

## The Lyric Art of Chaucer: Songs and Letters in *Troilus* and *Criseyde*

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### Abstract

Geoffrey Chaucer, regarded to be the greatest author of the medieval times, marked his mastery and gift in not only his narrative composition but also lyric poetry. Songs and letters, as significant mediums of lyric art, have an important role in his work *Troilus* and *Criseyde*, which was composed in the 1380s. In this work, Chaucer exhibits his lyric prowess in a superb and functional way by using the songs and letters which signalize themselves in the forms of mainly love, bliss, sorrow or complaint. In examining the lyric units in this work, new historicism is also used as a literary approach that connects the ancient and medieval times. Also some comparison with the works of Boccaccio, Robert Henryson and Shakespeare is made in terms of their using lyric units. The aim of this paper is to analyse Chaucer's *Troilus* and *Criseyde* in terms of his use of songs and letters, functioning in several senses such as means of self-expression of characters – their bliss or afflictions, fundamental communication tools of characters, mediums that assure secrecy in terms of court literature and instruments representing both human love and eternal love.

**Keywords:** Lyric art, songs, letters, new historicism, human nature.

## Chaucer'in Lirik Sanatı: *Troilus* ve *Criseyde*'de Şarkılar ve Mektuplar

### Özet

Ortaçağın en büyük yazarı olarak kabul edilen Geoffrey Chaucer, ustalık ve yeteneğini sadece hikâye türünden yazılarında değil, aynı zamanda lirik şiirinde de göstermiştir. Lirik sanatın önemli araçları olan şarkılar ve mektuplar, 1380'lerde yazılan *Troilus* ve *Criseyde* eserinde önemli yere sahiptir. Bu eserde Chaucer, kendilerini temel olarak aşk, sevinç, üzüntü ya da şikâyet şekillerinde gösteren şarkılar ve mektuplar kullanarak, lirik sanatını harikulade ve işlevsel bir şekilde ortaya koyar. Bu çalışmadaki lirik öğeleri incelerken, antik ve orta çağı bağdaştıran bir edebi yaklaşım olan yeni tarihselcilik de kullanılmıştır. Aynı zamanda Boccaccio, Robert Henryson ve Shakespeare'in eserleriyle de lirik kullanımlar bağlamında kıyaslama yapılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Chaucer'ın *Troilus* ve *Criseyde* eserini, Chaucer'ın karakterlerin kendilerini ifade etme araçları – sevinçleri ve kederleri, karakterlerin temel iletişim araçları, saray edebiyatı bağlamında gizliliği sağlayan araçlar ve hem beşeri hem de sonsuz aşkı yansıtan vasıtalar olarak çeşitli açılardan işlev gören şarkı ve mektup kullanımı açısından tahlil etmektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Lirik sanat, şarkılar, mektuplar, yeni tarihselcilik, insan doğası.

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## INTRODUCTION

As the greatest author of the medieval times, Geoffrey Chaucer is not only the father of English literature as a preeminent craftsman, but also a gifted artist as a lyric poet. Regarded as a first-class poet by his contemporaries, Chaucer is still considered to be one of the most gifted writers of the world literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He was born in London in the early 1340s to Agnes and John Chaucer, as the only son in his family, who dealt with the business of mercantile. He became the page to the countess of Ulster and then began to serve Prince Lionel, son of King Edward III, which documents his close connection with the court members. Chaucer, who was a polyglot author, courtier and philosopher, able to speak Latin, French and Italian, also worked as a soldier and diplomat. He read the works of Ovid, Cicero, Virgil and Boethius in Latin; the ones of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio in Italian; the *Romance of the Rose* and other French works, reflecting their influences in his works. He was a great man of literature, who provided the legitimacy of Middle English and wrote his works in the vernacular. Among his major works are *The Book of the Duchess*, which was composed to commemorate the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster; *The House of Fame*, an over 2000-line long dream vision; *Parliament of Fowls*, again a dream vision addressing St. Valentine's Day; *The Legend of Good Women*, in which Chaucer narrates stories of virtuous women; *The Canterbury Tales*, which depicts a pilgrimage with pilgrims telling stories and *Troilus and Criseyde*, which vividly illustrates the love story of Troilus and Criseyde. In all of his works, Geoffrey Chaucer showed his mastery and gift in not only his narrative composition but also lyric poetry. It can be assumed that he was both a competent author and a gifted lyric poet: "In addition to his narrative verse, Chaucer wrote lyric poetry on the models of famous French and Italian poets who made lyric into a medieval art form aimed at learned and aristocratic audiences, an audience that included fellow poets. Chaucer also embedded lyric in narrative poetry" (Greenblatt, 2006, p.316). Similarly, Chaucer embeds lyric in his narrative poetry, *Troilus and Criseyde*, "so that narrative and lyric are not formally distinguished" (Wildeatt, 1992, p.165). He uses not only songs but also letters in his work for several purposes, creating considerable effects. While analysing the songs and letters in the work, New Historicism as a literary approach that connects the ancient and medieval times is also used and some comparison with Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* is made. After giving information about New Historicism and information about *Troilus and Criseyde* in the first part; Chaucer's using songs and letters in *Troilus and Criseyde* will be analysed in detail in the following part.

