

1992

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Original Published Citation

Sadlek, Gregory M. "Love, Labor, and Sloth in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde." *Chaucer Review* 26 (1992): 350-68.

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LOVE, LABOR, AND SLOTH IN CHAUCER'S *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*

by Gregory M. Sadlek

Amors, c'est . . . repos travaillant an touz termes.
Jean de Meun

I.

To say that erotic love is a complex and paradoxical phenomenon in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and, indeed, in all of courtly literature is perhaps to state the obvious. But this complexity is the reason for yet another article on the poem, for various aspects of Chaucer's conception of love have not yet been fully explored. For example, love in Troilus's world is at one and the same time a disease that the lover suffers, an ideal that ennobles him, and a "house" that is built with purposeful activity. Chaucer creates a space in which these various perspectives on love play off against each other without ever being resolved.¹ This is why readers often disagree about or, at least, feel ambivalent toward the protagonist, Troilus, who is generally timid, passive, and prone to excessive despondency. From one perspective these qualities are merely symptoms of an illness, *amor hereos*, and, hence, some would argue, irrelevant in an evaluation of Troilus's character. From another perspective Troilus's passivity is a natural consequence of his genuine idealism. Finally, from still a third perspective, these qualities suggest notable character flaws.²

In a recent article in the *Chaucer Review*, Milo Kearney and Mimosa Schraer complain that "a disproportionate attention has been focused on Chaucer's presentation of the character flaws of Criseyde. . . . Yet Troilus has gotten off with little criticism."³ Given the writings of K. S. Kiernan, June Hall Martin, Howard Patch, Edmund Reiss, and others, this is hardly the case. At least in the recent history of criticism, Troilus has had almost as many strong detractors as he has had supporters. However, while Troilus's moral character is complex enough to invite and support a wide variety of judgments, and while it would

be a mistake to deny Troilus's strengths, this article seeks to highlight a significant weakness, his *acedia*, for seeing Troilus as a victim of sloth helps to arrange many previous criticisms of the hapless lover into a coherent medieval pattern.

When he took up Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, Chaucer discovered a protagonist who was passive (sometimes), prone to exaggerated fits of melancholy, and characterized by both the narrator and Pandaro as "timido."⁴ However, for Chaucer and his contemporaries these qualities defined a recognizable constellation of moral characteristics, the characteristics of a person caught in *acedia*. Yet Boccaccio's Troilo was apparently neither as courtly as Chaucer wished him to be nor as "timid" or "slothful" as the frequency of Boccaccio's epithet seemed to imply. In reconstructing, then, the character of the protagonist, Chaucer (1) improved his courtliness and (2) found in the concept of *acedia* an appropriate character flaw to counter-balance Troilus's most shining virtue, his fidelity.

In his book on the Christian conception of *acedia*, Siegfried Wenzel comments that "an analysis that can do no more than suggest that a lovesick romance hero is meant to symbolize *acedia* because he stays in bed and weeps abundantly seems rather pointless."⁵ Wenzel is replying to D. W. Robertson, Jr., who in 1951 commented that lovesickness was "an extreme form of *acedia*."⁶ However, I do not intend to argue that Troilus symbolizes *anything*, nor do I wish to suggest that lovesickness was always perceived as a moral failing. Indeed, scholars have adduced sufficient evidence from medieval medical texts to establish that some medieval writers considered it simply a physical illness, while others considered it the result of moral corruption.⁷ However, I find that the literature of *acedia* is especially illuminating in an attempt to understand Troilus's character in particular because the text suggests that Chaucer modified his major source with this specific vice in mind. As Charles Muscatine has written: "It is difficult to think of a single hero of French romance who is quite so prostrated by love, so removed from the actual business of courtship, who depends so completely on an intermediary."⁸ All courtly lovers suffer from fear, melancholia, and even despair, but Troilus suffers from these and from passivity to an extreme degree. Hence, he is not a typical courtly lover. He may, indeed, be a parody of one.

However, I must make an important qualification at the outset. In *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer's protagonist has two different personae: the public warrior and the private lover.⁹ The public Troilus is a confident worker. He is far from Erec, whom Chrétien de Troyes criticizes for leaving public life to live in private pleasure with Enide, his beautiful wife.¹⁰ On the contrary, throughout Chaucer's work Troilus fulfills

his public duties as warrior successfully. It is only the private Troilus who is guilty of sloth.

Although twentieth-century readers of the *Troilus* may not recognize *acedia* in all of its manifestations, for Chaucer and his contemporaries, the Seven Deadly Sins played important parts in their universe of discourse.¹¹ Wenzel has treated the subject thoroughly, but a short summary of its history may help us see manifestations of the vice that Chaucer's contemporaries would not have missed.¹² The discussion of *acedia* begins with the fourth-century Egyptian desert fathers. Evagrius Ponticus identified *acedia* with the "noonday demon" of Psalm 90, who tempts monks to leave their way of life. He used it to refer to the psychic exhaustion and listlessness caused by the monotony of life in the desert. According to Evagrius, its chief remedy was patience. Later, John Cassian offered the classic definition of the vice as "taedium cordis," weariness of the heart. Further, not only did he establish for the first time the branches of the vice—idleness, somnolence, rudeness, restlessness, wandering about, instability of mind, chattering, and inquisitiveness—but he also added two new remedies, courage and manual labor.¹³

By the late Middle Ages, two major traditions concerning *acedia* clearly existed: one, scholarly, the other, popular.¹⁴ On the one hand, *acedia* was thought to be a sin of the spirit. In the words of Hugh of St. Victor it is "ex confusione mentis nata tristitia, sive taedium et amaritudo animi immoderata" [a sadness born of confusion of the mind, or weariness and immoderate bitterness].¹⁵ On the other hand, *acedia* was also thought to be a sin of the flesh, idleness. While Chaucer's Parson speaks primarily of spiritual *acedia* in his sermon, calling it at one point "the angwisch of troubled herte," Chaucer's Second Nun opens her tale with a treatment of fleshly *acedia*, which she calls "the minstre and norice unto vices."¹⁶ If the remedy for fleshly *acedia* was "bisynesse," the major remedy for spiritual *acedia* was *fortitudo*, or courage, that, as the Parson says, "may endure by long suffraunce the travailles that been covenable" (I 730).

