

## *Troilus and Criseyde*

*Troilus and Criseyde* is a work on a large scale, 8239 lines of rhyme-royal (seven-line stanzas rhyming ababbcc) in five books, the first major work of English literature and sometimes called the first English novel on account of its concern with the characters' psychology.

The story comes from Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*. When he began to write *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer was already fully aware of the need to make the English language into a poetic diction that would be as powerful in expressing emotion and reflexion as the other literary languages he knew. He was familiar with the writings of Ovid, Cicero, Virgil, Statius, Macrobius, Boethius, and Alain de Lisle in Latin, with Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio in Italian, with the *Romance of the Rose* and other French works, as well as with the native English romances. He had travelled, too, his mind was European. The opening lines of *Troilus and Criseyde* show why John Dryden called Chaucer the "father of English poetry" (in the Preface to his *Fables Ancient and Modern* of 1700).

The first four books of the poem each begin with a 'Proemium' (Preface)

### **Book 1**

- 1 The double sorrow of Troilus to tellen,  
That was the king Priamus son of Troye,  
In loving, how his adventures fellen  
From woe to wele, and after out of joie,  
5 My purpose is, er that I parte from ye.  
Thesiphone, thou help me for t'endite  
These woeful vers, that weepen as I write.  
To thee clepe I, thou goddess of torment,  
Thou cruel Fury, sorrowing ever in peyne,  
10 Help me, that am the sorrowful instrument,  
That helpeth lovers, as I can, to pleyne.  
For wel sit it, the sothe for to sayne,  
A woeful wight to have a dreary feere,  
And to a sorrowful tale, a sorry chere.  
15 For I, that god of Love's servants serve,  
Ne dare to love, for mine unlikeliness,  
Prayen for speed, al sholde I therfore sterve,  
So far am I from his help in darknesse;  
But nonetheless, if this may doon gladnesse  
20 To any lover, and his cause availe,  
Have he my thank, and mine be this travayle!  
But ye lovers, that bathen in gladnesse,  
If any drop of pity in you be,  
Remembreth you on passed heavinesse  
25 That ye have felt, and on the adversitee  
Of other folk, and thinketh how that ye  
Have felt that Love dorste yow displease;  
Or ye have won him with too great an ease.  
And prayeth for them that been in the cas  
30 Of Troilus, as ye may after heare,  
That love hem bringe in heavene to solas,  
And eek for me preyeth to God so deare,  
That I have might to show, in some mannere,  
Such pain and woe as Love's folk endure,

35 In Troilus unsely aventure.  
 And biddeth eek for them that been despaired  
 In love, that never nil recovered be,  
 And eek for them that falsely been apeyred  
 Through wicked tongues, be it he or she;  
 40 Thus biddeth God, for his benignitee,  
 So grant them soon out of this world to pass,  
 That been despaired out of Love's grace.  
 And biddeth eek for them that been at ease,  
 That God them grante ay good perseverance,  
 45 And send them might their ladies so to please,  
 That it to Love be worship and plesaunce.  
 For so hope I my soule best avaunce,  
 To praye for them that Love's servants be,  
 And write their woe, and live in charitee.  
 50 And for to have of them compassion  
 As though I were their owne brother dere.  
 Now herkeneth with a good intention,  
 For now will I gn straight to my matere,  
 In which ye may the double sorrowes heare  
 55 Of Troilus, in loving of Criseyde,  
 And how that she forsook him er she diede.

End of the first Proemium

*Troilus and Criseyde* is set inside Troy during the Trojan War. After this Proemium, Book 1 begins with the news that the soothsayer (prophet) Calkas (Criseyde's father), foreseeing the end of Troy, has left the city to join the Greek camp.

Criseyde was this lady name a-right;  
 100 As to my dome, in al Troyes citee  
 Nas noon so fair, for passing every wight  
 So aungellyk was hir natyf beautee,  
 That lyk a thing immortal semed she,  
 As doth an hevenish parfit creature,  
 105 That doun were sent in scorning of nature.  
 This lady, which that al-day herde at ere  
 Hir fadres shame, his falsnesse and tresoun,  
 Wel nigh out of hir wit for sorwe and fere,  
 In widewes habit large of samit broun,  
 110 On knees she fil biforn Ector a-doun;  
 With pitous voys, and tendrely wepinge,  
 His mercy bad, hir-selven excusinge.

Hector reassures her that she will be respected, despite her father's act. In April the people of Troy celebrate the Palladium festival and go to the temples.

Among thise othere folk was Criseyda,  
 170 In widewes habite blak; but nathelees,  
 Right as our firste lettre is now an A,  
 In beautee first so stood she, makelees;  
 Hir godly looking gladede al the prees.