After the domination of text-based theories of 1950s and 1960s, New Historicism, in 1980s, emerged as a counter-theory that distinguishes the idea that a literary text can't be examined under separate cover from its own time and culture and that the time, culture and conditions in which that text is produced is important. It dwells on the idea

that literary works should be studied considering both the history of the author and the one of the critic. As Hickling states, it "consciously engages the idea that we inevitably read the past from the present" (2018, p.54). New Historicism argues that writers are affected by their social and historical environment. Thereby objective view of neither history nor literature is possible. As Bressler, about New Historicism, states "history can never provide us with the objective truth of or give us a totally accurate picture of past events, persons, or eras nor the worldview of a group of people" (2007, p.214). And authors by taking this same non-objective history, can produce different texts as befitting the argument of New Historicism as seen in the examples of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. They all take the same historical event – the Trojan War – and people as their subjects, but they all form their own texts and comment upon them in the way they feel. This fact is expressed by Gao as well as follows:

*New historicism claims that history is a text, a story, and a narrative. This indicates that historical events exist only in the form of textual imprint. We can understand history in both textual form and in a textualized form. What we learn is not real historical events, but descriptive construction of historical events. In fact, in the course of historical revision, due to the different backgrounds and personal preferences, historians need to revise the disorderly events by means of exclusion, emphasis, and subordination. In this way, the same historical events may have completely different or even opposite meanings through different treatments. They carry the personal imprint of the historical creators. (2019, p.192)*

As stated above, authors may take the same historical events as their subjects but they may reflect them in rather different ways. For instance, in terms of New historicist approach that offers the idea that, the author while taking the same historical event as his subject is influenced by the time and culture he lives in; one can clearly see that while Chaucer's *Criseyde* is a shy and coy lady guided by his uncle Pandarus, Walton's opera *Troilus and Cressida* "presents Cressida very much as the victim of a violent male world that both tricks and psychologically batters her into betraying Troilus" (Ashley, 2009). With the growing ideas about the emancipation of women and how they should make their voice heard in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Walton's depicting Cressida as expressed above can be considered as reflecting the ideas of the time he lived in, as he produced this work in 1950s.

### *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*

Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, which is thought to be written between 1382 and 1386, is the first tragedy, epic and mythological work in British literature.

Furthermore “it’s the first great novel in modern sense”<sup>2</sup> (Turhan, 1949, p.43). Considered to be a psychological novel as well, *Troilus and Criseyde* has a universal story that goes beyond time and space: “All humanity has the same basic qualities”, such as love and sorrow, “which we share with all other periods and cultures” (Brewer, 1998, p.1). Thus, although it was written approximately seven centuries ago, it’s still read with the same enthusiasm when it was written. However, what makes it exceed centuries and places most and what makes his writings able to speak directly to modern people is unquestionably its creator’s aptitude and competence in art and literature, as well as his profound understanding of human nature and the complexities of human life.

Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* is the translation of Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato*, which means *The Love-Stricken*. Although Chaucer used Boccaccio’s text, “a passionate narrative of 5700 lines in stanzaic Italian verse” (Donaldson, 1991, p.44), as a source, he recreated it and gave it a new form through his characteristics as a poet. He followed Boccaccio’s story but extended Troilus’ wooing and the philosophical depth. Apart from this, he took the story from Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s 24,500-line long French poem *Le Roman de Troie*, which retells the epic story of the Trojan War and which presents “the story as romance and [...] Troilus as lover” (Windeatt, 1992, p.139). Chaucer’s longest single poem “*Troilus and Criseyde* impressed its early readers as a legend that captured the much-admired world of antiquity and approximated a classical epic” (Frantzen, 1993, p.10). In writing the poem, the writer hopes to bring pleasure and solace to all lovers who read it. Among its main themes are “the nature of fin’amors, the predicament of women, predestination and free will, chance and fortune, society and the individual, writing and interpretation” (Saunders, 2001, p.129).

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer depicts vividly the story of Troilus, a young prince who desperately falls in love for the first time with Criseyde, a beautiful young widow. The Trojan cleric Calchas, knowing that Troy will be defeated, leaves there to take refuge in the Greeks. Troilus, the son of the Trojan king falls in love with Calchas’ daughter, who continues to stay in Troy after her father’s departure. As Criseyde’s uncle Pandarus helps them as a matchmaker, Troilus wins the love of Criseyde. However, when the Trojans and the Greeks decide to exchange prisoners, Criseyde and the Trojan warrior Antenor are exchanged and therefore the lovers are separated. Although Criseyde promises to return to Troilus after ten days, when she goes to the Greek camp, she is courted by the Greek warrior Diomedes and yielding to his flirtations, she cannot return to Troilus and falls for Diomedes. After Troilus is killed by Achilles, his spirit goes to heaven and he meditates upon triviality of earthly concerns, eternity and eternal love.

### Songs and Letters in Troilus and Criseyde

Chaucer, a lyric artist as well, depicts the subtlety of his lyric art in his several works. As Olson states in his article *Chaucer and the Music of the Fourteenth Century*, he uses songs in his writings:

*Chaucer did write some beautifully flowing lyric verse that has survived to our day; some of it in short, detached pieces, such as To Rosemounde, Womanly Noblesse, Fortune, Truth, Gentillesse, Lak of Stedfastnesse, and Merciles Beaute; and some embedded in his longer poems [...] The Knight’s Tale contains the first three lines of a roundel sung by Arcite [...] in Troilus and Criseyde, Antigone sings her ‘Trojan song’; and Troilus sings several songs indicative of his feelings in regard to love. (Olson, 1941, p.72, 73)*

As befitting to what Olson indicates above, it’s possible to track some lyrical instruments in Chaucer’s works. Specifically in *Troilus and Criseyde*, he exhibits his lyric prowess in a superb and functional way, as Windeatt also states as follows: “He works to establish a context in which lyric set-pieces become part of the accepted self-expression of his characters: not only performed songs but also the lovers’ formal laments or ‘complaints’, and so too by extension the courtly letters in which some of their entreaties and lamentations are expressed” (Windeatt, 1992, p.164). As Windeatt expresses above, songs and letters function as tools of self-expression of Chaucer’s characters. By means of them, the characters express their bliss or afflictions over the course of the story. In the following part, songs and letters in *Troilus and Criseyde* will be analysed in detail, by giving examples from the work.

At the beginning of the story, Troilus, who falls in love with Criseyde, after seeing her, goes home without a word to anyone, shuts himself up in his room and composes a song to express his feelings and to rid himself of grief:

*‘If there’s no love, O God! What am I feeling?  
If there is love, who then, and what, is he?  
If love be good, whence comes this sorrow  
stealing?  
If evil, what a wonder it is to me  
[...]  
I am a rudderless vessel in mid-sea,  
Between the double-winded storms that blow  
From ever-contrary shores; alas, for woe!  
What is this wondrous malady that fills me?  
With fire of ice and ice of fire, and kills me?’  
(p.17)*

