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“*Kan he speke wel of love?*”: *Luf talk* and Chivalry
「他訴說情愛的功夫在行嗎？」：情話與騎士之道

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Today, I'd like to speak to you about chivalry in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*.¹ I want to start with a methodological remark about my talk, so you will know the kind of talk you're going to be listening to and the reasons why I'm giving this kind of talk rather than some other kind. In the following 20 minutes or so I will be discussing the language of “courtly love”² in medieval romance world and its relation to Chaucer's tragic narrative, *Troilus and Criseyde*. I will be offering, in other words, what is known in literary criticism as a stylistic reading or a genre study of Chaucer's *Troilus*. By this I mean not simply a reading that seeks to understand Chaucer's “tragedy” in terms of genre per se, since there are many kinds of literature in it.³ I will not talk about literary history, for example, about romance conventions, the definitions of “courtly love” given either by Andreas Capellanus or C. S. Lewis, nor the kinds of sources that Chaucer used, the Italian and French writers who provided him with inspiration, and so on. I won't talk about the cultural history of Chaucer's time, either. This would include the kind of art that was produced during his time, the kinds of books that were read and circulated, the structures of feeling of the time that were expressed, the kind of public rituals that were practiced, and so on.⁴ Instead, I will discuss what would be called the discourse of courtly love in Chaucer's *Troilus*, that is, the verbal/textual conditions of Troilus's “luf talk” Chaucer (de)constructs in the poem. With this phrase – the verbal/textual conditions of

¹ In this essay, all references to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton, 1987). The translation is that of Nevill Coghill (London: Penguin, 1971), which I have slightly modified in a few places.

² The definitions of “courtly love” or “chivalry” as “Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love.” are given by C. S. Lewis in *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford, 1936), however, the exact nature of the medieval ideal of courtly love is hotly debated, and the question of whether or not the medieval concept of love is different from that of other historical periods is also unresolved. See Robertson's “Medieval Doctrines of Love,” (472-501) and Windeatt's “Love,” (116-31). In this essay, I want to claim that, at the very least, there was a particular medieval formation of love that was constrained by specific language conventions in defining a special social system of sexuality.

³ Some critics have pointed out the “tragic,” “comic,” “tragic-comic,” or “melodramatic” nature of the poem. The critics, who work in particular on the genre of the poem, I have in mind here are Stephen Knight, A.C. Spearing, and Monica A. McAlpine.

⁴ The scholarship on *Troilus* is immense and this is not the place to offer an annotated bibliography. Two websites offer excellent starting point to do research on Chaucer: the Geoffrey Chaucer Website Homepage offered by Harvard University (<http://www.icg.harvard.edu/-chaucer>) and the Essential Chaucer online (<http://www.colfa.utsa.edu/chaucer>). Useful links to medieval studies online are listed.

Troilus's love talk— I mean to designate all of those embodiments of the word “love” that determine Troilus's private and public place in the City of Troy. In brief, I'd like to explore the ways how Chaucer, as a novel poet, tests and recasts the already clichéd claims for “loves crafte” in his *Troilus*.

The language of Troilus's “luf talk,” especially as Chaucer exemplifies in Books I and III of *Troilus*, is a decisive generic material, one that simultaneously and designedly excludes the other kinds of literature, in that it designates a particular cultural formation of love, a specific social construction of sexuality. The form of speech, as Chaucer shows us in Troilus's “luf talk,” is an essential part of a chivalric style of love. Larry Benson rightly points out that the main characteristics of a courtly lover—his courtesy, humility, and religion of love, are expressed in speech. Benson calls our attention to Criseyde's first question to Pandarus when she agrees to meet Troilus: “kan he speke wel of love?” (II 503). Considering the question not unusual and strange from a “medievalized”⁵ courtly lady, Benson remarks that Criseyde in effect is asking, “Is he a gentleman?” (“Courtly Love” 243).⁶ In my view, Criseyde's inquiry about Troilus's verbal skill in “luf talk” highlights more a problematic issue of Criseyde's concern about a man's “loves craft” than that of his class in society. As Chaucer's narrator remarks in the proem of Book II (22-42), every human activity in love is governed by language conventions, expressive shortcuts that a community agrees to understand and honor (“As thus, in opyn doing or in chere,/In visiting in forme, or seyde hire sawes;/Forthi men seyn, ‘Ecch contree hath his lawes’” [with open doings, looks, visits, formalities and tricks of words, therefore people say, “every country has its own peculiar laws of love” 40-42]); in other words, the language conventions of love change to satisfy the needs of different communities and eras. He warns the readers that different countries have different rules for love, different routes to travel to Rome:

Ye knowe ek that in forme of speche is chaunge
 Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
 That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge
 Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so,
 And spedde as wel in love as men now do;
 Ek for to wynnen love in sundry ages,
 In sundry londes, sundry ben usages. (II 22-28)

[*You know the forms of language change within a thousand years, and long ago some*

⁵ The idea of “medievalization” is from C. S. Lewis. In “What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*,” he remarks that “the process which *Il Filostrato* underwent at Chaucer's hands was first and foremost a process of medievalization” (65).

⁶ See also Toril Moi's analysis on the relations of language, desire, and class in her essay, “Desire,” esp., 24-26.

words were valued that now seem to us strange and even silly; yet they spoke them so, and worked very well in love as we do now; various are the language conventions to win love, in various ages and various lands.]

The differences in “love carping and doing” are owing to the effects of time (II 22-28), geography (II 36-42), and individual point of view (II 43-48):

Ek scarsly ben ther in this place thre
That have in love seid lik, and don, in al:
For to thi purpos this may liken the,
And the right nought; yet al is seid or schal;
Ek som men grave in tree, some in ston wal,
As it bitit. But syn I have bigonne,
Myn auctour shal I folwen, if I konne. (II 43-49)

[For there are scarcely three among us all, at this place, who have said alike in love, or done the same; what pleases one won't please another, however, that all is said or shall be said goes on. Some carve words of love on a tree, some on a stone wall, as the game of love prescribes. Since I have begun, I shall follow my author, if I know his speech.]

“Love carping and doing” are subject to change, as Chaucer points out; “loves crafte” changes just as the language of love people fashion changes in various ages and various places. Chaucer, indeed, treats such differences as relevant to his narrator’s interpretation of his “auctour” and *our* interpretation of the language of love. In *Troilus*, Chaucer attributes the “loves crafte” of his own time to his Trojan courtly lovers. Medievalized princes in the City of Troy like Troilus and Pandorus must be skilled in the discourse of courtly love. It is within the received conditions of courtly love discourse that Chaucer presents Troilus’s withdrawal from the public eyes to the privacy of his bedroom. It is unfolded in the language of courtly love, so central to the identity of the ideal courtier, that one may hardly deny the poem’s representation of the way Troilus’s “private” fantasy of Criseyde is a “public” product of chivalric discourse of love.⁷ Yet, far from succumbing to the conventions of romance upon sexuality, Chaucer manipulates the genre to play with his audience’s expectation and questions the very ideological convictions that construct the chivalric sense of sex relations. While Troilus’s concepts of love and self-image are restricted by genre, constrained by the discourse of courtly love which structures his love talk, Criseyde and Diomedes subversively speak through the cracks of courtly love discourse, inverting and perverting the tired system of sexuality in the world of romance. In

⁷ I am indebted to David Aers for this point, as well as for the comparison of Troilus and the Black Knight in *The Book of Duchess* in the following paragraphs. See Aers, “Masculine,” esp., 121-23.

Troilus's "luf talk," we find a self-contained language system in which chivalric ideals are reaffirmed and elevated through the discourse of courtly love that expresses them. In Criseyde's and Diomedes's articulation, the language system does not bind but enables and poses opportunities for testing and subverting such ideals.