Nas never seyn thing to ben preysed derre,  
175 Nor under cloude blak so bright a sterre  
As was Criseyde, as folk seyde everichoon  
That hir behelden in hir blake wede;  
And yet she stood ful lowe and stille alloon,  
Bihinden othere folk, in litel brede,  
180 And neigh the dore, ay under shames drede,  
Simple of a-tyr, and debonaire of chere,  
With ful assured loking and manere.

Troilus is shown mocking love; the god of love (Eros / Cupid) hears him, is annoyed, and shoots an arrow at him. The poet introduces a long commentary, a kind of sermon, on what is about to happen to Troilus and the meaning of it to the readers ("pride comes before a fall").

O blinde world, O blinde entencioun!  
How ofte falleth al theeffect contraire  
Of surquidrye and foul presumpcioun;  
For caught is proud, and caught is debonaire.  
215 This Troilus is clomben on the staire,  
And litel weneth that he moot descenden.  
But al-day falleth thing that foles ne wenden.  
As proude Bayard ginneth for to skippe  
Out of the wey, so priketh him his corn,  
220 Til he a lash have of the longe whippe,  
Than thenketh he, `Though I prounce al biforn  
First in the trays, ful fat and newe shorn,  
Yet am I but an hors, and horses lawe  
I moot endure, and with my feres drawe.'  
225 So ferde it by this fers and proude knight;  
Though he a worthy kinges sone were,  
And wende nothing hadde had swiche might  
Ayens his wil that sholde his herte stere,  
Yet with a look his herte wex a-ferre,  
230 That he, that now was most in pryde above,  
Wex sodeynly most subget un-to love.  
For-thy ensample taketh of this man,  
Ye wyse, proude, and worthy folkes alle,  
To scornen Love, which that so sone can  
235 The freedom of your hertes to him thralle;  
For ever it was, and ever it shal bifalle,  
That Love is he that alle thing may binde;  
For may no man for-do the lawe of kinde.  
That this be sooth, hath preved and doth yet;  
240 For this trowe I ye knowen, alle or some,  
Men reden not that folk han gretter wit  
Than they that han be most with love y-nome;  
And strengest folk ben therwith overcome,  
The worthiest and grettest of degree:  
245 This was, and is, and yet men shal it see.  
And trowelich it sit wel to be so;  
For alderwysest han ther-with ben plesed;  
And they that han ben aldermost in wo,

With love han ben confortid most and esed;  
250 And ofte it hath the cruel herte apesed,  
And worthy folk maad worthier of name,  
And causeth most to dreden vyce and shame.

Suddenly Troilus sees Criseyde

With-inne the temple he wente him forth pleyinge,  
This Troilus, of every wight aboute,  
On this lady and now on that lokinge,  
270 Wher-so she were of toune, or of with-oute:  
And up-on cas bifel, that thorough a route  
His eye perced, and so depe it wente,  
Til on Criseyde it smoot, and ther it stente.  
And sodeynly he wax ther-with astoned,  
275 And gan hire bet biholde in thrifty wyse:  
'O mercy, god!' thoughte he, 'wher hastow woned,  
That art so fair and goodly to devyse?'  
Ther-with his herte gan to sprede and ryse,  
And softe sighed, lest men mighte him here,  
280 And caughte a-yein his firste pleyinge chere.  
She nas nat with the leste of hir stature,  
But alle hir limes so wel answeringe  
Weren to womanhode, that creature  
Was neuer lasse mannish in seminge.  
285 And eek the pure wyse of here meninge  
Shewede wel, that men might in hir gesse  
Honour, estat, and wommanly noblesse.  
To Troilus right wonder wel with-alle  
Gan for to lyke hir meninge and hir chere,  
290 Which somdel deynous was, for she leet falle  
Hir look a lite a-side, in swich manere,  
Ascaunces, 'What! May I not stonden here?'  
And after that hir loking gan she lighte,  
That never thoughte him seen so good a sighte.  
295 And of hir look in him ther gan to quiken  
So greet desir, and swich affeccioun,  
That in his herte botme gan to stiken  
Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun:  
And though he erst hadde poured up and doun,  
300 He was tho glad his hornes in to shrinke;  
Unnethes wiste he how to loke or winke.  
Lo, he that leet him-selven so konninge,  
And scorned hem that loves peynes dryen,  
Was ful unwar that love hadde his dwellinge  
305 With-inne the subtile stremes of hir yen;  
That sodeynly him thoughte he felte dyen,  
Right with hir look, the spirit in his herte;  
Blissed be love, that thus can folk converte!  
She, this in blak, likinge to Troylus,  
310 Over alle thyng, he stood for to biholde;  
Ne his desir, ne wherfor he stood thus,

