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‘Double Cresseyde’ in John Lydgate’s *Troy Book* (1412-1420)[1]

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If we were to construct a factual narrative about a literary criminal case in the English Middle Ages, we could maybe start it off in this way:

> It was the 31st of October 1412. The weak afternoon sun fell on Brother John as he, commissioned by Henry, Prince of Wales, lined up his books to tell the true story of the Fall of Troy in English verse. As he sharpened his quill, John, aiming it at the same time at women in general, planned to stab it right into the heart of one particular lady. Her name: Briseida, aka Criseyde or Cresseyde. Her marital status: widow. Her place of residence: Troy, later the Greek camp. Her crime: Treason in love.

Since its invention in the twelfth century, Criseyde’s crime has agitated people’s minds. She is a courtly lady accused of inexcusable treachery. Her punishment remains in the dark in most adaptations of the story, but it is always her isolation: she loses the sympathy of the other figures, of the narrator and the audience, and she finally sinks into oblivion within the story of Troy. Criseyde’s medieval prosecutors, are, on the one hand, notable historiographers of the Trojan War: Benoît de Sainte-Maure, Guido delle Colonne, John Lydgate; on the other hand, they are authors of book-length romances about the love story of Troilus and Criseyde: Giovanni Boccaccio, Geoffrey Chaucer, Richard Henryson. After the Middle Ages, the story keeps on being told, most famously by William Shakespeare. Looking at this list of famous writers, it is clear that our Brother John (i.e., John Lydgate), is not the most well-known redactor of the story of Troilus and Criseyde today. We should, however, keep in mind that he was a very prolific and widely read author in his time.

John Lydgate, monk of Bury St Edmunds, began his long writing process of the first English version of the Troy story at the end of October 1412 by order of the later King Henry V. The date and even the time of day, 4 p.m., can be deduced – given astronomical knowledge – by the constellation of the stars described in the prologue. Thus far, our factual narrative heeds the facts. In addition, Lydgate does not seem to leave any doubt that Criseyde’s actions are motivated by female fickleness when after her exchange for Antenor, betraying the Trojan prince Troilus, she gives her heart to the Greek warrior Diomede. In fact, Lydgate inserted several long passages of condemnation of women in general. This has led scholars such as Torti to conclude that Lydgate meant to emphasize the changeable nature of women by the example of Criseyde’s betrayal (184). Torti writes:

[1] This is, essentially, an English version of an unpublished lecture delivered at the University of Bamberg in 2003. The ideas developed here gave rise to many an unforgettable discussion in seminars co-taught by the author and her colleague and friend Christoph Houswitschka in the 2010s. In particular, we would argue at length about Chaucer’s art of characterization.

> In conclusion, the Troilus and Criseyde story in the *Troy Book* reinforces the dichotomy, already present in Guido and in Chaucer, between Troilus' nobility and Criseyde's inconstancy. Her doubleness, according to the poet, has a justification: it is unavoidable because woman is changeable by nature and because Fortune, in its variability, helps reverse the destinies of peoples and also of individuals. (184)

A more recent interpretation by Holly A. Crocker has challenged this traditional view, arguing that for Lydgate "[t]he source of Criseyde's betrayal is cultural" (Crocker 317), that he "locates the source of women's mutability in the cultural contingency that accompanies masculine violence, especially war" (305). Cresseyde's betrayal is thus portrayed by Lydgate as a choice motivated by her commitment to contemporary standards of feminine conduct, in particular by her pity, which attests to a woman's prized value within an economy of patriarchal exchange (see Crocker 318-19; on Lydgate's notion of *wommanhede*, see also Williams, ch. 3). While Torti and others take Lydgate's antifeminist outrage at face value, Crocker passes it by, noting that Lydgate refers to Guido in these places, often by hedging that it is not him who says so but Guido (Crocker 317). Thus, Lydgate's misogynist passages are excluded from Crocker's interpretation.