This is all very well, but how is it proper to use this Christian moral concept in the analysis of a classical, pagan lover? The answer is that, beginning with Andreas Capellanus' *De Amore*, a literary tradition arose in which Christian moral formulations were adapted for use in the literature of Courtly Love.¹⁷ Perhaps the best and most relevant example of a work in this tradition is John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. In the *Confessio*, Gower's protagonist, Amans, confesses his sins against love to Genius, Love's priest. The Seven Deadly Sins provide the framework for Amans' confession. Indeed, all of book IV is a classification and illustration of various types of *acedia* in love. The words "in love" are

important qualifiers here, for, although its Christian meaning seems always to linger in the background, the *acedia* which Genius discusses is not the Christian vice. An example makes this clear. In a major section of book IV, Genius examines Amans with respect to his idleness. Amans argues that he is not guilty of idleness because he is always ready, even when unbidden, to offer his lady “service.” In one notable passage, Amans describes his “service” in the following terms:

I serve, I bowe, I loke, I louthe,
 Min yhe folweth hire aboute,
 What so sche wole so wol I,
 When sche wol sitte, I knele by,
 And whan sche stant, than wol I stonde:

.
 And if it falle, as for a time
 Hir liketh noght abide bime,
 Bot besien hire on other thinges,
 Than make I othre tariinges
 To dreche forth the longe dai.

(IV, 1169–73, 1181–85)¹⁸

Among these “tariinges” are playing with the lady’s hound and birds. From the Christian perspective, these actions simply waste time and, hence, are a form of idleness. However, Genius, far from condemning Amans, agrees with his argument that these are bona fide amatory “labors.” “Mi Sone,” he says, “bot thou telle wilt / Oght elles than I mai now hier, / Thou schalt have no penance hier” (IV, 1224–26). Hence, although the Christian perspective comes to dominate by the end of the *Confessio*, the *acedia* that Genius treats in book IV is not the Christian vice but an analogous vice in the parallel religion of Love. Moreover, since Gower does not find it incongruous to apply the analogue outside of the Christian context, it quite possible that Chaucer does the same in *Troilus*.¹⁹

Although the *Confessio* was written a few years after *Troilus*, Gower’s writings on sloth in the *Mirour de l’omme* antedate it. Moreover, it is clear that Gower was aware of the story of Troilus well before Chaucer wrote his version. In all, there are seven references to it in Gower’s works.²⁰ Interestingly, two of these (*Confessio Amantis*, IV, 2795, and *Mirour de l’omme* 5251) occur in sections dealing with sloth. As John Fisher reminds us: “Authors who converse together and read one another’s writings over a period of years need not borrow one another’s very words, but they are likely to show concern for the same theme.”²¹ Clearly *acedia* was on the minds of both Gower and Chaucer in the 1370s and 1380s.²²

To complicate matters further, it should be noted that another literary tradition existed in which idleness, one of the branches of *acedia*, was considered a necessary ingredient for successful love. For example, as a *remedy* against love, Ovid suggests, in a well-known passage, that lovers get busy: “*Otia si tollas, periere Cupidinis arcus*” [If you take away idleness, you break Cupid’s bow].²³ Further, in the *Roman de la Rose*, *Oiseuse* (Ydelnesse) is the gatekeeper of the rose garden.²⁴ How, then, does one know which tradition dominates in *Troilus*? In fact, the idea of sloth in love makes most sense in a context where courtship is presented as work or labor, for if love is labor, then someone who is too slow or timid in love might well be thought of as stricken with lover’s *acedia*.

Although the word “labor” does not appear in Chaucer’s title as it does, for example, in Shakespeare’s play *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, *Troilus* is filled with references to the courtship as “work,” “labor,” or “travail.”²⁵ This is not surprising, for while the title of Chaucer’s source, *Il Filostrato* [The Lovestricken], seems to compel readers to conceive of love only as an illness, plenty of references to love as either “affano” or “fatica” can be found in the work. At one point, for example, Pandaro says to Troilo: “*Questa fatica tutta sarà mia,/ E’l dolce fine tuo voglio che sia*” [This labor will all be mine and the sweet result I wish to be thine] (2:32). In another place, Diomede, fearing his attempt to win Criseida will be for naught, says: “*Vana fatica credo sia la mia*” [I think this labor of mine an idle one] (6:10).

That Chaucer reacted favorably to these allusions is suggested by his increasing their number in the *Troilus*. The most important of these is his borrowing from Geoffrey of Vinsauf, in which Pandarus compares the conducting of a love affair to the building of a house. He says,

For everi wight that hath an hous to founde
 Ne renneth naught *the werk* for to bygynne
 With rakel hond, but he wol bide a stounde,
 And send his hertes line out fro withinne
 Aldirfirst his purpos for to wynne.
 Al this Pandare in his herte thoughte,
 And caste *his werk* ful wisely or he wroughte.
 (I, 1065–71, emphasis added)

If love is a house to be built, then it must be constructed carefully and thoughtfully.²⁶ The building of a house cannot be done in a bed. One might object that the work to which Chaucer’s narrator refers here is the labor of the go-between, not the “true” labor of love. Nevertheless, Pandarus’s work extends far beyond the responsibilities of Boccaccio’s

Pandaro, a more normal go-between. Pandarus, for example, must not only undress Troilus but also throw him into bed with Criseyde on the night of the first tryst (III, 1093–99). Furthermore, when speaking to Troilus, on one occasion he pointedly refers to his own activities as “thi werk” (II, 960).