In Book I, Chaucer shows Troilus prying into his male fellows' feelings about "love" and abusing their "love" immediately before his own conversion. A certain language style, namely, the discourse of courtly love, is already very much on Troilus's tongue—"love," with its courtly "observaunces," its "servyse," its "ordre," its "lay" (a law of belief), its "woo and penanunces":

He wolde smyle and holden it folye,
 And seye him thus, "God woot, she slepeth softe,
 For love of the, whan thou turnest ful ofte!
 I have herd told, pardieux, of your lyvyng,
 Ye loveres, and youre lewed observaunces,
 And which a labour folk han in wynnyng
 Of love, and in the kepyng which doutaunces;
 And whan youre prey is lost, woo and penanunces.
 O very fooles, nyce and blynde be ye!

Ther nys nat oon kan war by other be." (I 193-203)

[He would smile and consider it folly, and he would say: "God knows, she sleeps softly for love of you, when you turn in restless pain the whole night through! I have heard, by God, of your ways of living, you lovers, and your crazy observations and false beliefs, the pain you take, the services you give to win your love; when won, you owns your winning in doubts and fears, and when your prey is lost, in woes and penances. Fools that you are—blind and silly! There is none of you who know how to take warning from the others.]

Later, Troilus comments on the overwhelming power of love again in the very discourse of courtly love:

"Ye lovers! For the konnyngeste of yow,
 That serveth most ententiflich and best,
 Hym tit as often harm therof as prow.
 Youre hire is quyt ayeyn, ye God woot how!
 Nought wel for wel, but scorn for good servyse.
 In feith, youre ordre is ruled in good wise!

"In nouncertaeyn ben alle youre observaunces,
 But it a sely fewe pointes be;

Ne no thing asketh so gret attendaunces
 As doth youre lay, and that knowe alle ye;
 But that is nat the worste, as mote I the!
 But, tolde I yow the worste point, I leve,
 Al seyde I soth, ye wolden at me greve. (I 330-44)

[*“You lovers! The cleverest of you, who serves love most attentively and best, comes to more harm than honor. Your service is repaid, God knows how, not love for love, but scorn for good service. In faith, your order is ruled in such a good way!” “All of your observances are quite unsure of their result, except in a few points. No other thing as your law asks so great attendances, as you all know. But that is the worst, if I may warn you! But, I’d tell you the worst point, by your permission; although what I say is in good sense, you would be angry with me.”*]

Then, Troilus looks up at the sky and seems to say “Loo! Is this naught wisely spoken?” (“Was that not wisely spoken?” I 204). We are told that the God of Love is angry at Troilus’s pride and presumptuousness against love and that Troilus’s love for Criseyde is in effect a punishment in keeping with the conventions of courtly love. As the story goes, Troilus, this worthy king’s son who scoffs at love, sees Criseyde in the temple and “sodeynly” he is struck by the arrow of the God of Love. This Troilus now determines to use love’s craft to win Criseyde’s love without anyone else knowing it. He ponders how best to work out his “love carping and doing” into Criseyde’s heart:

“And over al this, yet muchel more he thoughte
 What for to speke, and what to holden inne;
 And what to arten hire to love he soughte,
 And on a song anon-right to bygynne,
 And gan loude on his sorwe for to wyne;
 For with good hope he gan fully assente
 Criseyde for to love, and nought repente. (I 386-92)

[*And over and above all this, yet much more he thought what he should speak and what to keep in, what he could do to kindle her to love; he decided at once to begin with a song, and so he sang aloud on his sorrow to win; with good hope he gave his full assent to love Criseyde and never to repent.*]

In Troilus’s songs on love (I 400-420; III 1744-71), the discourse of courtly love offers him a system through which the cultural standards and ideals of love are internalized. According to the narrator’s description of Troilus’s love letter to Criseyde (II 1065-92), we also find Troilus’s convictions of love are framed within the

same phrases and terms of courtly love:

First he gan hire his righte lady calle,
His hertes lif, his lust, his sorwes leche,
His blisse, and ek thise other termes alle
That in swich cas thise lovers all seche;
And in ful humble wise, as in his speche,
He gan hym recomaunde unto hire grace;
To telle al how, it axeth muchel space. (II 1065-71)

[*First he began to call her his true lady, his life and joy, his sorrow's remedy, his bliss and all the other phrases that all these lovers look for to employ as their cases may require; and in a very humble manner, as in his speech, he began to recommend himself to her grace; to tell it all would ask much space.*]

Troilus's love letter and songs suggest, as does the whole poem and its genre, the importance of chivalric love discourse, or "loves crafte" in courtly poetry. Chaucer comments on Troilus's fantasy of Criseyde: "Thus took he purpos loves crafte to suwe" (I 379), echoing the decision of the black knight in *The Book of Duchess*, "I ches love to my firste craft" (791). The chivalric ideals of love are assimilated both to Troilus's ideal self-image and the basic sexual drives which may only be legitimately acted out within the phrases and terms of chivalry. So too are the references to secrecy, to a private realm opposed to the public.⁸ The more skilled in "loves crafte" the more complete the achievement of the knight. In his private bedroom, he prays the God of Love and Criseyde for mercy:

"But now help, God, and ye, swete, for whom
I pleyne, ikaught, ye, nevere wight so faste!
O mercy, dere herte, and help me from
The deth, for I, whil that my lyf may laste,
More than myself wol love yow to my laste,
And with som frendly lok gladeth me, swete,
Though nevere more thing ye me beheete." (I 533-39)

[*"Ah, help me, God! And help me, sweetest heart, for whom I complain, yes, I am*

⁸ Windeatt discusses the role of privacy and secrecy in the *Troilus* as compared to the *Filostrato* and argues that Chaucer's displacement of the story back to a courtly, rather than urban, setting imposes a completely different dynamic of public and private, most notably in the need for self-identity along certain codes of sexuality (116-31). See also Knight's historicizing conception (which echoes Windeatt's) of the tension between public and private worlds which Chaucer so remarkably inscribes into his romance (32-65). In this essay, I have not the space to provide the useful comparison with Boccaccio's text in relation to the present argument, but it is worth noting how Chaucer deliberately turns Boccaccio's setting into a courtly, aristocratic one. Similarly, it is significant that Chaucer deliberately calls our attention to Criseyde's practical character, her social situation, and her subversion of the courtiers' "luf talk," a central part of Chaucer's transformation of Boccaccio's heroine.

caught—none ever caught so fast! Dear sweetheart, have mercy on me and help me from the death, for I, while my life may last, more than myself I will love you to the last day of my life, and with some friendly look, gladden me, sweetheart, though I may never hope for better chance.”]

He vows to himself that he will “serve” Criseyde always: “But as hire man I wol ay lyve and sterve” ([but as her man I mean to live and die] I 427). And all this occurs before he has even been introduced to Criseyde!

These passages quoted above clearly indicate how initiation in the discourse of love long preceded the existence of any certain relationship: it is the discourse of courtly love which produces the particular form of desire—the will to mastery and servitude. We find the same language conventions and structure of feeling on the tongue of the Black Knight in *the Book of Duchess*, a figure whose discourse of love corresponds to Troilus’s:

“Dredeles, I have ever yit
Be tributarye and yiven rente
To Love, hooly with good entente,
And through pleasaunce become his thrall
With good wille, body, hert, and al.
Al this I putte in his servage,
As to my lord, and did homage;
And ful devoutly I prayed him to,
He shulde besette mye herte so
That hyt plesance to hym were,
And worship to my lady dere.” (*The Book of Duchess* 764-74)

[“doubtless, I have ever yet tributary and given rent to love, wholly with good intent, and through pleasance become his thrall with good will, body, heart and all. All this I put in his servitude, as to my lord, did homage; and full devotedly I prayed to him that he should beset my heart so that it was plesance to him and worship to my dear lady.”]

