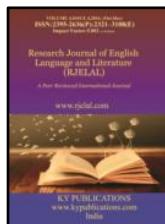


RESEARCH ARTICLE**THE CONCEPT OF LOVE IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE: THE IDEA OF LOVE
IN CHAUCER'S *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*****Berna Köseoğlu**

Assistant Professor of English Language and Literature

Kocaeli University, Department of English Language and Literature, Kocaeli, Turkey

berna.koseoglu@kocaeli.edu.tr

**ABSTRACT**

Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* reflects the idea of love in Medieval texts and sheds light on the characteristics of the Medieval male lover and the agony he experiences as a consequence of the impossibility of coming together with the beloved in earthly life. Dwelling on the distressed position of Troilus in the work and his hopeless state due to his excessive love towards Criseyde, one can observe that earthly love in Medieval texts is associated with suffering, helplessness and disillusionment. In this article, the role of the character, Pandarus coming to the fore as a go-between, in the union of Troilus and Criseyde, will be analyzed in the light of the Medieval understanding of love, anguish and fortune. Thus, the aim of the study is to emphasize the inevitability of misery and disappointment for lovers in Medieval literature and to portray the undeniable impact of fortune upon one's agony and contentment in the philosophy of Medieval love.

Keywords: Chaucer, Medieval Period, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Idea of Love, Pandarus**I. Introduction**

Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (1380-87), which is the re-accounting of the tragic love of the Trojan Prince Troilus and Criseyde, contains the aspects of allegory and characteristics of the medieval courtly love. The work not only reflects the traces of the previously written literary texts but it also leads to the production of other literary works. While Benoît de Sainte-Maure's poem *Le Roman de Troie* and Boccaccio's work *Il Filostrato* were published before Chaucer's work, Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cresside* came to the fore as a re-creation of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (Pappas 3-4).

Although there are certain divergences and diversifications in these literary sources, the common point is the effective portrayal of the characters and the undeniable influence of these

personages upon the flow of the events. Considering Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, it is no doubt that Troilus and Criseyde are the main characters, but Pandarus, the uncle of Criseyde, and the friend of Troilus, also plays a very important role not only in the arrangement of the structure of the work but also in the development of the incidents that influence the fate of the main characters. Therefore, throughout the work, it is "Pandarus [who] instructs both Troilus and Criseyde in the meaning of their experience, telling them how to act, what to say, and what to think. [So] he frames the action for them [...]" (Frantzen 64).

In the work, rather than actions, thoughts and dialogues are in the foreground and they are portrayed by means of Pandarus, who gives advice and consolation both to Troilus and Criseyde throughout the work. So even though "[...]" it does

not have the full range of physical action, we expect from an epic or chivalric romance, it does have a movement within the world of thought and speech" (Gaylord 32). In this sense, if the counsels and interventions of Pandarus are taken into account, it is obvious that he considerably contributes to the dominance of speech and ideas in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Since he is the go-between, organizing all the meetings between the lovers in order to bring them together, his name, which comes from the verb "to pander," can also be regarded as allegorical (Brewer 219), because he panders to this couple by making plans for their happiness. As a result, as Bloomfield utters, the designs of Pandarus lead Troilus to ignore the "personal values, social concerns" (296), since he is obsessed with his love towards Criseyde.

II. The Idea of Love in Medieval Literature: Troilus as a Medieval Lover

Considering the idea of courtly love in Medieval texts, one can recognize the sufferings of the male lover, together with his pleasure, due to the intensity of his feelings towards the beloved and his hopelessness, helplessness as a consequence of the obstacles preventing him from achieving happiness with his beloved in the earthly world (Olivares 20). Troilus, who is unable to attain Criseyde with his own strategies and intelligence, is led to action and guided by Pandarus, who aims at comforting Troilus and finding ways to help him overcome his distress, misery and hopelessness due to his love. His grief can be recognized along these lines:

"God wold I were aryved in the port
Of deth, to which my sorwe wol me lede!
A, Lord, to me it were a gret comforte;
Than were I quyt of languisshyng in drede.
For, be myn hidde sorwe iblowe on brede,
I shal byiapec ben a thousand tyme
More than that fol of whos folie men ryme.
(I. 526-32)

It is clear that Troilus suffers so much from his despair and frustration because of love that he desires for death in order to escape from his anguish, as observed in medieval texts. The more he undergoes disillusionment because of the impossibility of achieving the lover and her love, the

more depressed he becomes. It is hardly possible for him to overcome his distress without the support of another person. Therefore, it is Pandarus who tries to find remedies for his depression and to relieve him, which shows "the seriousness of Pandarus's attempt to manipulate and control" (Knopp 334).

III. Pandarus as a Go-between for the Sake of Love

In the work, Pandarus is portrayed as a "good-natured and warm-hearted [character], and he truly believes he is not only making everybody comfortable, but is doing an unmixed service to both Troilus and his blighted and widowed niece" (Tatlock 96). Consequently, his attempts to soothe Troilus and to determine what to do about his torment dominate *Troilus and Criseyde* as it is seen:

By wayling in his chambre thus allone,
A frend of his that called was Pandare,
Com oones in unwar, and herd hym
groone,
And say his frend in swich destresse and
care:
"Allas," quod he, "who causeth al this fare?
O mercy, god, what unhap may this
meene?
(I. 547-52)

Pandarus, who is described as the friend of Troilus, comes into view and tries to get information about the reason of Troilus's unhappiness, distress and groaning. This is the foreshadowing of his significance for the progress of the incidents and of his very important function in the decisions that will be taken by the characters, since he will dominate the lives of Troilus and Criseyde in such an exceeding way that each movement of the characters will be directed and determined by Pandarus, who is the controller of all the developments related to the plot and who is the organizer of the relationship between Troilus and Criseyde. In this sense, D'Evelyn points out that "they [characters] exemplify the perpetual conflict between the higher reason, sensuality, and the provocations of external temptation" (275). Thus, while the main characters are torn between their love and their hesitations, between reason and sensations, it is Pandarus who will lead them to take action.

At the same time, it is very ironic that although Pandarus himself is unsuccessful at his own love affairs, he makes an enormous effort to enable the lovers to unite, to achieve passionate love and to attain sexual fulfillment. So, realizing this conflict, Troilus utters: "This were a wonder thing, [...] / Thow koudest nevere in love thiselven wisse; / How devel maistow bryng me to blisse?" (l. 621-23). He wonders how Pandarus, who has never been wise in love affairs, will be able to bring him bliss and comfort. On the other hand, the ideas of Pandarus related to the importance of Fortune and pain in one's life efficiently portray the hidden message in the Medieval texts: the inevitability of experiencing the influence of Fortune in the material world. Hence, it is impossible not to stress that Pandarus is Chaucer's "brilliance of conceptual design" (Fleming 158). In this aspect, the speech of Pandarus, which demonstrates the impossibility of escaping from Fortune and the unavoidability of undergoing both the negative and the positive outcomes of that force, effectively reflects one of the most common subjects emphasized in the works of Middle Ages. It is also observed in the work: "For how myghte evere swetnesse han ben knowe / To him that nevere tasted bitternesse? Ne no man may ben inly glad, I trowe, / That nevere was in sorwe or som destresse (l. 638-41)".

In addition to his function as a go-between, Pandarus is also the spokesman stressing the typical understanding of the Medieval times. Highlighting that it is impossible for an individual not to go through bitterness in earthly life, he reveals that those who are unable to endure grief can not achieve contentment. In other words, he underlines that if you do not bear the burden of sorrow or disillusionment, you can never be glad or never attain comfort in life. In this manner, the importance of Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* (AD 524) should be indicated; since in this work the understanding of Lady Philosophy can also be associated with the function of Pandarus in *Troilus and Criseyde*. As it is recognized "[the] dialogue between a wise physician and suffering yet educable patient [in C of P]" (Arch 448) is replaced with the dialogue between Troilus and Pandarus in *Troilus and Criseyde*. In *The Consolation of Philosophy*, it is