When the characteristic of New Historicism of a writer’s getting influenced by the time and culture he lives in is

<sup>2</sup> Texts from the sources in Turkish have been translated to English by the writer of this study.

considered, as “New Historicism reconstructs a historic moment with as much density and reality as possible without totalizing it” (Berghahn, 1992, p.145), Chaucer can be thought to be affected by the acculturation of his time. Befittingly when one considers Chaucer’s connection with Italy, it can be clearly seen that he was influenced by the *Divine Comedy* of Dante and the sonnets of Petrarch. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer took the 88<sup>th</sup> sonnet of Petrarch and turned it into Troilus’ love song. After Troilus sees Criseyde for the first time, he is immediately on fire and suddenly becomes slave to love. In order to reflect this grandeur of love, Chaucer not only masterfully depicts his love in detail in the following lines in the work, but he also embeds the song of Troilus, which is given above, in the text in order to reinforce Troilus’ feeling of love, which heightens the readers’ understanding of his emotions. In the song which is from Lollius, the paradoxes of love, its sweet longings are revealed and Troilus likens himself to a rudderless vessel in mid-sea as he doesn’t know what to do and where to go, filled with “wondrous malady”. As the songs in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* are the research topic of this paper, one should also examine musicology in terms of romanticism that deals with lyrical songs. The romantic composers such as Liszt, Chopin and Schubert gave importance to emotional expressions rather than structural forms of the songs. “The Romantic movement led to new subjects for art works with emphasis on the fanciful and strange, the emotional, passionate and exotic. [...] Romanticism’s choice of subjects and especially its rather indefinite emotional character suggested music as an appropriate medium of expression [and] it emphasized lyrical expression” (Hinson, 1902, p.4). As one of the key features of romantic music is emotional expression, the song presented above is the very example of this speciality. Troilus by means of his song, expresses his emotions of malady of love, grief and woe. Singing this song, he tries to ease his great sorrow by expressing his emotions.

In Book 2, Pandarus upon learning Troilus’ love for Criseyde, informs her of the situation. As a humble and respectable widow, she cares for her good reputation and cannot decide what to do. After Pandarus leaves, Criseyde goes to her chamber and hearing voices outside, looks out of the window and sees Troilus riding on his horse, looking extremely attractive with a knightly grace. She then feels as if she drank a love potion and starts to think about the situation, feeling anxiety about responding to Troilus’ love or not. Finally she decides to take the risk and seeking something to amuse her, goes to the garden with her nieces there, Flexippe, Tarba and Antigone. Then Antigone starts to sing a Trojan song, certain lines of which are given below:

*Whom should I thank but Thee, O god above?  
For all this bliss in which I now begin  
To bathe? Ah, Lord, I give Thee thanks for love!  
This is the life, the right life, to be in,  
To banish every form of vice and sin;  
This turns me so to virtue, I intend*

*In heart and spirit daily to amend  
[...]  
Who defame love; nothing of him they know;  
They talk, but never yet have bent his bow.  
[...]  
But I, with all my heart and all my might,  
As I have said, will love, unto my last,  
My dearest heart, my own beloved knight,  
In whom my soul has verily grown fast  
As his in me, and shall till Time is past.  
I feared love once, and dreaded to begin it;  
Now I know well there is no peril in it. (p.75, 76)*

As can be understood from the lines, Antigone’s song is in praise of love. As Kinney also states, the speaker “is engaged in celebrating that power [namely love]. She describes a condition of perfect and stable bliss” (1992, p.276). When Criseyde asks if love is really so delightful and if lovers are happy, Antigone assures her that it’s really sweet and there’s no other happiness than the bliss of loving. So this song functions as an instrument which encourages Criseyde of what Pandarus has told her about Troilus’ emotions and which reinforces Criseyde’s feelings about love and her decision about Troilus. Now after learning the delightful side of love in Antigone’s song, she is more determined to carry on her love for Troilus, which is supported by these lines: “Her fear of love lessened and faded fast; / Love sank into her heart and, terror fleeing” (p.77). While in Chaucer’s work, love is reflected as something sweet and blissful as shown in Antigone’s song; in Shakespeare’s work Pandarus sings as song saying that love causes sore and wound:

*Love, love, nothing but love, still more!  
For, O, love’s bow  
Shoots buck and doe:  
The shaft confounds,  
Not that it wounds,  
But tickles still the sore.  
These lovers cry Oh! Oh! They die:  
Yet that which seems the wound to kill,  
Doth turn oh! Oh! To ha! Ha! He!  
So dying love lives still:  
Oh! Oh! A while, but ha! Ha! Ha!  
Oh! Oh! Groans our for ha! Ha! Ha!  
Heigh-ho! (1901, p.78)*

It can be said that although the two songs take the same theme – love – as their subject, in Chaucer’s work Antigone presents it as something sweet while Pandarus in Shakespeare’s work presents it as something that causes pain. Charney in this sense comments on the same song of Pandarus in Shakespeare’s work that “love is ultimately bitter and tormenting” (2014, p.100). Therefore while Antigone’s song exhibits love as blissful, Pandarus’ song presents it as agonising.

The use of letters in *Troilus and Criseyde* is very significant, as well, in terms of the fact that the first epistolary approach in British literature is seen in this work. In the story, Pandarus, hoping to get them together, suggests Troilus to write a letter to Criseyde, saying that he's ill. Pandarus then tells Troilus that he will take the letter to Criseyde early in the day and when he's with her, Troilus should ride past in order that they see him. Pandarus also explains Troilus how to write the letter: "As to your letter, you have sense enough / Not to be formal, or to show wit / By being argumentative or tough; / Your handwriting should not be exquisite / Or clerkly; blot it with your tears a bit" (p.81). In this way, he thinks, the letter will be effective and Criseyde will be touched. Troilus, after some hesitation, accepts Pandarus' offer and writes a letter in which "he called her his true lady, life and joy, / His sorrow's cure, his bliss, his heart's desire. [...] And next he begged her with all lowliness, [...] He begged her piteously to take his side" (p.83). After finishing the letter, Troilus folds it and considers the letter to be lucky and blissful as she will hold it. Pandarus takes the letter to his niece and although Criseyde acts in a demure way at first, she consents to write a reply to Troilus in the end. She goes to her room and sets herself to write the first letter that she has ever written. In it, she thanks him but hesitates to give him greater hope. Then Pandarus takes the letter to Troilus and after reading the letter, Troilus, with hope and Pandarus' promises, frees himself from despair and her letter increases the passion that burns Troilus. Though in Chaucer's story, Criseyde is a shy, decent and well-mannered lady – she acts in a demure way and hesitates to write a reply to Troilus; in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, she's not that coy lady at all – she is now a flippant, fleshly and frivolous woman. She's impudent enough to compare two men in the presence of her uncle Pandarus. She says: "There is among the Greeks Achilles, a better man than Troilus" (1901, p.39). When we turn back to Criseyde's letter in Chaucer's work, we can say that the letters have a functional role which make way for the lovers' coming together and which serve love and Cupid. In a way, they may be thought as the instruments that serve Cupid, the Greek god of love and his pursuit. Accordingly, when Criseyde confesses her eagerness to be with Troilus, as a result of the letters and Pandarus' efforts, Pandarus celebrates their love addressing Cupid: "Immortal god, O deathless deity – Cupid I mean – by this be glorified!" (p.117). Furthermore, the letters of Troilus and Criseyde can be considered to be conventional letters and McKinnell's following statements are symptomatic of this idea: "Clearly, the Narrator is encouraging his listeners to view both letters with a cheerful detachment. Troilus' letter, like so many of his actions, shows an uncritical yet unspontaneous acceptance of courtly convention" and "Criseyde's reply is full of rather conventional good sense." (McKinnell, 1991, p.83). In addition, not exceeding the boundaries of this above-stated convention, Troilus and Criseyde express their feelings of love reciprocally in their letters.