It appears that both approaches could profit from considering more fully both the rhetorical traditions of medieval literature, in particular concerning the technique of amplification (see Section 3, below), and the full epic framework of the *Troy Book* (see Section 4, below). Hidden in other parts of the text, there are some indications of a negotiation of male ethics in love matters, too, which seem to have escaped the attention of the critics. But first a brief outline will be given of what John Lydgate found in the books on his desk, in particular in Guido delle Colonne's historiographical work (see Section 1, below) and Geoffrey Chaucer's verse novel *Troilus and Criseyde* (see Section 2, below).

1. Guido's Briseida: A New Figure on the Chessboard of the Trojan War

Frequently in his work, John Lydgate acknowledges the Sicilian Guido delle Colonne as the main source of his report on the Fall of Troy. What he refers to is Guido's *Historia destructionis Troiae*, written in 1287. Guido's *Historia* functioned as a kind of 'handbook' of the Trojan War and was decisive for the spread of the whole Troy story in the later Middle Ages, complete with the story of Troilus and Briseida (Antonelli 45-48). Guido's report was considered to be a 'true' account and could thus be adduced by the historian Lydgate, writing for the crown, for both the royalty's claim to political legitimacy and the author's didactic and moral intentions (Finlayson 146).

Guido, on his part, found in Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* a newly invented love story of medieval provenance. This was the love triangle between

Briseida, Troilus and Diomede. The assumption is that Benoît had invented the story himself (see Antonelli; Mapstone 139-43). Guido's adaptation is more straightforward than his source: not only is Briseida's complexity largely reduced, but also Benoît's narrative structure with its previews and flashbacks is changed into a linear storyline. Guido deletes the monologues which give Benoît's Briseida a voice, allowing insights into the motives and thoughts of the figure and entering into a complex exchange with the narrator's comments. This multi-layered narrative technique is reduced to only *one* voice in Guido, and this is the voice of the narrator who condemns Briseida's betrayal of Troilus. At the same time, Guido adds a misogynist statement which stands in a particular tradition addressed in Section 3, below. Briseida is said to become mutable very quickly and abruptly, and in general women are accused of unsteadiness, deceitfulness and indescribably mean fickle intentions (Guido delle Colonne 166).

Briseida's reduced function emerges even more clearly if we briefly consider how this medieval figure came into being. She emerges from two women in the *Ilias*, Briseis and Chryseis, who are both sent to and fro between two men. The medieval Briseida features elements of both figures, but in particular of Briseis, as has been argued by Sally Mapstone (134). These elements and further attributes of other figures around Briseis and Chryseis melt into the noble Trojan woman Briseida, the daughter of the Trojan priest Calchas, who, divining the fall of Troy, has deserted the city for the Greek camp and has left his daughter behind. Love erupts between her and Troilus, the youngest son of King Priam of Troy. Troilus' role is fixed: he is the best warrior (after his brother Hector), and Achilles' killing of childless Troilus on the battlefield stands for the inevitable fate of the city of Troy (Boitani 5-6).

What Benoît, thus, did was to invent the personal treachery of Calchas' daughter Briseida on Troilus as a parallel story to the priest's treason against the city of Troy. A match for Troilus had to be an exemplary lady, noble and good – in other words, a courtly lady. On the other hand, she had to be able to betray this love. In parallel to other female fates in the story of Troy, above all of course Helen's, men force a woman to enter the territory of enemies. Once there, she is either doomed to die or she attaches herself to the man who desires her. Diomede, a brave warrior of the Greeks and Troilus' traditional counterpart on the battlefield, fitted the new role very well. In this way, as Gretchen Mieszkowski (especially 78-79, 87) points out, Briseida was born as a complex female figure, known from the time of her inception as an *exemplum* of the unfaithful woman.

Through Guido's reductions, Briseida becomes a fragmented figure of an unfaithful woman, a negative *exemplum*, a woman without a face. Guido's Briseida is a pawn sacrificed on the chessboard of the Trojan War: she is introduced for Troilus to prove his constancy and faith in love. Then she disappears.