While one would expect the industrious Pandarus to see love as work, it is surprising that Troilus also seems to see it the same way. However, although Troilus conceives of love as work, he rarely does any of love’s work, except for a brief time after his first night with Criseyde. This short period of well being (III, 1772–1806) suggests that success helps Troilus subdue his *acedia* temporarily. Nevertheless, because this period occupies such a small part of the entire poem, Chaucer’s focus seems to lie elsewhere. In the main, then, Winthrop Wetherbee is correct when he notes, “The most striking feature of Troilus’ role is his passivity. . . . The tendency of Troilus’ emotions to turn in upon themselves rather than to cause him to actively pursue love is perhaps the most consistent feature of his behavior.”²⁷ The following analysis will highlight those traits in Troilus that suggest he was conceived as a character given in part to both physical and spiritual lover’s *acedia*.

II.

First of all, Troilus admits freely to a distaste for love’s work. For example, when we first meet him in the temple, he indirectly boasts about the work that he has avoided in his life:

*I have herd told, pardieux, of youre lvyngye,
Ye loveres, and youre lewed observaunces,
And which a labour folk han in wynnynge
Of love . . .
O veray fooles, nyce and blynde be ye!*

(I, 197–200, 202, emphasis added)

When, after leaving the temple, he first meditates on Criseyde, he immediately links labor and sorrow with the process of love. He imagines, says the Narrator, that “travaille nor grame / Ne myghte for so goodly oon be lorn” (I, 372–73). Despite this thought, Troilus often worries about wasting the little labor that he does for the winning of Criseyde. When, for example, in book III, fearing Criseyde’s anger over his feigned jealousy, he is brought into Criseyde’s bedroom, “in his mynde [Troilus] gan the tyme acorse / . . . And al that *labour* he hath don byforn, / He wende it lost” (1072, 1075–76, emphasis

added). With the exception of the second quotation, all of these references are Chaucer's additions.

Fleshly *acedia* is also manifested in somnolence. When Troilus suffers the blows of bad fortune or his own negligence, he characteristically takes to his bed. Some might believe that this is a normal and excusable reaction to depression, yet Troilus goes to bed even when he is happy. Chaucer's description of his behavior after the first night with Criseyde is enlightening. He writes that Troilus

Returned to his real paleys soone,
He softe into his bed gan for *to slynke*,
To slepe longe, *as he was wont to doone*.
(III, 1534–36, emphasis added)

Chaucer emphasizes Troilus's somnolence here by using the verb "to slink," which hardly seems an appropriate movement for an exultant lover, and by adding the phrase "as he was wont to doone," which indicates that "sloggy slombrynge" (CT, I 705) was one of Troilus's habits. Neither of these characterizations is in Boccaccio's text.²⁸

Troilus's fleshly *acedia* is frequently brought into relief by the work done by his go-between, Pandarus, and his rival, Diomedes, neither of whom lack *fortitudo* or *bisynesse* in matters of love. In fact, Troilus's passivity is aided by Pandarus's willingness to assume Troilus's work. In book I, taking a line directly from Boccaccio, Chaucer has Pandarus say: "Yef me *this labour* and *this bisynesse*, / And of my spede be thyn al that swetnesse" (I, 1042–43, emphasis added. See above for Boccaccio's original). However, Chaucer adds many more such comments. For example, when Pandarus learns from Troilus that his favorite brother is Deiphobus, he merrily goes off to arrange their first meeting with the words "Now lat m'alone, and *werken* as I may" (II, 1401, emphasis added). And, again, in book IV, Pandarus, in an attempt to calm his despairing friend, begs: "and shortly, brother deere, / Be glad, and lat me *werke* in this matere" (650–51, emphasis added).

However, although he often and willingly assumes Troilus's rightful work, Pandarus is indeed aware of his friend's extreme passivity. In fact, several times he uses the word *slouthe*—a word never used in *Il Filostrato*—to attempt to goad Troilus into some kind of minimal activity. For example, when he returns to Troilus after he has presented the young knight's request to Criseyde, he warns Troilus:

Sire, my nece wol do wel by the,
And love the best, by God and by my trouthe,
But lak of pursuyt make it in thi slouthe.
(II, 957–59)

Indeed, as I noted earlier, Pandarus refers to the love affair as “*thi werk*” in the very next line. Because at this point Troilus seems ready to respond, Pandarus suggests that he write a love letter to Criseyde and adds: “Now help thiself, and leve it nought for slouthe!” (II, 1008). Later, in the house of Deiphebus, before Criseyde is led into Troilus’s sick room, Pandarus, for the third time in less than 600 lines, urges Troilus not to let sloth hinder the progress of the affair (II, 1499–1502). Pandarus’s attitudes towards Troilus’s sloth are, then, inconsistent, but his own industry and aggressiveness in forwarding the affair are unflagging.

Another industrious worker in love’s fields is Diomede. Indeed, his first words, adapted from part 4, stanza 10 of *Il Filostrato*, underscore this. When he is sent to pick up his beautiful prisoner, he says to himself: “Al my *labour* shal nat ben on *ydel*, /If that I may, for somewhat shal I seye” (V, 94–95, emphasis added). Note that Chaucer makes Diomede even more self-confident and aggressive than Boccaccio made him (see Boccaccio’s original above). Whereas Boccaccio’s Diomede fears his labor will be vain, Chaucer’s Diomede begins with the conviction that his labor will *not* be in vain. Shrewd, fearless, and practical as a lover, Diomede is clearly spiritually akin to Pandarus and opposite to Troilus. He too perceives love as labor and, like Pandarus, plans his amorous strategy carefully—as if he were building a house. After closely observing Troilus and Criseyde, he reasons:

Certeynlich I am aboute nought,
If that I speke of love or make it tough;
For douteles, if she have in hire thought
Hym that I gesse, he may nat ben ybrought
So soon away; but I shal fynde a meene
That she naught wite as yet shal what I mene.
(V, 100–05)

Although Criseyde does not respond very warmly to his first approaches, she does thank him “Of al his *travaile* and his goode cheere.”²⁹ Thus, while Troilus in book I worries that love is nothing but “labor” and “suffering,” Diomede, who successfully wins Criseyde away from him, cheerfully accepts the “labor” necessary for love.³⁰