He neither chere made, ne worde tolde;  
 But from a-fer, his maner for to holde,  
 On other thing his look som-tyme he caste,  
 315 And eft on hir, whyl that servyse laste.  
 And after this, not fulliche al awhaped,  
 Out of the temple al esiliche he wente,  
 Repentinge him that he hadde ever y-iaped  
 Of loves folk, lest fully the descente  
 320 Of scorn fille on him-self; but, what he mente,  
 Lest it were wist on any maner syde,  
 His wo he gan dissimulen and hyde.  
 Whan he was fro the temple thus departed,  
 He streyght anoon un-to his paleys torneth,  
 325 Right with hir look thurgh-shoten and thurgh-darted,  
 Al feyneth he in lust that he soiorneth;  
 And al his chere and speche also he borneth;  
 And ay, of loves servants every whyle,  
 Him-self to wrye, at hem he gan to smyle.

He withdraws to think about what has happened. He tries to analyze his feelings, and turns to poetry:

365 Thus gan he make a mirour of his minde,  
 In which he saugh al hoolly hir figure;  
 And that he wel coude in his herte finde,  
 It was to him a right good aventure  
 To love swich oon, and if he dide his cure  
 370 To serven hir, yet mighte he falle in grace,  
 Or elles, for oon of hir servaunts pace.  
 And over al this, yet muchel more he thoughte  
 What for to speke, and what to holden inne,  
 And what to arten hir to love he soughte,  
 And on a song anoon-right to biginne,  
 390 And gan loude on his sorwe for to winne;  
 For with good hope he gan fully assente  
 Criseyde for to love, and nought repente.  
 And of his song nought only the sentence,  
 As writ myn autour called Lollius,  
 395 But pleynly, save our tonges difference,  
 I dar wel sayn, in al that Troilus  
 Seyde in his song, lo! every word right thus  
 As I shal seyn; and who-so list it here,  
 Lo! next this vers, he may it finden here.

*Cantus Troili. (Song of Troilus, actually a sonnet by Petrarch added by Chaucer)*

400 `If no love is, O god, what fele I so?  
 And if love is, what thing and whiche is he!  
 If love be good, from whennes comth my wo?  
 If it be wikke, a wonder thinketh me,  
 Whenne every torment and adversitee  
 405 That cometh of him, may to me savory thinke;  
 For ay thurst I, the more that I it drinke.

`And if that at myn owene lust I brenne,  
 Fro whennes cometh my wailing and my pleynte?  
 If harme agree me, wher-to pleyne I thenne?  
 410 I noot, ne why unwery that I feynte.  
 O quike deeth, O swete harm so queynte,  
 How may of thee in me swich quantitee,  
 But-if that I consente that it be?  
 `And if that I consente, I wrongfully  
 415 Compleyne, y-wis; thus possed to and fro,  
 Al sterelees with inne a boot am I  
 A-mid the see, by-twixen windes two,  
 That in contrarie stonden ever-mo.  
 Allas! what is this wonder maladye?  
 420 For hete of cold, for cold of hete, I deye.'

And to the god of love thus seyde he  
 With pitous voys, `O lord, now youres is  
 My spirit, which that oughte youres be.  
 Yow thanke I, lord, that han me brought to this;  
 425 But whether goddesse or womman, y-wis,  
 She be, I noot, which that ye do me serve;  
 But as hir man I wole ay live and sterve.  
 `Ye stonden in hire eyen mightily,  
 As in a place un-to youre vertu digne;  
 430 Wherfore, lord, if my servyse or I  
 May lyke yow, so beth to me benigne;  
 For myn estat royal here I resigne  
 In-to hir hond, and with ful humble chere  
 Bicome hir man, as to my lady dere.'

Soon he falls sick with the contradictions of his love. A friend of his, Pandare, overhears him lamenting. He tries for a long time to force Troilus to tell him who the lady is, guessing he is in love, but Troilus believes that it will not help to tell him. Pandare mocks him on learning that he has not told the lady about his feelings. At last he admits he is in love with Pandare's niece Criseyde. Pandare offers to help Troilus meet her, which makes him very happy. He returns to society.