2. Chaucer's Criseyde: The Story of Courtly Love Prior to Treachery

A new period in the history of the matter is marked by Geoffrey Chaucer's adaptation of the story in his verse romance *Troilus and Criseyde*. Chaucer had found the love narrative extracted from the story of Troy in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*. In the part about faithful love, Boccaccio had reestablished Benoît's narrative voice. Criseida emerges as a widow, thus implicitly she appears more mature and experienced. Her cousin Pandaro functions as a go-between for the lovers. Unlike Benoît, Boccaccio does not elaborate on the love story between Briseida and Diomede after her treachery, but his emphasis is on the rise and fulfilment of a love which is in the end doomed to fail, namely the love between Troilo and Criseida.

Chaucer adapts Boccaccio's names and constellations but shapes the ambivalence and problems of the main figures Troilus, Criseyde, Pandarus (now Criseyde's uncle) and also Diomede in a singular and unsurpassed manner. The figures are given voices in monologues, letters and dialogues; further points of view are opened up by the narrator, who accompanies the story and seems to be eager to excuse Criseyde's behaviour, who asks new questions and leaves out others. Criseyde's description exemplifies Chaucer's art well (Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde* V, 806-26). For the most part, it derives from the classical tradition of the story as transmitted by Benoît and Dares, an alleged eye-witness of the Trojan War, in Joseph of Exeter's Latin hexameter version. After the list of her exquisite features (apart from her joined eyebrows), Chaucer concludes her description thus:

> She sobre was, ek symple, and wys with-al,
> The best ynorisshed ek that myghte be,
> And goodly of hire speche in general;
> Charitable, estatlich, lusty and fre,
> Ne neuere mo ne lakked hire pite:
> Tendre-herted, slydynge of corage –
> But trewely I kan nat telle hire age. (V, 820-26)
>
> "She was serious, in addition natural and also wise, also the most well-bred that could exist, and generally benevolent in her speaking; charitable, noble, spirited and generous, never ever did she lack empathy: of tender heart, mutable – but truly, I cannot tell her age."[2]

To comprehend Chaucer's work fully, it is vitally important to understand the author's narrative technique, in particular the figure of the narrator, who claims to have no experience in love, and the interaction between narrator and audience, as E. Talbot Donaldson's (ch. 5) and Dieter Mehl's (215-20) contributions in particular make us aware. This narrative technique involves inherent contradictions. The narrator asks questions which he does not intend to answer, as for instance

[2] All translations from Middle English are my own.

the question of Criseyde's age. By this move, he distracts the audience from a more important point in Criseyde's description, namely her character, described as *slydynge of corage*, which may be rendered as 'fickle' or 'mutable in her intentions'. There are questions which are intentionally not asked by the narrator, such as why Troilus and Criseyde are not openly in love, or maybe even marry, which would in any case put an end to the secrecy which pervades the story like a central nerve and maybe even avoid Criseyde's extradition to the Greeks. Instead, the narrator – apparently himself in love with Criseyde – evokes extraordinary sympathy for the figure, even when she has become treacherous, mourning about her lost reputation (Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde* V, 1054-64):

> She seyde, "allas, for now is clene ago
> My name of trouthe in loue for euere mo,
> For I haue falsed oon the gentileste
> That euere was and oon the worthieste." (V, 1054-57)
>
> "She said, 'alas, because now my reputation for faithfulness in love is fully destroyed for evermore because I have betrayed the very best and noblest man who ever lived.'"

And a little later the narrator comments thus:

> Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde
> Forther than the storye wol deuyse:
> Hire name, allas, is punysshed so wide,
> That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise;
> And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,
> For she so sory was for hire vntrouthe,
> I-wis, I wolde excuse hire ȝet for routhe. (V, 1093-99)
>
> "I do not wish to blame this poor woman more than the story relates: her reputation, alas, is ruined so widely that it should suffice for her guilt; and if I could excuse her in any way, because she was so sorry for her infidelity, I would certainly, nevertheless, excuse her out of pity."

The modern reader – medieval scholar and student alike – is still captivated by the narrator's compassion. But how did Lydgate react to Chaucer's narrative art in his rendering of the love story, set in the context of the Trojan War?