Lady Philosophy, who consoles Boethius, the narrator, for his suffering due to his imprisonment and it is again her who points out the reality that life consists of both affliction and ease and also who puts emphasis on the great effect of Fortune on people's lives as observed:

[...] fortune is ever changing, indeed cyclical; that the universe is controlled by good Creator; that happiness can only be achieved through virtue [...] (16). No man is so completely happy [...]. It is the nature of human affairs to be fraught with anxiety; they never prosper perfectly and they never remain constant [...]. No one finds it easy to accept the lot Fortune has sent him [...]. (63)

Lady Philosophy indicates that Fortune is cyclical and the state of human beings is not stable and also her consolation of Boethius by stating that all the individuals find it difficult to come to terms with their Fortune sheds light on the medieval understanding about Fortune. Thus, it is implied that the wheel of Fortune has both ups and downs. Similarly, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, it is Pandarus who tries to do his best to relieve Troilus by claiming that Fortune treats everyone in the same manner: "[...] Fortune is comune / To everi manere wight in som degree? / And yet thou hast this comfort lo, perde, / That as hire ioies moten overgone, / So mote hire sorwes passen everychone (l. 843-47). So, it is recognized that Pandarus eases Troilus by saying that since Fortune is common and makes every person experience the same torments and bliss, he should not complain about his situation, because both suffering and happiness are for the human beings. The consolation in *Troilus and Criseyde* is related to the idea that if comfort comes and passes, sorrow will also come and pass. In this outlook, Troilus, indicating "of al my wo the welle, / Thanne is my swete fo called Criseyde/ (l. 873-74), [...] for wel fynde I that fortune is my fo [...]" (l. 837), is soothed by Pandarus. It can be asserted that "[Fortune] was a convenient figure to blame when, dissatisfied with one's portion in life" (Patch 25). Since Troilus can not put up with his passionate love for Criseyde, he defines Fortune as his foe. Consequently, even if the focus, in *The Consolation*

of Philosophy, is on philosophy, virtue and the divinity of God, the great impact of Fortune upon human beings is also emphasized in the work. As Martin puts it,

[...] [t]he dilemmas facing both Troilus and Boethius are strikingly similar, as are the conclusions at which they both arrive. Both Troilus and Boethius are characters who weep. Both their problems can be summarized in [the] insight offered by Lady Philosophy. (173)

Likewise, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, the same issue is underlined by Pandarus. That is why "Pandarus is undeniably central to the plot of *Troilus and Criseyde*" (Carton 50). Considering the connection between the consolation and the love affair in the work, it should be noted that the consolation is for the sake of an earthly affair, not for an issue related to the spiritual world. On the other hand, in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, the consolation of Lady Philosophy is associated with the heavenly world. While in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Pandarus comforts the lovers in order to bring them together in the mortal world, Lady Philosophy eases Boethius, the narrator, in the work, so as to make him realize that not the earthly matters, but the immortal world should be taken into consideration (75). Thus, as Robertson emphasizes, "[t]he character of Pandarus is a masterpiece of medieval irony. On the surface, he is an attractive little man, wise, witty, and generous. But this wisdom is not of the kind that Lady Philosophy would approve [...]" (72), because she teaches Boethius the divinity of heavenly world, not the pleasures of earthly life. However, taking the similarities into account, it is obvious that both of them suffer from the idea that Fortune is responsible for their miseries, so "[b]oth Troilus and Boethius [...] are afflicted by the same illness, react in similar ways, and turn to the aid of learned physicians who claim they can cure them of their woes" (McCall 298). While Pandarus helps Troilus attain earthly love, Lady Philosophy enables Boethius to achieve spiritual love. In this sense, as McCall stresses, Pandarus is the "spokesman for worldly wisdom and the law of the flesh" whereas Lady Philosophy appears as the "spokeswoman for spiritual wisdom and the rule of reason" (298).

