which he wex a litel reed for shame,  
 Whan he the peple up-on him herde cryen,  
 That to biholde it was a noble game,  
 How sobrelliche he caste doun his yēn.  
 Criseyde gan al his chere aspyen,  
 And leet so softe it in hir herte sinke,  
 That to hir-self she seyde, 'who yaf me drinke?'

The human naturalness triumphs in that last stanza first in the demeanour of Troilus—a bashfulness in the young hero that might be that of a lover—and above all, in the spectacle's effect—'who yaf me drinke?'—on Criseyde.

The description of the visit the women of Troy pay to Criseyde

to say farewell (Book Four, stanzas 98-105) in the finely satiric observation it shows of social behaviour, the naturalness and life-likeness—felt in the movement—of its dialogue, and above all in the alteration caused by the knowledge and revelation of the heart, is an equally remarkable triumph of Chaucer's humanity. The point of the irony, and at the same time the pathos, is in the collision between the incompatible public, social life and the private, secret life of the heart. The women come to sympathize or rejoice with Criseyde, according to what they may feel to be the more tactful, but they fail to comprehend because they do not know. They sympathize but for the wrong reasons, assuming a different cause for the strange grief that in the end (when the social comedy turns for Criseyde into unendurable irony) they have to notice.

But as men seen in toune, and al aboute,  
That wommen usen frendes to visyte,  
So to Criseyde of wommen com a route  
For pitous joye, and wenden hir delyte;  
And with hir tales, dere y-nough a myte,  
These wommen, whiche that in the cite dwelle,  
They sette hem down, and seyde as I shal telle.

Quod first that oon, 'I am glad, trewely,  
By-cause of yow, that shal your fader see.'  
A-nother seyde, 'y-wis, so nam not I;  
For al to litel hath she with us be.'  
Quod tho the thridde, 'I hope, y-wis, that she  
Shal bringen us the pees on every syde,  
That, whan she gooth, almighty god hir gyde!'

The wordes and the wommannisshe thinges,  
She herde hem right as though she thennes were;  
For, god it wot, hir herte on other thing is,  
Although the body sat among hem there.  
Hir advertence is alwey elles-where;  
For Troilus ful faste hir soule soughte;  
With-uten word, alwey on him she thoughte.

The first two lines invoke social form and custom. The 'route of wommen' are performing a social ritual for 'pitous joye'—sorry she must leave them, glad for her sake that she will see her father, and perhaps glad also because they enjoy paying visits. There is no escaping them—'they sette hem doun'—however indisposed Criseyde is for such a visit. They say at once all the appropriate tactful things—'I am glad, trewely, by-cause of yow, that shal your fader see'—'So nam not I . . . for al to litel hath she with us be.' The background of the public misfortune is inevitably introduced in the course of these polite, good-natured remarks, and Criseyde's departure is related to the hope of a favourable turn in the political situation—

I hope, y-wis, that she  
Shal bringen us the pees on every syde.

Criseyde's private grief being to her much more overwhelming, this

concern for the public good only aggravates the irony. Then, in the third stanza, our attention is shifted to the heart of Criseyde—

The wordes and the wommannisshe thinges,  
She herde hem right as though she thennes were.

With wonderful knowledge Chaucer presents—in the midst of all this solicitude—the absent mind—

For, god it wot, hir herte on other thing is,  
Although the body sat among hem there—

the preoccupied heart by which tact and sympathy—uncomprehending and unknowing—are unheeded. The irony—and the pathos—reach their climax in the succeeding stanzas which describe how, unable to endure the ironic tension any longer, she breaks down in tears and they can only suppose, with amusing egoism, that she weeps because she must leave Troy and them. They weep, too, not knowing what they are weeping for. The theological terms—‘body, soule, herte, hevene, helle’—are here as elsewhere used, being the most precise psychological terms to hand, to describe lovers’ states of mind. The scene is finally placed as (another term with a religious significance) ‘vanitee’—‘after al this nyce vanitee’ (stanza 105 cf. stanza 101 ‘swich vanitee’)—the suggestion being not only that the women’s comfort and sympathy are vain but perhaps also that their whole lives and conversation are vain.