Imagery in *Troilus* further supports my contention that Chaucer conceives of Diomede as the polar opposite of his slothful protagonist. After Diomede first presents his case to Criseyde, the narrator says,

This Diomede, of whom yow telle I gan,
Goth now withinne hymself ay arguynge,
With al the sleghte and al that evere he kan,

How he may best, with shortest taryinge,
Into his net Criseydes herte brynge.
To this entent he koude nevere fyne;
To fisshen hire he leyde out hook and lyne.
(V, 771–77, emphasis added)

The fishing imagery may come from the tradition in which slothful men are likened to cats who refuse to fish because they do not want to get their paws wet. In the *Confessio Amantis*, for example, Genius uses this image to describe the idle lover:

For he ne wol no travail take
To ryde for his ladi sake,
Bot liveth al upon his wissches;
And as a cat wolde ete fisshes
Withoute wetinge of his cles,
So wolde he do, bot natheles
He faileth ofte of that he wolde.

(IV, 1105–11)

Chaucer himself uses the image in the *House of Fame* when the Goddess of Fame describes the idlers who want good fame without doing anything to merit it. “Ye be lyke the sweynte cat,” she says, “That wolde have fissh; but wostow what? / He wolde nothing wete his clowes” (1783–85). By using fishing imagery, Chaucer obliquely suggests that Diomedes is no such “cat,” and, by implication, that Troilus is.³¹

If it is clear that Troilus is afflicted with fleshly *acedia*, it is even more evident that he suffers from spiritual *acedia* as well. Gower’s Genius discusses several different branches of lover’s sloth: besides idleness, procrastination, negligence, and somnolence, there are timidity, forgetfulness, sadness, and despair, all aspects of spiritual *acedia*. Few, I believe, would argue that these are not essential qualities of Troilus’s character.

Ovid writes that “res est solliciti plena timoris amor” [love is a thing full of anxious dread].³² This seems to have become something of a commonplace; it was quoted, for example, by Andreas Cappellanus and by Chaucer himself when he has Criseyde say, “Love is thyng ay ful of bisy drede.”³³ Since Troilus’s private life is riddled with fears, one might argue that he is simply a sensitive lover in this Ovidian tradition. However, since his numerous fears paralyze him (unlike Criseyde’s, which goad her into action), one can reasonably argue that they are symptoms of his *acedia*. In his description of the pusillanimous lover, Gower’s Genius foregrounds the emasculating, paralyzing nature of the slothful man’s fear when he describes such a lover as

He that hath litel of corage
 And dar no *mannes werk* beginne:

 Him lacketh bothe word and dede,
 Wherof he scholde his cause spede:
 He woll no manhed understonde,
 For evere he hath drede upon honde:
 Al is peril that he schal seie,
 Him thenkth the wolf is in the weie,
 And of ymaginacioun
 He makth his excusacioun
 And feigneth cause of pure drede,
 And evere he faileth ate nede,
 Til al be spilt that he with deleth.
 He hath the sor which noman heleth,
 The which is cleped lack of herte.

(IV, 316–17, 323–35, emphasis added)

Notice that the distinguishing mark of the pusillanimous lover is that his dread keeps him from “mannes work,” the lack of which, in turn, causes the failure of the love affair. Even if the timid lover is apt to blame fortune for his failure, as Troilus does, his excuses come from “ymaginacioun” only. Indeed, Gower’s description of the pusillanimous lover is so like Troilus that one wonders whether Gower used the Trojan as his model here.

In Book I Troilus “languishes in drede” (1, 529). He fears that Criseyde loves another (1, 499), that she will be angry when Pandarus reveals his (Troilus’s) love to her (1, 1019), and that she will not hear his case (1, 1020). On more than one occasion, Pandarus ridicules the fears of the young Trojan (for example, 1, 1023–24), and he even tries to anger him with unjust accusations, hoping to exorcise the younger man’s fear and sorrow:

Thise wordes seyde he for the nones alle,
 That with swich thing he myght hym angry maken,
 And with angre don his wo to falle,
 As for the tyme, and *his corage awaken*.

(I, 561–64, emphasis added)

Courage, one should recall, was the remedy for spiritual *acedia*, and, thus, Pandarus here plays the concerned physician. But in Books IV and V Troilus is afraid to carry out his plan to spirit Criseyde out of Troy (IV, 561–62), he fears Criseyde will be slain by the Greeks (V, 52–54), and he fears to sneak into the Greek camp to visit Criseyde

(V, 1576–82). Again, his fears hold him back from direct, remedial action.

The best and certainly the funniest example of Troilus's paralyzing fear comes on the night of the first tryst. Chaucer makes it clear that, were it not for Pandarus, Troilus's fears would have prevented the tryst from happening at all. For example, when he realizes that Pandarus has completed all the arrangements, Troilus prays: "Now, blisful Venus, thow me grace send! / . . . For nevere yet no nede / Hadde ich er now, ne halvendel the drede" (III, 705–07). Completely distracted, he begins a litany of prayers to the gods—including Diana!—for help and strength. Pandarus, sensing that Troilus was merely procrastinating, snaps in anger, "Thow wrecched mouses herte, / Artow agast so that she wol the bite?" (III, 736–37) and grabs him "by the lappe" to pull him along (III, 742). When forced by Pandarus's lies to play the role of the jealous lover, Troilus can say nothing but "God woot that of this game, / Whan al is wist, than am I nought to blame" (III, 1084–85). Finally, Troilus collapses in his famous swoon, which Chaucer seems to suggest was caused by excess of sorrow and fear (III, 1086–92). It is not until Troilus is quite literally thrown in bed and stripped by Pandarus, and then stroked by Criseyde that he begins to be capable of some minimal action on his own behalf.