In the work, it is always Pandarus who makes effort to make Troilus believe that he should not be hopeless by indicating that every individual suffers from the same torment as he does: "And wostow why I am the lasse afered / Of this matere with my nece trete?/ ffor this haue I herd seyd of wyse lered, / Was nevere man or womman yet bigete / That was unapt to suffren loves hete, / Celestial, or elles love of kynde" (I. 974-79). What is in the foreground that Pandarus aims at persuading Troilus to accept the fact that all human beings are under the pressure of love, sometimes earthly, sometimes spiritually; therefore it is impossible for an individual to be exempt from this torture. In this outlook, "Pandarus operates as love's strategist [...] an artificer of situations, a deviser of fictions to bring Troilus and Criseyde together" (Fyler 108). So, he plays a very significant role in the progress of the events and in the development of the love affair and he regards his attempts to unite the lovers as a "labour" and a "bisynesse" (I. 1042). Pandarus goes on consoling Troilus for his sorrow that appears as a result of his condemning Fortune for his own suffering. The emphasis of Pandarus on the importance of action and of making use of the opportunities can be observed in his own words:

Forto euery wight som goodly aventure
Som tyme is shape, if he it kan receyven,
And if that he wol take of it no cure,
Whan that it commeth, but wilfully it
weyven,
Lo, neyther cas ne fortune hym deceyven,
But ryght his verray slouthe and
wrecchednesse;
And swich a wight is forto blame, I gesse.
(II. 281-87)

What draws attention is that Pandarus imposes his ideas on Troilus once more and endevours to make him recognize that not just Fortune but he himself is responsible for his anguish as well. What he underlines is that although the good opportunities are shaped by Fortune, "neglect of offered opportunities is caused by our own internal wretchedness, and not by Fortune" (Kelly 98). By means of these words, it is noticed that Troilus is directed and guided by Pandarus in such a significant way that Troilus will find himself acting in

accordance with the approval and dictates of Pandarus, who stresses that "[...] [his] entent is cleene [...]" (II. 580). As Dinshaw underlines, "Pandarus's activity [...] keeps him physically alive, breathless, and sweaty: he leaps, he perspires, he moves back and forth between the two lovers" (65). Although the focus is on the characters, Troilus and Criseyde and their love, it is undeniable that their love could not have been foregrounded without Pandarus.

In the same manner, Pandarus also gives advice to Criseyde and attempts to influence her by praising the love of Troilus and regarding him as a noble, gentle knight as it is seen: "That trewe man, that noble, gentil knyght, / That naught desireth but youre frendly cheere, / I se hym deyen ther he goth upryght" (II. 331-33). He utters the intensity of Troilus's desire and his suffering because of his love for Criseyde. In this respect, it is hardly possible to state that "Troilus and Criseyde themselves are self-authorized" (Smith 949), since they are controlled by Pandarus throughout the work. He does not hesitate even from exaggerating situations for their coming together, so he tells that he hears Troilus revealing his love in his dream (II. 500-18). Moreover, he praises his heroism, "his persoun, his aray, his look, his chere" (II. 1267) in order to influence the decision of Criseyde and he also makes it easier for them to communicate with one another by means of letters (II. 1335-37). Thus, as Windeatt suggests, it is no doubt that:

[i]t is Chaucer's Pandarus who in the manner of an author, invents a plot by arranging correspondence and meetings; he generates action from feeling, invents motivation for the characters [...] and sees further into them than they do themselves (214). He is the essence of initiative and resourcefulness; he generates action and shapes it. [...] A generational difference [between Troilus and Pandarus] might explain the inclination of Pandarus to give worldly advice [...]. (290)

By means of his supervision and suggestions, he determines the manners of the characters and their destinies. Furthermore, as he is older than both Troilus and Criseyde, he comes to the fore as a wise

and an experienced man who is ready to give counsel to the young. In this sense, he is very good at teaching Troilus the tactics to win the favour of Criseyde by instructing him how to salute and impress Criseyde sitting (II. 1013-15). As Penninger emphasizes, "Pandarus as player, Troilus as playing piece. Here the game begins: The hunt is on, Troilus pursued by Pandarus; or Pandarus and Troilus as players on the same team, hunters of the same prey" (22). In this game, Pandarus is very determined to teach Troilus the methods which will enable him to attain Criseyde's love. In this perspective, Pandarus asks Troilus to pretend as if he were ill due to his suffering as a consequence of his love towards Criseyde:

Thow shalt gon over nyght, and that bylyve,
Unto Deiphebus hous as the to pleye,
Thi maladie awey the bet to dryve,
For-whi thow semest sik, soth forto seye.
Soone after that, down in thi bed the leye,
And sey thow mayst no lenger up endure.
(II. 1513-18)

According to Pandarus, the meeting in the house of Deiphebus will result in success if Troilus seems to be sick because of Criseyde's love and if he says to Criseyde it is her who will end his distress. Not only Troilus but also Pandarus will be involved in the play by weeping and asking her to put an end to his friend's pain (III. 115-18). So, as Barney points out, "[i]f Pandarus excels, up to a points, in arranging circumstances, then Troilus excels [...]" (2). If the plans of the go-between succeed, the attempts of Troilus also work, however what should be stressed is that although Pandarus comes into view in all events, "what we know of him is only his functions, not his essential being" (Brewer, 1998: 218). Rather than his physical description or personal identity, his function as a go-between is emphasized. As a panderer, by means of his plans, he makes the lovers meet and enjoy the passion of love as it is seen:

Hire armes smale, hire streghte bak and
softe,
Hire sydes longe, flesshly, smothe, and
white
He gan to stroke, and good thrift bad ful
ofte

Hire snowissh throte, hire brestes rounde
and lite;
Thus in this hevene he gan hym to delite,
And ther-with-al a thousand tyme hire
kiste,
That what to don for ioie unnethe he wiste.
(III. 1247-53)

It is clear that he leads them to experience the physical fulfilment and the intensity of love by bringing them together. It can be realized that with the instructions of Pandarus, the lovers unite and undergo the joy of love; it is him who acts as an intermediary and contributes to the joy of the lovers. In this manner, Frantzen indicates that:

[...] romantic love cannot succeed without the intervention and the moderating influence of intermediaries. [...] Pandarus demonstrates both that love affairs in courtly societies must be mediated by go-betweens who protect the secrecy and thus ensure the safety of the lovers, and that the go-between may have his own motives in promoting the affair. (82)

The love affair progresses with the involvement and manipulation of Pandarus, who watches the excitement and the delight of the lovers in their meeting as if he were watching a romance (III. 980). Nevertheless, this pleasure is temporary, so the lovers can be likened to persons who "become disillusioned in their desire to be happy in an unreal world of their own making" (Ertin 115). On the other hand, although the end is a tragic one, it is impossible not to pay attention to the important function of Pandarus in the development of the couple's affair and in the fulfilment of their temporary desires. Consequently, "[d]esire in *Troilus and Criseyde* [...] undergoes a rich thematic elaboration, especially through Pandarus's mediation" (Edwards 83).

IV. Conclusion

Finally, analyzing the idea of love in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, it is apparent that Pandarus, who directs each movement of the lovers and who has a very significant impact on their decisions and actions, paves the way for the lovers, Troilus and Criseyde, who can experience the pleasures of love for a certain period owing to the

noteworthy contributions of Pandarus even if they are separated from each other at the end and cannot achieve a complete sense of happiness. Pandarus not only controls the progress of the love affair, but he also represents the conventional ideas about love, suffering, fortune, in other words, the common concepts in the medieval texts. As a result, re-creating the love of Troilus and Criseyde in his work, Chaucer effectively illustrates the philosophy of love in the Medieval Ages by reflecting the impossibility of eternal joy in earthly love in the material world.