Criseyde has sufficient in common with Pandarus—and with her lady visitors—to make her, in her complex life, independent to a considerable degree of the courtly convention from which nevertheless she emerges. Some part of the allegorical quality of the original Garden of the Rose still adheres to her garden (Book Two, stanzas 117–118). The three nieces, Flexippe, Tharbe and Antigone, and the crowd of women who attend her when she walks in to replace the personifications of the original, but accord her—as the ‘yonge knightes’ who accompany Troilus in the temple, and again when he rides beyond the walls to take a ceremonial farewell of Criseyde, accord him—a kind of processional state. The nightingale that later—when ‘whyte thinges wexen dimme and donne’—sings against the moon ‘upon a cedre grene’ under Criseyde’s ‘chambre-wal,’ and the bird allegory she dreams, belong to the conventional Italian landscape of love.

But, unlike Criseyde, Troilus retains, and remains, the outline of his original—the swooning, complaining lover of the *trouvère*—Petrarchan convention. Troilus’ complainings, in so far as they are responded to sympathetically, as Pandarus certainly responds to them, are of course to that extent accepted as not unnatural—in the last book especially, where there is real cause for grief, they are musically, if diffusely, rendered which argues at least an imaginative sympathy—or at least their rejection is held in suspension. But Pandarus’ mere presence produces, at the same time, an implicit criticism, even a satire, which from time to time he makes explicit, of these complainings and of the whole love convention which is their excuse—or, in terms of regarding Troilus as a ‘psychological study,’ his excessive complainings become felt, by contrast with

Pandarus' humorous good sense, as an indulgence of self-pity which not only arrests our pity but at times tries our patience. There is just sufficient in the last book of a fresh love intrigue—the insinuations of Diomedes and the now only too familiar equivocations of Criseyde (*e.g.* stanzas 141 *et seq.*)—

I am disposed bet, so mote I go,  
Un-to my deeth, to pleyne and maken wo,  
What I shal after doon, I can not seye,  
But trewely, as yet me list not pleye.

My herte is now in tribulacioun,  
And ye in armes bisy, day by day.  
Here-after, whan ye wonnen han the toun . . .

If that I sholde of any Greek han routhe,  
It sholde be your-selven, by my trouthe!

I sey not therfore that I wol yow love,  
Ne I sey not nay, but in conclusioun,  
I mene wel, by god that sit above.

—sufficient to form an ironic, revelatory reminiscence of the earlier 'seduction.' But this is subsidiary. The last book is predominantly a musical lament—the music peculiarly unforced, no strain, no feeling of effort disturbing the outflow of Troilus' gentle giving-tongue to grief. Pandarus—as well as Criseyde—recedes into the background. He evokes once more, appealing to it in vain as being a world of the natural enjoyment of the heart, the *trouvère* world through which move—dancing, singing, playing, round-cheeked—the ladies of mediaeval convention,<sup>5</sup> from among whom Criseyde herself has originally emerged; but only for it to become momentarily a contrasting background to the complaining grief-stricken lover left solitarily in the foreground (stanzas 64–66).

For she, that of his herte berth the keye,  
Was absent, lo, this was his fantasye,  
That no wight sholde make melodye.<sup>6</sup>

The double suggestion of 'keye' enriches these closing lines of the passage unusually for Chaucer. The more Chaucerian significance is possibly in that 'fantasye' which Chaucer so often uses as meaning a 'foolish imagining.' Unwilling to be comforted by Pandarus, Troilus revisits Criseyde's empty house (stanzas 76–77), haunts the

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<sup>5</sup>*cp.* I saw hir daunce so comlyly,  
Carole and singe so swetely,  
Laughe and pleye so womanly . . .  
(*The Book of the Duchesse*).

And lyke ruby ben your chekes rounde.  
Therwith ye ben so mery and so jocounde,  
That at a revel whan that I see you daunce . . .  
(*Balade to Rosemounde*).