A measure of Troilus's pusillanimity can be taken from a comparison with the "timid" Troilo. Unlike Troilus, Boccaccio's lover makes his way without Pandaro to Criseida's house and waits in her garden "baldanzoso con seco e sicuro" [with a sense of courage and security] (3:25). When the two lovers meet, Troilo is not at all tongue-tied but expresses his love confidently. After the two lovers kiss a thousand times in the garden, they rush into Criseida's bedroom, where they strip themselves and jump into bed. While Criseida would prefer to keep on a bit of underwear, Troilo boldly asks that she rid herself of it, saying: "anima mia, / I'te ne prego, si ch'io t'abbia in braccio / Ignuda sì come il mio cor disia" [Soul of me, I pray thee remove it, so that I may have thee naked in my arms, as my heart desireth] (3:32). If these are the actions of a "timido amante," how does one characterize those of Troilus?

The next manifestation of spiritual *acedia*, forgetfulness, is really only a specific effect of pusillanimity, for here dread leads to loss of memory. Gower's Amans, who confesses to "forgetfulness," is much like Troilus when he says:

For whanne I come ther sche is,
I have it al foryete ywiss;

Of that I thoghte forto telle
I can noght thanne unethes spelle
That I wende altherbest have rad,
So sore I am of hire adrad.

(IV, 567–72)

Troilus's forgetfulness is best seen when he lies in bed at Deiphebus's house waiting for Criseyde to appear. Chaucer tells us that Troilus carefully prepared his remarks before the encounter (III, 51–55). Nevertheless, when Criseyde enters the room, "his herte gan to quappe" for dread, and "his lessoun that he wende konne / To preyen hire, is thorgh his wit ironne" (III, 57, 83–84). He can say nothing but "Mercy, mercy, swete herte!" (III, 98). All this scene is Chaucer's addition to Boccaccio's story.

To treat in detail all the passages in which Chaucer says that Troilus suffers from sorrow or *tristitia*, the next branch of spiritual *acedia*, would be tedious and unnecessary, for with the exception of a brief period at the end of book III, Troilus is continuously sorrowful. Indeed, his attitude seems well described by Petrarch's definition of *acedia* as "a voluptuousness of suffering."³⁴

Chaucer announces at the beginning of the *Troilus* that a major theme will be *sorrow*, and "swich peyne and wo as Loves folk endure" (I, 34). He begins:

The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,
That was the kyng Priamus sone of Troye,
In lovyng, how his aventures fellen
Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie,
My purpos is, er that I parte fro ye.

(I, 1–5)

If "sorrow" is "the distress of mind caused by loss, suffering [or] disappointment" (OED, *sorrow*, 1), it is clear that Troilus's spiritual *acedia*, his "angwissh of troubled herte," must be the central concern of the narrative. This sorrow is *double* in several senses. First, there are really two sorrows, the sorrow of winning Criseyde and that of losing her. It is also *double* in the sense of being "doubly intense" (MED, *double*, 3a). Finally, since the Middle English *double* could also mean "false, deceitful, [or] treacherous" (MED, *double*, 6a), Troilus's sorrow is *double* because through it, even more than through bad fortune, Troilus loses Criseyde, who, it seems, values Diomedes's labor and good cheer even more than she values Troilus's integrity and deep suffering.

Near the end of book V, when Troilus charges off to seek Diomedes

in battle, a reader's first impression is likely to be that Troilus has conquered his *acedia* and that his private and public personae have finally met. This is only an illusion, however, because at this point Troilus is motivated by the last, most terrible manifestation of *acedia*, despair, "that comth," says the Parson, "somtyme of to mucche outrageous sorwe, and somtyme of to mucche drede" (I 693). Only just barely saved from despair and suicide in book IV, Troilus, who discovers Criseyde's broach on Diomedes's cloak, now seeks both to kill and to be killed; he says:

And certeynly, withouten moore speche,
From hennesforth, as ferforth as I may,
Myn owen deth in armes wol I seche;
I recche nat how soone be the day!

(V, 1716–19)

Wetherbee says of Troilus's motivation at this point: "The necessary condition for Troilus' final display of courage is not madness or hatred, but despair, and the only motive for his 'wrath' is the desire to achieve his own death."³⁵ However, unlike Troilus, Troilo at the corresponding point in Boccaccio's story seems motivated by anger and a desire for vengeance. Although he recognizes that he might die in pursuit of his vengeance, his chief intent is not to kill himself but to kill Diomedes:

Mandimi Iddio Diomede davanti
La prima volta ch'esco alla battaglia!
Questo disio tra li miei guai contanti,
Si ch'io provar gli faccia come taglia
La spada mia, e lui morir con pianti
Nel campo faccia, e poi non me ne caglia
Che mi s'uccida, sol ch'e'muoia, e lui
Misero trovi nelli regni bui.

(8:21)

[May the gods send Diomedes in my way the first time that I go forth in battle. This do I desire among my great woes, that I may let him know by experience how my sword cutteth and put him to death with groans on the field of battle. And then I care not if I die provided only that he die and that I find him wretched in the realm of darkness.]

While Troilo's anger is directed outwardly and pushes him into desperate action, Troilus's anger is primarily inwardly directed. With

respect to his *acedia*, then, the Troilus of book V differs little from the Troilus of the earlier books.

III.

If one accepts the argument that Troilus suffers from both spiritual and fleshly *acedia*, what effect does that have on one's reading of the poem? First, it shifts somewhat the moral focus of the work. Chaucer's readers have often seen its main moral preoccupation as an examination of either the transitoriness of worldly love or the polarity between Criseyde's unfaithfulness and Troilus's fidelity.³⁶ From the second perspective, despite the protestations of the narrator, Criseyde is made to bear complete moral responsibility for the collapse of the love affair and Troilus's sad end. Moreover, Troilus, due to his fidelity, is considered unlucky but blameless. However, seeing Troilus as a slothful lover shifts some of the responsibility for the failure of the affair to his shoulders and, if it does not relieve Criseyde of all her guilt, it at least distributes the guilt more equitably.