All the familiar terms are well known to Troilus: “To love... thrall...servage... pray...worship.” In practicing the “loves crafte,” Troilus in love becomes “the frendlieste wright,/The gentlest, and ek the mooste fre,/The thriftiest, oon the beste knight/That in his tyme was or myghte be” ([he became the friendliest of men, the noblest, the most generous and free, the sturdiest too, one of the best that then, in his own time, there were, or that could be.] I 1079-82). We are told that he fights not because he hates the Greeks, nor because he wants to rescue Troy, but because he

wants Criseyde to appreciate his fame: “But for non hate to the Grekes hadde,/Ne also for the rescous of the town,/Ne made hym thus in armes for to madde,/But only, lo, for this conclusioun:/To liken hire the bet for his renoun” ([But not to show his hatred of the Greek, nor even for the rescue of the town; what made him battle-mad was just to seek a single end, namely to win renown and please his lady better.] I 477-81). He no longer lies on bed in regrets and with perplexity over love, but fights like a lion in defense of Troy (“up anon upon his stede bay,/And in the feld he pleyde tho leoun” [up at once upon his stead, and he played the lion in the battle field] I 1073-74), and becomes the most worshipped “gentilest” knight in the town (“And in the town his manere tho forth ay/Soo goodly was, and gat hym so in grace,/That ecch hym loved that loked on his face” [from that time on so winning was his way with everyon in Troy, he gained in grace; they loved him and looked on his face] I 1076-78). In brief, all that make Troilus a hero in his community can be attributed to the chivalric culture of love, namely, “Loves heigh servise” (III 1794).

Troilus is indeed an ideal courtly lover who follows all the precepts of “loves crafte.” In his “luf talk,” he vows to keep their love affair a secret and do his best to protect her “honour.” The language conventions of chivalric sexuality constrain him to remain quiet when his Trojan kinsmen decide to exchange Criseyde with Antenor. He is powerless to say or do anything without her permission. His words in public setting must be mediated by such codes of signification. Criseyde was wooed according to elaborate conventions of “luf talk” and was the constant recipient of songs and love letters with sweet favors and ceremonial gestures. For all these gentle and painstaking attentions on the part of Troilus, Criseyde needs only return a short hint of approval, a mere shadow of affection, a grace. After all, she was the lady-lord -- the commanding “mistress” of the affair; he was but her servus--a lowly but faithful servant. According to the cultural formation of courtly love and the social construction of chivalric sense of gender, it is understandable that Troilus takes no aggressive move to prevent Criseyde from going to the Greek camp against her will.

In the end of Book III, the poet comments on this cultural formation of courtly love in Troilus: “And this encrees of hardynesse and might/Com hym of Love.../That altered his spirit so withinne/.../And moost of love and vertu was his speche,/And in despit hadde all wrecchednesse” ([Love increased his courage and strength and changed much of his inner thoughts... his speech was chiefly of love and virtue, and he despised all baseness] III 1176-78; 1786-87). These are the familiar terms of the language conventions of love which we find not only in Troilus, Palamon, Arcite, Aurelius, Absalon, the Black Knight, and other Chaucerian knights but in all makings of “love” in the world of romance. Gawain is renowned for his “tecchles termes of talkynge noble” in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. When the courtiers in Bercilak’s