The letters in *Troilus and Criseyde* also function as mediums that assure secrecy in terms of court literature, which makes one "aware of the power of the notions of honour and reputation" (Saunders, 2001, p.132). Correlating the New Historicist approach that suggests that a writer is influenced by the time and culture he lives in and also the history of the earlier times – as he's a part of it – Chaucer here can also be considered to be impressed by a historical notion. In middle ages, notions of honour and reputation were significant terms as "courtesy literature promises that good manners and morals will lead to honor" (Szarmach, Tavormina and Rosenthal, 1998, p.213). In court literature, the male lover praises and belauds the lady he loves and becomes his lady's servant while the lady remains coy and demure, also caring for her good name. The secrecy preserves the reputation of women from tale-tellers and gossips. In this respect, as the reputation of women is a significant fact, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, by means of letters, Criseyde's reputation is preserved. Different from Cressida who is a whore in her twenties in Shakespeare's version of the story, Chaucer's Criseyde is a middle-aged widow for whom reputation is very important. As expressed above, the letters in Chaucer's work help to maintain and preserve Criseyde's reputation and through the use of them, nobody knows that she and Troilus are having an affair. This idea gives way to another function of the letters in *Troilus and Criseyde*, which is the fact that they are used "as a substitute for oral communication" (McKinnell, 1991, p.77). As Troilus and Criseyde, due to the societal norms, cannot meet and talk face to face when they wish, they use letters as tools facilitating their communication. Besides, the letters in *Troilus and Criseyde* "have a narrative function which is not shared by songs, dreams or plays" and "Chaucer's individuality does not emerge strongly in them" (McKinnell, 1991, p.76). Thus, a rather objective narration, free from the poet's personal inner world, is created through the use of letters.

Apart from this, Chaucer, as he used *Il Filostrato* as a source while writing *Troilus and Criseyde*, uses the lyrics in it and provides additional ones as well. Keeping the songs and letters in the work, he rewrites them in his own style. As Windeatt expresses, "a passing mention of Troilo as singing, of Criseida as writing, or of the lovers as sorrowing at dawn, prompts Chaucer to insert at those points a full text of Troilus' song [...], of Criseyde's letter [...], or of the lovers' aubades or 'dawn-songs'" (Windeatt, 1992, p.164). In this way, Chaucer again depicts his skill in composing eloquent and cadenced pieces of writing in the context of his literary work.

In Book III, after Troilus and Criseyde write their letters to each other and their love is strengthened in this way, Pandarus seeking for an opportunity to bring them together invites Criseyde to supper on a night when he thinks there'll be heavy rain and Criseyde won't be able to go home. In the meantime, although Troilus is thought to be out of town, he's in fact hidden in Pandarus' house and when everybody goes to bed, Pandarus brings Troilus near Criseyde. He pushes Troilus into Criseyde's

bed and after that their love is consummated, after a night of perfect joy. In the morning Troilus goes his home and Pandarus after visiting Criseyde, visits Troilus who is more deeply in love than ever before. Again, as an instrument of reflecting love, Troilus begins to sing a song, praising love itself:

*'Love that is ruler over earth and sea,  
Love whose commandment governs heaven on high,  
Love that has made a wholesome amity  
In neighbour states to join and guide them by,  
That couples lovers in a holy tie,  
And gives the law of love to friends as well,  
Bind thou this harmony of which I tell!'* (p.173)

Troilus, after longing for Criseyde for a long time, attains his wish to be with her and he is in such a happy mood that, he reflects his bliss and joy with a song, praising love. The author also confirms the idea that the song reflects Troilus' emotions of love: "Through you I have accomplished in my song / The full effects of love in Troilus" (p.175). Similarly as mentioned above, in Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, as Chaucer was influenced by the songs in it; one can see similar songs about love. In the third part of *Il Filostrato*, Troilus praising love sings:

*I bless the season, the year, the month, and the day, the hour and the very moment that one so virtuous, fair, graceful, and courteous first appeared to mine eyes. [...] If there were a hundred tongues in my mouth and each were vocal, and if I had the cunning of every poet in my breast, I should never be able to express her true virtues, her lofty gentleness, and her abundant courtesy.* (1999, p.55)