<sup>6</sup>*cp.* Dorigen in the *Frankleyns Tale*—  
For she ne saugh him in the daunce go.

places where in the past he remembers her *dance, laugh, play*, and *sing* (stanzas 81-83). Again (stanzas 96-97)—

Upon the walles faste eek wolde he walke,  
And on the Grekes ost he wolde see,  
And to him-self right thus he wolde talke,  
'Lo, yonder is myn owne lady free,  
Or elles yonder, ther tho tentes be!  
And thennes comth this eyr, that is so sote,  
That in my soule I fele it doth me bote.

And hardely this wind, that more and more  
Thus stoundemele encreseth in my face,  
Is of my ladyes depe sykes sore.  
I preve it thus, for in non othere place  
Of al this toun, save onliche in this space  
Fele I no wind that souneth so lyk peyne;  
It seyth, "allas! why twinned be we tweyne?"

Though irony underlies its extravagance—Criseyde, we know, is false—the conceit (for it might almost be called such) is yet natural, emotionally true, and not merely fancifully beautiful. Chaucer has here entered into very complete imaginative sympathy with one whom—by means chiefly of the Pandarus juxta-position—he remains critically antipathetic to.

The ultimate criticism of the love extravagance is not, however, in relation to Pandarus if we are to accept the final stanzas of the poem. These stanzas, at any rate, provide the modern reader with the key to the traditional morality against which the story would have been set. They explicitly place the passionate lovers in relation to the established values which Chaucer does not challenge; for the poem is no glorification of romantic passion. So when Troilus' soul rising above the earth condemns (stanza 261):

The blinde lust, the which that may not last,  
and when again profane love is described (stanza 263) as 'worldly vanitee,' the particular voice may not sound Chaucerian—unless that of a Chaucer in age, sickness and proximity to death—but in as much as it is deeply mediaeval it states what Chaucer has perhaps all the time implicitly accepted. The divine love is set above the profane love.

And loveth him, the which that right for love  
Upon a cros, our soules for to beye,  
First starf, and roos, and sit in hevene a-bove;  
For he nil falsen no wight, dar I seye,  
That wol his herte al hoolly on him leye.  
And sin he best to love is, and most meke,  
What nedeth feyned loves for to seke?

Troilus has 'leyde his herte al hoolly' on Criseyde instead of on Christ. That would appear to be the ultimate mediaeval judgment. It might be argued that this need not—and therefore ought not to—have been added, or at least that the judgment need not have been phrased so harshly. Those who find this conclusion disharmonious

with the poem's tone of tolerance perhaps correspond with those who would ignore the context of Dante's Paolo and Francesca episode as if this apotheosis of types of passionate lovers absorbed in themselves and granted what they most of all desire and—the stern context implies—deserve, the torment of an ecstatic eternity in each other's arms, appears only accidentally in the *Inferno*.

But whether or not we regard the moral end of *Troilus and Criseyde* as superadded and arbitrary it is certain that the poem itself compels us to be aware of deficiencies in Troilus, Criseyde and Pandarus, and that this is no negligible part of Chaucer's meaning. If Pandarus is rational by contrast with Troilus, and can give worldly advice, he is deficient morally and spiritually—in this respect above all an inferior. In Criseyde's case also that naturalness of human behaviour and demeanour partly arises from an almost complete absence in her of a moral sense. She exhibits her father as a type of senile Covetousness (Book Four, stanzas 200–201),

Desyr of gold shal so his sowle blende,  
That, as me lyst . . .

to indicate the particular moral weakness which as a shameless opportunist she intends to exploit. This radical disrespect, which she and Pandarus share, extends blasphemously also to the gods of her father's sacred knowledge—

For goddes speken in amphibologies,  
And, for a sooth, they tellen twenty lyes.

For all her complicatedness she is in important respects undeveloped, morally a child. As such she lays herself open to deceptions felt as betrayals, and is equally a danger to others through her irresponsibility. Every important poem is, as Arnold said, a work of appraisal; and the tolerant, sympathetic humanity that permeates Chaucer's poem is not of the kind that implies any suspension or blunting of critical judgment.