Second, such a reading of *Troilus* also has implications for our view of Chaucer's narrative strategies. His narrator's open sympathy for the heroine is made quite clear throughout the romance. Even after Criseyde betrays her lover, the narrator, unlike Robert Henryson, one of Chaucer's early readers, can hardly bring himself to admit her guilt: "Men seyn—I not—that she yaf hym hire herte."³⁷ And even when he does admit her guilt, he cannot condemn her: "For she so sory was for hire untrouthe / Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe" (V, 1098–99). If I am correct, then Chaucer the poet works silently to further his narrator's explicit agenda. By incorporating the qualities of lover's *acedia* into his protagonist, he quietly subverts the audience's sympathy for the true but weak Troilus and shores up sympathy for his heroine.

Ultimately, sympathy for Troilus is undercut because, although he is extremely idealistic, he lacks practical courage; in a sense, he is psychologically emasculated by his sloth. As we have seen earlier, in the *Confessio Amantis* Genius describes the pusillanimous lover as emasculated, a lover who can not or will not do a "*mannes werk*"; and in the *Vox Clamantis*, Gower argues that if a knight holds with womanish behavior, his honor dies: "Femineos mores teneat si miles, abibit / Orphanus a stirpe nobilitatis honor" [If the knight holds with womanish behavior, his honor dies, cut off from the root of nobility].³⁸ Martin writes that spiritual emasculation via sloth was always a potential danger in courtly literature, for "love feeds and nurtures inactivity."³⁹

How far Chaucer went in emasculating his protagonist is suggested by R. E. Kaske, who points out that Troilus is not even allowed the male role in the traditional dawn song. Kaske writes:

Chaucer seems to have bestowed on Troilus several speeches usually assigned to the lady in an aube, and on Criseyde certain speeches usually assigned to the lover, thus enriching a theme sometimes detected in other parts of the poem: the reversal of roles of man and woman as they are popularly and romantically conceived.⁴⁰

Chaucer's sometimes comic, sometimes pathetic heightening of Troilus's sloth dovetails well with other of his strategies for diminishing the masculinity of his hero. From this perspective, Troilus seems not to be an ideal courtly lover.

The ending of the poem, where Troilus ascends "ful blisfully" into the heavens (V, 1807–27), neither proves that Troilus is an unflawed lover nor disproves my argument that Troilus suffers from lover's *acedia*. By this point in the poem, Chaucer's ethical perspective is clearly Christian. Although Troilus as a lover despairs, his fidelity, a virtue under both ethical systems, saves him. In some respects, however, the heavenly Troilus resembles the earthly Troilus, for, as he rises to find his final resting place among the stars, he "dampned al *oure werk* that foloweth so / The blynde lust" (V, 1823–24, emphasis added). Nevertheless, his motives for condemning love's labor are different from those that caused him to avoid it earlier, for at this point his opinion springs not from his sloth but from the Boethian wisdom afforded him by his newly won, other-worldly perspective.

A final point: if Troilus is not for Chaucer an ideal lover, neither is Pandarus or Diomedes. On the contrary, although from the perspective of lover's *acedia* they are presented as more purposeful, courageous, and sane than Troilus, from other perspectives they too are seriously flawed. They are both, for example, crass, prosaic, and ruthless. They lack Troilus's nobility, his integrity, his fineness of feeling and thought. My argument simply suggests that *all* the poem's characters are flawed when seen in light of its various moral and social codes, no one of which is allowed to dominate completely.

And Criseyde? A full investigation of Criseyde in light of lover's *acedia* goes well beyond the bounds of this article. Interestingly, Pandarus also uses the word "slouthe" three times to push her into action.⁴¹ However, Criseyde has too much of her uncle's practicality, energy, and wit for us to take these charges seriously. It would be difficult to prove that Criseyde suffers from fleshly *acedia*. Nevertheless, to the extent that Criseyde deserves the narrator's characteriza-

tion as “the ferfulleste wight / That myghte be” (II, 450–51), she too might appropriately be seen as suffering from spiritual *acedia*. But, in my opinion, even this charge does not seem to fit her. Her fears are generally founded on real worldly dangers, and she has the healthy (but perhaps ignoble) trait of making the best out of unfortunate situations. Criseyde simply lacks Troilus’s proclivities to lethargy and melancholia; she lacks his “voluptuousness in suffering.”

In *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer explores the concepts of labor and *acedia* in the highly artificial world of courtly love rather than in their usual contexts of the monastery or the workplace. By doing so, he adds another ethical perspective from which readers can evaluate the characters and actions of his poem. In particular, he employs lover’s *acedia* as a guide in conceiving the dark side of an otherwise shining hero, the sad, serious, suffering chevalier of Ilium.

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This article, based on papers given at the Sixth Citadel Conference on Literature and the 1988 South Central MLA Convention, was made possible by a 1986 Summer Seminar Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities and a Margaret Bundy Scott Fellowship from Hamilton College. I am grateful to all the people and institutions that aided me in its completion, especially Prof. R. E. Kaske, who organized the N.E.H. Seminar I attended, and Profs. Joseph Milosh, Thomas Liszka, George Economou, and Thomas Garbáty, who offered helpful comments on the article’s various drafts. They, of course, bear no responsibility for errors that may remain in the text.

1. For a similar view, see Charles Muscatine’s description of the “multiconsciousness,” the “simultaneous awareness of different and opposite planes of reality,” in *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley, 1957), 132–33. See also June Hall Martin’s remarks in *Love’s Fools: Aucassin, Troilus, Calisto, and the Parody of the Courtly Lover* (London, 1972), 40.