References

- Arch, J. "The Boethian Testament of Love". *Studies in Philology*, 105 (4); (2008): pp.448-462.
- Barney, S. A. "Troilus Bound". *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde: "Subgit to alle Poesye," Essays in Criticism*. Ed. R. A. Shoaf. Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts P, 1992. 1-16.
- Bloomfield, J. "Chaucer and the Polis: Piety and Desire in the *Troilus and Criseyde*". *Modern Philology*, 94 (3); (1997): pp.291-304.
- Boethius, A. M. S. *The Consolation of Philosophy* (AD 524). Ed. V. E. Watts. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969.
- Brewer, D. *A New Introduction to Chaucer*. London: Longman, 1998.
- Carton, E. "Complicity and Responsibility in Pandarus' Bed and Chaucer's Art". *Modern Language Association of America*, 94 (1); (1979): pp.47-61.
- Chaucer, G. "Troilus and Criseyde" (1380-87). *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Ed. F.N. Robinson. London: Oxford UP, 1957.
- D'Evelyn, C. "Pandarus a Devil?" *Modern Language Association of America*, 7 (1); (1956): pp.275-79.
- Dinshaw, C. "Reading like a Man: The Critics, the Narrator, Troilus, and Pandarus". *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde: "Subgit to alle Poesye," Essays in Criticism*. Ed. R. A. Shoaf. Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts P, 1992. 47-73.
- Edwards, R. R. "Pandarus's 'Unthrift' and the Problem of Desire in *Troilus and Criseyde*". *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde: "Subgit to*

- alle Poesye,” Essays in Criticism.* Ed. R. A. Shoaf. Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts P, 1992. 74-87.
- Ertin, S. “Dissociation of Literary Characters: The Use of ‘the Double’ as a Defense Mechanism in Ayckbourn’s Woman in Mind and Friel’s Philadelphia, Here I Come!” *Journal of Drama Studies: An International Journal of Research on World Drama in English*, 1 (2); (2007), pp. 107-117. Print.
- Fleming, J. V. *Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer’s Troilus.* London: U of Nebraska P, 1990.
- Frantzen, A. J. *Troilus and Criseyde: The Poem and the Frame.* New York: Twayne, 1993.
- Fyler, J. M. “The Fabrications of Pandarus”. R. A. *Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde: “Subgit to alle Poesye,” Essays in Criticism.* Ed. R. A. Shoaf. Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts P, 1992. 107-119.
- Gaylord, A. T. “The Lessons of the Troilus: Chastisement and Correction”. *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde.* Ed. M. Salu. Cambridge: Brewer, 1991. 23-42.
- Kelly, H. A. *Chaucerian Tragedy.* Cambridge: Brewer, 1997.
- Knopp, S. E. “Narrator and Audience in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde”.* *Studies in Philology*, 78 (4); (1981): pp.323-40.
- Martin, T. L. “Time and Eternity in Troilus and Criseyde”. *Renaissance: Essays on Values in Literature*, 51; (1999): pp.167-79.
- McCall, J. P. “Five-book Structure in Chaucer’s Troilus”. *The Chaucer Review*, 9 (4); (1962): pp.297-308.
- Olivares, J. *The Love Poetry of Francisco de Quevedo.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983.
- Pappas, A.J. *A Comparison of Chaucer’s and Shakespeare’s Treatment of the Troilus and Cressida Story.* 1950. Boston U, MA Dissertation.
- Patch, H. R. “Chaucer and Lady Fortune”. *The Modern Language Review*, 22 (4); (1927): pp.377-88.
- Penninger, F. E. *Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde and The Knight’s Tale: Fictions Used.* Lanham: U P of America, 1993.
- Robertson, D. W. “Medieval Doctrines of Love”. *Critical Essays on Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde and his Major Early Poems.* Ed. C. David Benson. Buckingham: Open UP, 1991. 68-91.
- Smith, N. B. and Carton, E. “Chaucer’s Art”. *Modern Language Association of America*, 94 (5); (1979): pp.948-50.
- Tatlock, J.S.P. “The People in Chaucer’s Troilus”. *Modern Language Association of America*, 56 (1); (1941): pp.85-104.
- Windeatt, B. *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1992.