As can be seen in the examples, both Chaucer and Boccaccio, through Troilus' songs, praise love and comment upon lovers' happiness. The two songs reflect Troilus' emotions and bliss about love. Later in the course of the story, a truce between the Trojans and Greeks is arranged in order to exchange prisoners, namely Criseyde and Antenor. Troilus, hearing the news, gets sorrowful and Pandarus sympathizes with him, suggesting solutions. Then Troilus visits Criseyde and when she faints, he attempts to kill himself, thinking she's dead. When she revives, they talk, trying to find some remedy out and Criseyde promises to return to Troy in ten days, after she's taken for Antenor. Pandarus and Troilus wait for Criseyde's return on the tenth day after parting. During this time, Troilus again sings; however, he's now sorrowful and waiting for Criseyde, thus reflecting his feelings of longing between hope and dread: "Said Troilus: 'Now Heaven send me grace / That I may find, upon my homecoming, / Criseyde returned!' And he began to sing" (p.260). Troilus' song that he sang

in order to ease his heart while waiting hopelessly for Criseyde, reflects his reason of grief:

*'O star of love, since I have lost thy light,  
Shall not my heart lament thee and bewail  
In darkening torment, moving night by night  
Towards my death; the wind is in my sail.  
If the tenth night should come, and if it fail,  
Thy guiding beam, if only for an hour,  
My ship and me Charybdis will devour.'* (p.265)

This song, like the other ones in the story, not only points to Troilus' feelings but also makes it easier for the reader to sympathize with him by understanding him profoundly. Similarly in Robert Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid*, which was written less than a century after Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* – though his version can be considered to be a sequel to Chaucer's work as he adds a sad ending of Criseyde to the story and can be considered to be different than Chaucer's work as Troilus is not dead at the end – one can see Troilus' sigh about Criseyde reflecting his woe and sadness:

*For great sorrow his heart to burst was bound.  
Sighing full sadly said: "I can no more.  
She was untrue, and woe is me therefore."<sup>3</sup>  
(Henryson, 1925, p.30)*

In both extracts, Troilus is sad about losing his love and reflects his emotions by the use of lyric units. Later in the story of Chaucer's version, Troilus, dreaming of a boar embracing his love, cannot decide what to believe and upon Pandarus' offer, he writes a letter to her in order to be sure whether she has betrayed him or not. Contrary to Troilus' former letters that reflected his joy and bliss of love, this letter points to his grief, complaint and misery, which is evidenced in these lines:

*How long a time it is – ah, well you know! –  
Since you departed, leaving me dejected  
In bitter grief [...]  
I write my grief, that every hour increases,  
With such complaining as I dare, or can  
Make in a letter, wet with tears that ran  
Like rain [...]* (p.290)

In Troilus' letter, which "is based on a very long letter in *Il Filostrato* [...] the ponderous, misapplied rhetoric of the first part and the faulty construction of the letter are a deliberate portrayal of Troilus' mental state" (McKinnell, 1991, p.84,85). Criseyde's reply, which is brief and not clear, is only described and not fully given in the text. She says she'll come but doesn't know when, creating an effect of vagueness, thus leading Troilus to consider them to be "empty phrases" (p.294). Troilus often writes to Criseyde in order to be sure of the reason of her delay in coming; however, her reply is prosaic and tasteless, which Troilus finds strange: "Come back I will; but in the

<sup>3</sup> The modern English version of the text is taken from Michael Murphy's translation of the text.

disarray / In which I stand just now, what day or year / This is to happen, I can hardly say” (p.300). From these lines that are taken from Criseyde’s last letter, which “is perfectly conventional” (McKinnell, 1991, p.80), it can be inferred that as she cannot tell Troilus of her betrayal, she just seems to explain the reasons for her lateness of returning to Troy, making excuses. Apart from this, when Criseyde’s letter is examined in terms of its structural pattern, what Windeatt says is elucidative:

*The medieval artes dictandi (arts of letter-writing) divided the structure of a letter into five parts, to which Criseyde’s last letter to Troilus conforms: a combined salutation and benevolentiae captatio (i.e an attempt to gain the recipient’s sympathy) [...]; a narration, relating her attitudes [...]; a peticio, asking Troilus for friendship and not to be displeased by brevity [...], a second benevolentiae captatio using sententiae (proverbs) [...]; and a simple conclusio. (Windeatt, 1992, p.166)*