castle learn that their guest is Gawain they cluster around him hoping to learn how to improve their speech. The romantic idea of love is apparent in the language of male lovers as we find in one of Chaucer's short poems, "Complaint to His Lady." When Chaucer in his ballad "To Rosamund" playfully claims "I am trewe Tristram the secounde," he not only echoes Froissart ("Nom ai Amans, et en sornom Tristans") but also alludes to a chivalric ideal of a new courtly society in which the new Tristans could most easily be recognized by their "tecchles termes of talkynge noble," namely, their "love carping and doing." In *The Canterbury Tales*, the Knight of the General Prologue "nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde ... unto no maner wight." (["never says words of vulgarity to a man."]) The churl, on the other hand, is incapable of speaking in "termes of talkynge noble" because a churl is incapable of love and he talks, as Chaucer says, ever in "cherles termes" (*Canterbury Tales* I:3169). That is to say, the language of love is an essential part of a courtier's identity, one that simultaneously excludes the lower classes. As Andreas Capellanus notes in chapter concerning peasants, they "can scarcely ever be found serving in Love's court. They are impelled to acts of love in the natural way like a horse or a mule" (Walsh, 223). Perhaps, the most deeply rooted and significant is the discourse of courtly love, or chivalry on Troilus's tongue.

Chaucer's narrator tells us that in Troilus's and Criseyde's first conversion, Troilus can hardly utter a word in reply to Criseyde's gracious greeting:

This Troilus, that herde his lady preye
Of lordshipe hym, wax neither quyk ne ded,
Ne myghte o word for shame to it seye,
Although men sholde smyten of his hed.
But Lord, so he wex sodeynliche red,
And sire, his lessoun, that he wende konne
To preyen hire, is thorough his wit ironne. (III 78-84)

The only word he finally comes up with is "mercy, mercy, swete herte" ("Lo, the alderfirste word that hym asterte/Was, twyes, 'Mercy, mercy, swete herte!'" III 97-98). Here, the chivalric "luf talk," with the images of sovereignty and service and yielding and kneeling, expresses, in an intriguing Chaucerian way, the different structures of feeling between Troilus and Criseyde.⁹

Unlike Troilus, Criseyde does not fall in love "sodeynly" (II 673). Many critics have pointed out that Chaucer has presented Criseyde as a conventional courtly lady, yet one with a reasoning ability and sophisticated life experience (Delany 29-46;

⁹ Derek Pearsall in his "Criseyde's Choices" gives a very good analysis of Criseyde's state of mind as she debates Pandarus's offer of Troilus, and of the ways in which she attempts to do as she pleases, but while deluding herself into believing that she has yielded herself to outside pressure.

Hanning 120-37; Aers “Criseyde” 177-200). To make up her mind, she argues in an elaborately formal way with herself : reasons for loving Troilus (II 703-931), reasons for leaving Troy (IV 1528-95), and finally reasons for not returning to Troy (V 689-707, 1023-29). She reasons against the love affair, arguing that she is a free woman (II 771), uneager for a new husband who might be either “ful of jalousie,/Or maisterfull, or loven novelrie” (II 755-56). Certainly, she will not put her safety in Troy in jeopardy and enthrall her liberty (II 772-73). She worries about the stormy life of love (II 778-84), the wicked tongues of people (II 785-86), and the fickleness of men’s love (II 787-91). She knows well that their love affair can only last in the ideal chivalric world of Troy and that their joy is transient (“O brotel wele of mannes joie unstable!/. . ./Either he woot that thow, joie, art mutable,/Or woot it nought. . .” III 820-23). Criseyde’s soliloquy weighing the pros and cons of becoming Troilus’s lover expresses a strong vein of cool, socially nuanced, and skillfully effaced self-appreciation. When she comments on the idea of remarriage, she says:

I am my owene woman, wel at ese,
I thank it God, as after myn estat,
Right yong, and stoned unteyd in lusty leese,
Wtihouten jalousie or swich debat:

Shal noon housbonde seyn to me “check mat!” (II 750-54)