2. Since the critical literature on Troilus is voluminous, the following note is meant to be suggestive of general positions rather than exhaustive. Among those critics who see Troilus as an ideal courtly lover are: F. Xavier Baron, “Chaucer’s Troilus and Self-Renunciation in Love,” *PLL* 10 (1974): 5–14; John Bayley, *The Characters of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality* (New York, 1960); Alfred David, “The Hero of the *Troilus*,” *Speculum* 37 (1962): 566–81; T. P. Dunning, “God and Man in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” in *English and Mediaeval Studies Presented to J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Norman Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London, 1962), 164–82; Thomas Kirby, *Chaucer’s Troilus: A Study in Courtly Love* ([Baton Rouge, 1940]); C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (London, 1936; repr. 1976); Robert ap Roberts, “The Central Episode in Chaucer’s *Troilus*,” *PMLA* 77 (1962): 373–88; and Siegfried Wenzel, “Chaucer’s *Troilus* of Book IV,” *PMLA* 79 (1964): 542–47.

Muscatine’s opinion (137) is that Troilus is an ideal knight. However, because he is somewhat too ideal, he becomes a figure of nostalgia. Martin (64–65) argues that Troilus is a tool of parody.

Critics who have rendered harsh judgments on Troilus include Richard F. Green, “Troilus and the Game of Love,” *ChauR* 13 (1979): 201–22 (Troilus is “a socially inept buffoon”); K. S. Kiernan, “Hector the Second: The Lost Face of Troilostratus,” *AnM* 16 (1975): 52–62 (Troilus is to blame for losing Criseyde because of his passivity); Howard Patch, *On Rereading Chaucer* (Cambridge, Mass., 1939): Troilus is miserably insecure

and fearful; and Edmund Reiss, "Troilus and the Failure of Understanding," *MLQ* 29 (1968): 131–44 (Troilus is neither wise nor heroic; he is simply worthy of pity).

3. Milo Kearney and Mimosa Schraer, "The Flaw in Troilus," *ChauR* 22 (1988): 185.

4. *The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. and trans. Nathaniel Griffin and Arthur Myrick (Philadelphia, 1929), part 2: stanzas 93, 94; 4: 16, 73; 7: 50; 8: 8. In 5: 35, Pandaro calls Troilo's actions "cowardly."

All quotations and translations from *Il Filostrato* are from this edition.

5. Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill, 1967), 128.

6. "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Gardens," *Speculum* 26 (1951): 44.

7. On lovesickness see John Livingston Lowes, "The Lover's Malady of Hereos," *MP* 11 (1914): 491–546; M. Ciavolella, "Medieval Medicine and Arcite's Love Sickness," *Florilegium: Carleton University Annual Papers on Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages* 1 (1979): 222–41; D. W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton, 1962), 49, 108–10, 457–60, 469; Charlotte Otten, "The Love-Sickness of Troilus," in *Chaucer and the Craft of Fiction*, ed. Leigh A. Arrathoun (Rochester, Minn., 1986), 23–33; and Mary Wack, "Memory and Love in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell Univ., 1982), "Lovesickness in *Troilus*," *PCP* 19 (1984): 55–61, and "The Liber de hereos morbo of Johannes Affacius and Its Implications for Medieval Love Conventions," *Speculum* 62 (1987): 324–44.

Robertson, who cites Arnaldus of Villanova and Bernard of Gordon as his authorities, stresses the moral reading of lovesickness, which he calls a malady of the spirit rather than of the flesh. Wack, who argues that Robertson's authorities are atypical, cites Constantinus Africanus, Petrus Hispanicus, and Avicenna, among others, to support her contention that lovesickness was not usually understood as a moral failing. One's attitude to *amor hereos*, then, seems dependent on which authorities one reads. It is clear, however, that except for Petrus Hispanicus, Chaucer knew of all these writers, for he refers to them by name in the *Canterbury Tales*, either in his description of the Physician (A 429–34) or in the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* (G 1428).

Some medieval thinkers wondered whether *acedia* itself was not more a physical than a moral illness. Especially the scholastics, who identified the vice with fear, often argued that *acedia* was caused simply by an imbalance of humors. See Wenzel, *Sin of Sloth*, 59–60, and especially Appendix A, "Acedia and the Humors," 191–94. Robert Gillet, Introduction, *Grégoire le Grande, Morales sur Job* (Paris, 1952), 91, argues that Gregory the Great dropped *acedia* from the list of the Seven Deadly Sins because he thought that it fell outside the realm of morals and in the realm of pathology. Wenzel comments, however, that there is no real evidence to support Gillet's theory. See *Sin of Sloth*, 25.

8. Muscatine, 137.

9. On the public and private personae, see William H. Brown, Jr., "A Separate Peace: Chaucer and the Troilus of Tradition," *JEGP* 83 (1984): 492–508. Furthermore, Barry Windeatt, " 'Love that oughte ben secree' in Chaucer's *Troilus*," *ChauR* 14 (1979–80): 116–31, argues that in Chaucer's poem there is a sharper sense of the distinction between the inner, private, and outer, public, worlds than in *Il Filostrato*.

10. See *Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, vol. 1: *Erec et Enide* (Paris, 1952).

11. See Morton Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* ([East Lansing], 1952), esp. 157–202. John Bowers, *The Crisis of Will in "Piers Plowman"* (Washington, D.C., 1986), 62, gives three reasons why modern readers either do not recognize *acedia* in medieval literature when they see it or do not sympathize with the writer's concerns when he treats the vice: (1) the subject was hidden under specialized terminology; (2) the symptoms were so well known that, rather than mentioning the vice by name, medieval writers often mentioned only the symptoms; and (3) the concept of "sloth" has narrowed so much that today it means little more than a tendency to procrastinate.

12. Besides *The Sin of Sloth*, see also Wenzel's "Acedia, 700–1200," *Traditio* 22 (1966): 72–102, and Reinhard Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide: Ennus in Western Literature* (Princeton, 1976).