As befitting to what Windeatt expresses above and conforming to New Historicism that suggests that works of literature should be examined for their meaning as products of the certain time they were written, Criseyde’s letter is a perfect example of the medieval arts of letter writing, including the aforementioned five parts, in which she makes “an attempt to arouse his pity, [...] by a rhetorical exposition of her unhappiness [...], the promise to return to Troy when circumstances permit” and “the pretence that their affair has been unimportant” (McKinnell, 1991, p.87,88). In substance, the letters throughout the story stand for tools of communication. While at the beginning of the verse novel, they act as communicators of blissful feelings; through the end of it, while again acting as mediums of communication, this time they depict the sorrow and grief of Troilus and laxness of Criseyde.

Later on, in the course of the story, after Troilus sees his own brooch that he gave Criseyde on the coat of Diomedes, he understands that she’ll not return, in contrast to her promise. Still loving her, Troilus dies in battle and ascends to heaven. The poet finishes the story while Troilus muses on the transience and triviality of earthly affairs and eternal love. However, the readers cannot simply label Criseyde ‘an unfaithful betrayer’, because “despite our knowledge of the ending, the narrator’s loving presentation of Criseyde in the course of the poem makes us feel the powerful attraction that brought about Troilus’ love; and we are even persuaded that she was worthy of it” (Donalson, 1991, p.46).

Troilus’ death and ascending to heaven at the end of the story can also be interpreted corresponding to New Historicism. In the Middle ages, Christianity was spreading across Europe. It was brought to England by a monk called Augustine in 597 A.D. As Bredero expresses in his book *Christendom and Christianity in the Middle Ages*, “historians strongly emphasized the impact of the Christian religion on society, [...] assuming that the medieval world was preeminently Christian” (1994,

p.10). As befitting to the Christian religion, at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer makes Troilus ascend to the eighth sphere of heaven, see the world from above and laugh at all the follies and everything on earth. While Boccaccio, in his related work, can be considered to be worldly, Chaucer’s Troilus sees the triviality of worldly things and meditates upon eternal love that is also confirmed by Christianity as Arnold in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity* presents this idea “as a triumph and transcendence of the spiritual over the ‘worldly’ “ (2014, p.11). In that way, Chaucer can be considered to represent his characters having Christian inner visions.

## CONCLUSION

The “lyric units” in *Troilus and Criseyde* “have been seen as representing, and carrying forward within themselves, a continuous emotional life which is the most significant focus of action in the poem” (Windeatt, 1992, p.167). They signalize themselves in the form of mainly love, bliss, sorrow or complaint. Chaucer, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, “is meditating the nature of Love, and mainly human love” (Coghill, 1971, p.xviii) and the songs and letters he uses throughout his verse novel are, on the one hand, indicative of this love theme as they function as the main instruments representing and conveying both the human love and eternal love. (Both the songs and the letters are components of the factors that result in love.) In a way, they can be likened to pebbles that lead someone to the true destination if followed attentively. In this sense, if the songs and letters didn’t exist, the love of Troilus and Criseyde wouldn’t be consummated. On the other hand, they also depict the sorrow and complaint of the characters, in the sense that “in a courtly context the act of making ‘complaint’ will often be the impetus behind such lyric forms as songs or epistles” (Windeatt, 1992, p.166). Thus, it can be deduced that the songs and letters in *Troilus and Criseyde* are indicative of both love and sorrow.

Not only the greatest writer of the medieval times but also one of the most accomplished writers of all times, Geoffrey Chaucer depicts his virtuosity and lyric art in *Troilus and Criseyde*, aiming to “use lyric both for its expressiveness and for its ability to convey something quintessential” (Windeatt, 1992, p.168). As “a text whose artistic merits have been, almost without exception, lauded by its readers for centuries” (Frantzen, 1993, p.11), *Troilus and Criseyde* will continue not only to be read and praised for long years but also to inspire authors and critics to write more and more works of art on the mastership and refinement of its creator.



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