Criseyde is practical and reasonable enough to understand that there is no true happiness in this world (“Ther is no verray weele in this world here.” III 836), a concept an ideal courtly lover like Troilus can never grasp until death. The ideal chivalric knight “sodeynly” (I 209) falls in love with Criseyde at the whim of the God of love, yet the practical worldly woman contemplates the question “to love or not to love” at the whim of the God of Fortune. In the consummation scene in Book III where Troilus is in bed at last with Criseyde, Criseyde’s reply to Troilus’s demand that she yield to him: “Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere,/Ben yold, ywis, I were now nought here!” (III 1210-11) lays bare a profound, negative reaction to Troilus’s realization of his “courtly” love: “Now be ye kaught, now is ther but we tweyne!/Now yeldeth yow, for other bote is non! (III 1206-08). There, when Criseyde responds to Diomedes’s overtures in the Greek camp, the phrase reappears and resonates with irony: “I say nat therefore that I wol yow love,/N’y say nat nay;” (V 1002-03). Her words are even more open-ended than her earlier reply to Troilus’s demand. Such a discourse of love significantly opens up or generates debate about the ideals of “courtly love.” As McGerr aptly points out, her participation in the wars of words that the men around her play is defensive: as the narrator says of Criseyde’s first letter to Troilus, “Al covered she the wordes under sheld” (II 1327) (190). In her letter (II 1197-1225), she informs Troilus that she will not “make hirselven bounde/In love,”

and in Book III, 169-72, she again reminds Troilus of this in a superb speech on love. Away from conventional discourse of courtly love, Criseyde voices her real and justifiable “entente.” In her final letter to Troilus, Criseyde talks about her most unhappy situation in the Greek camp aiming at manipulating the sympathies of the ideal courtly lover she has betrayed:

Come I wole; but yet in swich disjoynte
I stoned as now, that what yer or what day
That this shal be, that kan I naught apoynte. (V 1618-20)

With a unique individual consciousness and awareness of the “woman’s question,” Criseyde’s soliloquy, letters and “luf talk” with Troilus and Diomedes defer the clichéd chivalric terms of sexuality: “that kan I naught apoynte” (V 1620). Here once more shows Chaucer’s imagining his way into the cultural formation of “loves crafte” in a manner quite untypical of medieval romances (say, those by Lydgate and Gower), and of saint’s legends. So when we come to the now famous phrase describing Criseyde of being “slydyng of corage” (V 825), we can grasp its meaning in the full light Chaucer has cast on the courtly lady he deliberately makes strange in the romance genre.

In Book V Chaucer introduces another genesis of “love” in Diomedes within the language conventions of courtly love. Like Troilus, Diomedes falls in love with Criseyde at first sight. But, Diomedes is no typical courtly lover, according to the chivalric system of sexuality. Diomedes sees Criseyde’s miserable separation from Troilus, reads the signs of love, moves in “and by the regne hire hente,” leading her “by the bridel” (V 74-92). He woos Criseyde indirectly by trying to ease her distress (V 110) and by offering her friendship as a brother (V 128-34), knowing that he will gain nothing if he is too aggressive (V 99-103). From this position of power Diomedes begins to display his mastery of *luf talk*, the discourse of courtly love. All the key terms are produced as the knight “gan fallen forth in speche” (V 107), he’s no novice “in swich a crafte” (V 90) as Chaucer’s narrator notes:

Fro treweliche he swor hir as a knight
That ther nas thing with which he myghte hire plese,
That he nolde don his peyne and al his might
To don it, for to don hire herte an ese;
And preyed hire she wolde hire sorwe apese,
And seyde, “Iwis, we Grekis kan have joie
To honouren yow as wel as folk of Toie.” (V 113-19)

[For truly, and he swore it as a knight, there was not anything to give her pleasure he would not do with all his heart and might, if it could ease her heart in any measure; he begged her to make peace her sorrow, and said: “We Grecians know how to take

joy in honoring you, as much as folk in Troy.”]

And the Greek knight swears with the very discourse of courtly love:

“Ek I am nat of power for to stryve
Ayeyns the god of Love, but hym obeye
I wol alwey; and mercy I you preye.