Mr. Middleton Murry fixes on the suggestion that Criseyde comes to Troilus' bedside as his physician (as Christ is, elsewhere, the 'soules leche'); and finds that significant of Chaucer's wisely tolerant humanity. If we turn to the description of the lovers' union itself the sensual rapture is treated on the plane of religious allegory if we are to judge from the fact that the joys of the body are spoken of in terms of the soul risen from purgatory into divine union.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Chaucer is at home with the soul and the body distinction (see Book Four, stanzas 44, 45) as the seventeenth-century metaphysicals though he is of course without their subtlety and ingenuity in pursuing and maintaining the distinction through all the involvements of intimate relationships. 'O, wery ghost that errest to and fro,' and the play with 'eyen' in the second stanza referred to might repay attention. There seems to be a connection between scholastic verbal habit and Petrarchan. One or two comparisons showing the grief of Troilus—

Thus sondry peynes bringen folk to hevене . . .  
 For out of wo in blisse now they flete . . .

The system of courtly love had already taken over the whole terminology of divine love. But the use of such terms here does not in itself imply on Chaucer's part any complacent identification, or confusion, of earthy with divine joys; theological terms are used elsewhere by Chaucer simply to describe psychophysical conditions without any such implication. That there is, on the other hand, some such confusion in the minds of the lovers—a confusion perhaps inherent in the courtly love 'idealism'—is suggested rather by the disenchanting contrast of what seems to me the distinct ribaldry of the uncle-and-niece encounter the following morning. Chaucer's tolerant humanity is not quite of the kind Mr. Murry and others suggest. Rather it shows itself as a peculiar serenity in the midst even of painful knowledge of human weakness. It seems to proceed from an inner quality of spirit; and to be a quality as of grace rather than a quality with difficulty achieved through a self-torturing discipline; it belonged perhaps to Chaucer's civilization. That feeling of intellectual strain and spiritual travail that is such an important aspect of the rhythm of Donne—or again of Hopkins' last sonnets—is quite absent from Chaucer. It would be unwise to claim that Chaucer is more profoundly civilized than Marvell; but he belongs to what seems perhaps a more spiritually spacious and harmoniously catholic civilization than that of the seventeenth century.

JOHN SPEIRS.

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Y-bounden in the blake bark of care . . . —

seem just beginning to move into the sphere of suitability for Empsonian analysis. Mr. Empson does indeed analyse a passage of *Troilus and Criseyde* though, significantly perhaps, not so confidently as seventeenth-century poetry.

# A LETTER ON THE MUSIC CRITICISM OF W. H. MELLERS

The Editors, *Scrutiny*.

Sirs,—

The subject of this letter is Mr. Mellers' music criticism, and its excessive length, for which we must immediately apologize, can only be justified because we feel that this body of critical writing is intrinsically well worth detailed consideration. We are prompted to write by an impression, which has been long-maturing, that the articles that Mr. Mellers has been contributing regularly to *Scrutiny* are not tempered with the same degree of critical rigour as the generality of articles in *Scrutiny*. Re-reading the 200-odd pages of criticism that he has published during the last six years reveals at once a marked and disconcerting facility of expression that seems at times to lead to little more than verbiage:

'... it is, I say, very deliciously risible to read all this.'

'The beautiful violin Concerto, in which the soloist showers a soaring golden flight of lyrical rococo over and into the orchestra's sonorous harmonic framework, exhibits Delius' method at its ripest perfection.'

And this suggestion of uncritical superficiality is confirmed by a related defect that emerges very clearly, and that is the frequency with which Mr. Mellers contradicts himself:

of Bartok:

'insane like much of the later work of Bartok,' Dec., 1936.

'the music of Bartok before he got stuck in the bog of sadistic obsession with discord may exert, in a minor way, a stimulating influence,' Sept., 1936.

compared with:

'the most significant composer with reference to the immediate future of musical language,' Mar., 1941.

'Almost all other music pales into insignificance besides this assured mastery,' Jan., 1942.

or of Van Dieren:

'I am not able personally to feel very enthusiastic,' Sept., 1936.

compared with:

'that the consummation is serene seems to me unquestionable,' Dec., 1936.

Indeed, when Mr. Mellers admits, after an eulogy of that work, that he 'was completely baffled and unimpressed at a first hearing of the *Chinese Symphony*,' one admires his honesty but can only deplore that he should exercise this virtue at the expense of *Scrutiny*'s limited space.