13. Wenzel, *Sin of Sloth*, 5–22.

14. *Ibid.*, 174.
15. *Summa de Sacramentis Fidei*, II. 13. 1 (*PL* 175: 526).
16. *Canterbury Tales*, I 677; G 1. All quotations from Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1987).
17. See John F. Fitzpatrick, "Courtly Love and the Confessional in English Literature from 1215 to John Gower" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana Univ., 1978).
18. *Confessio Amantis*, vol. 2 in *The Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1901). All quotations from Gower will be taken from this edition.
19. For a discussion of the religion of Love as an imitation of Christianity, see Eugene E. Slaughter, "Love and Grace in Chaucer's *Troilus*," in *Essays in Honor of Walter Clyde Curry* (Nashville, 1954), 61–76.
20. For the list see John Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York, 1964), 233.
21. Fisher, 204.
22. The two writers would often have heard the Christian vice described as the cause of England's manifold social problems of the late fourteenth century. For example, according to Bowers, William Langland, who may have considered *acedia* the most dangerous sin, uses sloth as a "unifying construct for most of the forms of corruption held up for censure in *Piers Plowman*" (xiii). Furthermore, Bishop Thomas Brinton of Rochester, in a sermon delivered in January of 1375, also sees *acedia* at the root of England's turmoil; he writes: "Verum si terra non reddat fertilitier fructum suum, immo si regno Anglie accidit infortuna, pestilencie, atque guerre, multum debent imputari accidie nostre." [Indeed, if the earth would not render its fruit abundantly, nay, if bad fortune, pestilence, or war would befall the kingdom of England, they ought greatly to be blamed on our *acedia*.] *Sermons*, ed. Mary Aquinas Devlin, 2 vols. (London, 1954), 1: 216 (my translation).
23. *Remedia Amoris* (line 139), in *The Art of Love and Other Poems*, ed. J. H. Mozley (Cambridge, Mass., 1939).
24. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy, 3 vols. (Paris, 1966), lines 523–628. Quotations from the *Roman* are from this edition.
- Whether Oiseuse stands for aristocratic leisure or the vice *Luxuria* has been hotly debated recently. See Carlos Alvar, "Oiseuse, Vénus, Luxure: Trois dames et un miroir," *Romania* 106 (1985): 108–17; Jean Batany, "Miniature, allegorie, ideology: 'Oiseuse' et la mystique monacale recuperée par la 'classe de loisir,'" in *Études sur "Le Roman de la Rose" de Guillaume de Lorris*, ed. Jean Dufornet (Paris, 1984), 7–36; Charles Dahlberg, "Love and the *Roman de la Rose*," *Speculum* 44 (1969): 581; J. V. Fleming, *The Romance of the Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton, 1969), 74; E. Köhler, "Lea, Matelda and Oiseuse," *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 78 (1962): 464–69; H. Kolb, "Oiseuse, die Dame mit dem Spiegel," *Germanische-Romanische Monatschrift* 15 (1965): 139–49; Earl Jeffrey Richards, "Reflections on Oiseuse's Mirror: Iconographic Tradition, *Luxuria* and the *Roman de la Rose*," *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 98 (1982): 296–311; D. W. Robertson, *Preface*, 198; and Sasaki Shigemi, "Sur le Personnage d'Oiseuse," *Études de langue et littérature françaises* 32 (March 1978): 1–24.
25. Although the Middle English verb *labouren* could mean "to copulate" (MED, 1a), according to the MED and OED neither *labor* nor *work* as nouns had any specific connection to courtship or love. One would like to know whether their use in *Il Filostrato* and the *Troilus* reflects a bourgeois influence on the aristocratic courtly love formulation. In other words, is this a sign that the middle class work ethic is being borrowed, either consciously or unconsciously, by Boccaccio and, then, Chaucer? Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules*, for example, gives clear indication that he was interested in playing aristocratic and bourgeois values off against each other.
26. The Chaucerian narrator of the *Parlement of Foules* uses the "ars longa, vita breva" topos to describe the work of love in lines 1–4.
27. *Chaucer and the Poets* (Ithaca, 1984), 65–67.
28. Boccaccio writes: "Tornato Troilo nel real palagio, / Tacitamente se n'entrò nel letto, / Per dormir se potesse alquanto ad agio" [After Troilus had returned to the royal palace, he went thence silently to bed to sleep a little, if he could, for ease] (3: 53).

29. V, 184, emphasis added. In the parallel passage of *Il Filostrato*, Griseida rebuffs Diomede but notices his “ardir,” his daring (6: 26).

30. Although Alain Renoir, “Criseyde’s Two Half Lovers,” *Orbis Litterarum* 16 (1961): 239–55, explores the differences between Troilus and Diomede in terms of the former’s passivity and the latter’s aggressive activity, he does not use *acedia* as his starting point; rather, he analyzes their differences in Jungian terms. He claims that Criseyde, whose fear suggests that she has a stronger *anima* than *animus*, is drawn to Diomede almost against her will because his *animus* is clearly dominant. On the other hand, Troilus’s passivity suggests that he, like Criseyde, is dominated by his *anima*. Thus, Criseyde, in choosing Diomede, finds a psychic complement that she did not have in Troilus.

31. Wenzel, *Sin of Sloth*, 105, says that this was the most widespread simile of its kind.

32. *Heroides*, in *Heroides and Amores*, ed. Grant Showerman (New York, 1931), 1.12.

33. *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed. and trans. P. G. Walsh (London, 1982), 3.291. Chaucer, *Troilus*, IV, 1645.

34. From *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae*. Quoted both in Kuhn (72) and Bowers (72).

35. Wetherbee, 222.

36. See, for example, the analyses of Baron, Dunning, and Bayley.

37. See *The Testament of Cresseid*, in *Robert Henryson: The Poems*, ed. Denton Fox (New York, 1987), esp. lines 542–74; Chaucer, *Troilus*, V, 1050.

38. *Vox Clamantis*, vol. 4 of *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 5.4. The translation is from *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, trans. Eric W. Stockton (Seattle, 1962).

39. Martin, 16.

40. “The Aube in Chaucer’s *Troilus*,” in *Chaucer Criticism: Troilus and Criseyde and the Minor Poems*, ed. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor (Notre Dame, 1961), 170–71.

41. *Troilus*, II, 286; III, 896 and 935.