“Ther ben so worthi knyghtes in this place,
And ye so fayr, that everich of hem alle
Wol peynen hym to stonden in youre grace.
But myghte me so faire a grace falle,
That ye me for youre servant would calle,
So lowely ne so trewely yow serve
Nil non of hem as I shal til I sterve.” (V 166-75)

[Nor do I have in me the power to set myself again the God of Love, whom I obey, and ever will; have mercy, then, I pray you. There are so many worthy knights in this place, and you so fair, that one and all will strain in rivalry to stand in your grace; but should such happiness befall me as to be the one that you will call your servant, there’s not one of them so true and humble as I shall be, till death, in serving you.]

Here, the discourse of courtly love functions as a vehicle for exploring “trouthe” and lips-service. In a romance world where a knight’s “luf talk” is too often the norm, the problem becomes how one can know with certitude the truth of individual utterances, especially in the absence of a belief against which Diomedes’s words and actions can be measured and judged. Indeed, the more Diomedes practices his “loves crafte,” the further away from “trouthe” we are left; Diomedes’s “luf talk,” such as “by my trouthe,” and “have here my trouth” become Chaucerian signposts that something is amiss, that what we have in actuality is rift between language and reality.¹⁰ Diomedes certainly sees his attempt to be Criseyde’s “conquerour” (V 794) as a war of words: if he loses, he says to himself, “I shal namore lessen but my speche” (V 798). The result, as many critics have commented, is Criseyde “caught” in the net of a false knight’s “luf talk” (Hermann 156; Aers 126-27). Even though he knows she has a

¹⁰ Similarly, it is significant that Chaucer’s handling of Criseyde’s words of “trouthe” shows concern with his audience’s “real” world, the expectations of formulaic “carping and doing in love” they cherished, and the contradictory practices and mentality with which they were presented. In conventional romances, the formula of an outstanding knight committing his existence to the devoted service of a woman demands total obedience and submission of woman to man in love and marriage. It is in this context we should see the contradictory images of knights and ladies and “defamiliarized” conventions of courtly love literature. In *Troilus*, Chaucer uses the romance genre and the conventional discourse of courtly love to explore the cracks in Diomedes’s and Criseyde’s “love talk.” In short, he returns “romance” to reality and locates Diomedes and Criseyde firmly within it.

lover in Troy, Diomedes takes advantage of his chance to lay out his hook and line to catch Criseyde (“How he may best, with shortest taryinge,/Into his net Driseydes herte brynge./To this entent he koude nevere fine; to fisshen hire, he leyde out hook and lyne.” (V 774-77).

Unlike Troilus’s “luf talk,” or those we may find in the romances of Chrestien de Troyes (c. 1175), the *Libri Tres De Amore* of Andreas Capellanus (c. 1185), the *Roman de la Rose* (c. 1240-80) or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Diomedes’s discourse of courtly love is full of cracks. If we fail to admire Troilus’s “loves crafte” in “tecchles terms of talkyng noble,” Diomedes’s “luf talk” helps us to caution the clichéd terms of courtly love and question the very ideological convictions that construct the chivalric sense of sex relations. The tired system of sexuality in the world of romance in which Troilus, Gawain, Palamon, Arcite and other chivalric lovers perceive and honour their love is restricted by genre, constrained by the discourse of courtly love. Criseyde and Diomedes subversively speak through the cracks of courtly love discourse, inverting and perverting the tired system of sexuality in the world of romance. Through the cracks, the reliable phrase, structure of feeling, or system of sexuality becomes unreliable, the inconspicuous words of love become conspicuous, and the language conventions of a knight’s “luf talk” is made to yield unconventional associations. Chaucer’s *Troilus* makes us aware of the (de)limitations of language conventions of a courtier’s “luf talk,” the gender constraints in a chivalric society, and the (trans)formation of a certain kind of literature, viz., romance, in time.

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