## Book 2

### Proemium

Out of these blake wawes for to sayle,  
 O wind, O wind, the weder ginneth clere;  
 For in this see the boot hath swich travayle,  
 Of my conning, that unnethe I it stere:  
 5 This see clepe I the tempestous matere  
 Of desespeyr that Troilus was inne:  
 But now of hope the calendes biginne.  
 O lady myn, that called art Cleo,  
 Thou be my speed fro this forth, and my muse,  
 10 To ryme wel this book, til I have do;  
 Me nedeth here noon other art to use.  
 For-why to every lovere I me excuse,

That of no sentement I this endyte,  
 But out of Latin in my tonge it wryte.  
 15  Wherfore I nil have neither thank ne blame  
       Of al this werk, but prey yow mekely,  
       Disblameth me if any word be lame,  
       For as myn auctor seyde, so seye I.  
       Eek though I speke of love unfeleingly,  
 20  No wondre is, for it no-thing of newe is;  
       A blind man can nat Iuggen wel in hewis.  
       Ye knowe eek, that in forme of speche is chaunge  
       With-inne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho  
       That hadden prys, now wonder nyce and straunge  
 25  Us thinketh hem; and yet they spake hem so,  
       And spedde as wel in love as men now do;  
       Eek for to winne love in sondry ages,  
       In sondry londes, sondry ben usages.

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 End of Proemium to Book 2

Pandare goes to visit his niece. Having awoken her curiosity, Pandare refuses to tell her anything more. Instead, he casually turns the conversation to Hector and Troilus, praising them for their valor. She agrees with him. At last, when they are alone, he pursues his plan, telling her that she is very fortunate, arousing her curiosity. He tells her of Troilus's feelings. If she refuses to help, Troilus will die, he claims. Criseyde's response is not very positive:

And she bigan to breste a-wepe anoon,  
 And seyde, `Allas, for wo! Why nere I deed?  
 410  For of this world the feith is al agoon!  
       Allas! What sholden straunge to me doon,  
       Whan he, that for my beste freend I wende,  
       Ret me to love, and sholde it me defende?  
       `Allas! I wolde han trusted, doutelees,  
 415  That if that I, thurgh my disaventure,  
       Had loved other him or Achilles,  
       Ector, or any mannes creature,  
       Ye nolde han had no mercy ne mesure  
       On me, but alwey had me in repreve;  
 420  This false world, allas! Who may it leve?  
       `What? Is this al the Ioye and al the feste?  
       Is this your reed, is this my blisful cas?  
       Is this the verray mede of your beheste?  
       Is al this peynted proces seyde, allas!  
 425  Right for this fyn? O lady myn, Pallas!  
       Thou in this dredful cas for me purveye;  
       For so astonied am I that I deye!

Pandare brings pressure to bear. Criseyde begins to yield. He tells her a much changed version of the way in which he learned Troilus's secret, and leaves her. Fortune brings Troilus before her eyes at this crucial moment.

610  But as she sat allone and thoughte thus,  
       Thascry aroos at skarmish al with-oute,

And men cryde in the strete, `See, Troilus  
 Hath right now put to flight the Grekes route!  
 With that gan al hir meynee for to shoute,  
 615 `A! Go we see, caste up the latis wyde;  
 For thurgh this strete he moot to palays ryde;  
 `For other wey is fro the yate noon  
 Of Dardanus, ther open is the cheyne.'  
 With that com he and al his folk anoon  
 620 An esy pas rydinge, in routes tweyne,  
 Right as his happy day was, sooth to seyne,  
 For which, men say, may nought disturbed be  
 That shal bityden of necessitee.  
 This Troilus sat on his baye stede,  
 625 Al armed, save his heed, ful richely,  
 And wounded was his hors, and gan to blede,  
 On whiche he rood a pas, ful softly;  
 But swych a knightly sighte, trewely,  
 As was on him, was nought, with-outen faile,  
 630 To loke on Mars, that god is of batayle.  
 So lyk a man of armes and a knight  
 He was to seen, fulfild of heigh prowesse;  
 For bothe he hadde a body and a might  
 To doon that thing, as wel as hardinesse;  
 635 And eek to seen him in his gere him dresse,  
 So fresh, so yong, so weldy semed he,  
 It was an heven up-on him for to see.  
 His helm to-hewen was in twenty places,  
 That by a tissew heng, his bak bihinde,  
 640 His sheld to-dasshed was with swerdes and maces,  
 In which men mighte many an arwe finde  
 That thirled hadde horn and nerf and rinde;  
 And ay the peple cryde, `Here cometh our Ioye,  
 And, next his brother, holdere up of Troye!'  
 645 For which he wex a litel reed for shame,  
 Whan he the peple up-on him herde cryen,  
 That to biholde it was a noble game,  
 How sobreliche he caste doun his yen.  
 Cryseyda gan al his chere aspyen,  
 650 And leet so softe it in hir herte sinke,  
 That to hir-self she seyde, `Who yaf me drinke?'  
 For of hir owene thought she wex al reed,  
 Remembringe hir right thus, `Lo, this is he  
 Which that myn uncle swereth he moot be deed,  
 655 But I on him have mercy and pitee;'  
 And with that thought, for pure a-shamed, she  
 Gan in hir heed to pulle, and that as faste,  
 Whyl he and al the peple for-by paste,  
 And gan to caste and rollen up and doun  
 660 With-inne hir thought his excellent prowesse,  
 And his estat, and also his renoun,  
 His wit, his shap, and eek his gentillesse;  
 But most hir favour was, for his distresse



Was al for hir, and thoughte it was a routhe  
665 To sleen swich oon, if that he mente trouthe.

The narrator comments on the suddenness of her response. The sudden sight of Troilus, unexpected, has convinced her that she should act, but then we are given a long insight into her private thoughts. She goes to bed, and dreams a symbolic dream:

925 And as she sleep, anoon-right tho hir mette,  
How that an egle, fethered whyt as boon,  
Under hir brest his longe clawes sette,  
And out hir herte he rente, and that a-noon,  
And dide his herte in-to hir brest to goon,  
930 Of which she nought agroos, ne no-thing smerte,  
And forth he fleigh, with herte left for herte.

Pandarus comes to Troilus with news of his mission. Pandare tells Troilus to write to Criseyde. Pandare brings the letter to Criseyde but she is ashamed to take it. He thrusts it into her bosom and she hurries into her closet to read it. Pandare urges her to write a reply; again she protests but finally consents to write a note. She gives the reply to Pandare, and again Troilus happens to ride by, this time according to Pandare's plan.

And right as they declamed this matere,  
Lo, Troilus, right at the stretes ende,  
Com ryding with his tenthe some y-fere,  
1250 Al softely, and thiderward gan bende  
Ther-as they sete, as was his way to wende  
To paleys-ward; and Pandare him aspyde,  
And seyde, `Nece, y-see who cometh here ryde!  
`O flee not in, he seeth us, I suppose;  
1255 Lest he may thinke that ye him eschuwe.'  
`Nay, nay,' quod she, and wex as reed as rose.  
With that he gan hir humbly to saluwe  
With dreedful chere, and oft his hewes muwe;  
And up his look debonairly he caste,  
1260 And bekked on Pandare, and forth he paste.  
God woot if he sat on his hors a-right,  
Or goodly was beseyn, that ilke day!  
God woot wher he was lyk a manly knight!  
What sholde I drecche, or telle of his aray?  
1265 Criseyde, which that alle these thinges say,  
To telle in short, hir lyked al y-fere,  
His persone, his aray, his look, his chere,  
His goodly manere, and his gentillesse,  
So wel, that never, sith that she was born,  
1270 Ne hadde she swich routhe of his distresse;  
And how-so she hath hard ben her-biforn,  
To god hope I, she hath now caught a thorn,  
She shal not pulle it out this nexte wyke;  
God sende mo swich thornes on to pyke!  
1275 Pandare, which that stood hir faste by,  
Felte iren hoot, and he bigan to smyte,  
And seyde, `Nece, I pray yow hertely,

Tel me that I shal axen yow a lyte:  
A womman, that were of his deeth to wyte,  
1280 With-uten his gilt, but for hir lakked routhe,  
Were it wel doon?' Quod she, `Nay, by my trouthe!  
`God help me so,' quod he, `ye sey me sooth.  
Ye felen wel your-self that I not lye;  
Lo, yond he rit!' Quod she, `Ye, so he dooth!  
1285 `Wel,' quod Pandare, `as I have told yow thrye,  
Lat be youre nyce shame and youre folye,  
And spek with him in esing of his herte;  
Lat nycetee not do yow bothe smerte.'

Troilus reads the note and decides that it is encouraging. He longs for closer contact. Pandare knows that Criseyde is thinking that Troilus can be kept at a distance, that they do not have to meet. He invents a complicated trick to bring them together. He asks Troilus's brother Deiphebus to help Criseyde in a difficulty he says she has; he suggests that he invite her to his house to talk about the matter, and that he ask Helen and his brothers to be there too, including Troilus. The he tells Criseyde about the difficulty and suggests she ask Deiphebus to help her. Troilus he tells to go to Deiphebus' house the night before, then pretend to be sick in his room there. All is duly arranged, and Criseyde hears them praising Troilus during the meal. They begin to talk of her problem, and Pandare suggests that she be allowed to tell Troilus about it, adding that they should stay outside since the room is small!.