3. Lydgate's Cresseyde

The main epithet which Lydgate awards to his Cresseyde in the second part of the story is *double*, meant in the transferred sense of 'false, deceitful, treacherous'.[3] Cresseyde's *double*ness, however, can also be read in the literal sense: she is at the

[3] Lydgate IV, 306-07; *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *double* adj. 6(a). In line with her argument, Crocker (317) holds that Lydgate's Cresseyde earned this epithet from her tautological replies; however, she does not elaborate on this claim.

same time Troilus' courtly lady of Chaucer's narrator and Guido's negative *exemplum*, the pawn sacrifice on the chessboard of the Trojan War (see Section 3.1, below). What is more, it will be shown in Section 3.2, below, how Lydgate once again duplicates the figure of Cresseyde in her function of a pawn sacrifice, making her a *double* pawn sacrifice.

3.1 Cresseyde as Troilus' Courtly Lady

Lydgates's story is substantially shorter than Chaucer's and is presented much less emotionally and more statically. It is told in Books II and III and is limited to Cresseyde's being handed over to the Greeks, the couple lamenting its fate (both in Book III) and the description of the figures in Book II. Lydgate is very explicit about following Chaucer and gives a short summary of his master's verse romance. Approaching the separation of the couple, Lydgate presents Cresseyde as a courtly lady. He describes her woe and gives her a voice in a monologue which, in Chaucerian manner, employs confused syntax to mirror the figure's confusion of mind:

> Riȝt so hir chekis moiste wern & wete
> W*ith* cristal water, vp ascendyn[g] hiȝe
> Out of her breste i*n*-to hir heuenly eye;
> And ay amonge hir lamentaciou*n*,
> Ofte siþe she fil aswone dou*n*,
> Dedly pale, for-dy*m*med in hir siȝt,
> And ofte seide: "allas! my*n* owne knyȝt,
> Myn owne Troylus, allas! whi shal we parte! –
> Raþer late Deth w*ith* his spere darte
> Þoruȝ myn hert, & þe veynes kerue,
> And w*ith* his rage do me for to sterue –
> Raþer, allas! þan fro my knyȝt to twy*n*ne!
> And of þis wo, o Deth, þ*a*t I am Inne,
> Whi nyl þou come & help[e] make an ende?
> For how shulde I oute of Troye wende,
> He abide, and I to Grekis goon,
> Þer to dwelle amonge my cruel foon?
> Allas! allas! I, woful creature,
> Howe shulde I þer, in þe werre endure –
> I, wreche woman, but my silf allone,
> Amonge þe men of armys eu*er*ychon!" (Lydgate III, 4132-52)

> "Right thus [like dew on flowers] her cheeks were moist and wet with crystal water, which rose from her chest to her heavenly eye; and all the time she fell down frequently in her complaint, swooning, pale like death, her sight clouded over, and often she said, 'alas, my own knight, my own Troilus, alas, why must we part! Rather let Death pierce my heart with his spear and carve my veins and kill me with his rage – rather, alas, than part from my knight! And of this woe, oh Death, that I suffer, why do you not want to come

> and help to end it? Because how should I leave Troy, he remaining, and I go to the Greeks to live there among my cruel enemies? Alas, alas, I, suffering creature, how should I live there, in the war – I, wretched woman, all alone by myself, among all the warriors'"

It is remarkable that Lydgate addresses this love story at all in his story of Troy, given that other chroniclers of the Trojan War of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries simply ignored the famous tragedy of the lovers' parting (Benson, "True Troilus and False Cresseid"). Up until her (enforced) change of sides, Cresseyde has not only inherited the name of the lady in Chaucer's romance – ignoring the usual variance in phonetic and orthographic detail – but also her positive courtly charisma.

Still, Lydgate finds himself "sette euene amyddes tweyne" (Lydgate II, 4693) 'falling between two stools', by which he refers to his dilemmas of firstly having to describe Cresseyde while falling short of Chaucer's art, and secondly, above all, of having to describe one and the same figure altogether positively at first and then downright negatively. The medieval historian attempts to approach the second of his dilemmas by contrasting his two sources: when he speaks about Cresseyde's infidelity, he exclusively refers to Guido delle Colonne, and not to Chaucer (II, 4736-62):

> Also sche was, for al hir semlynes,
> Ful symple & meke, & ful of sobirnes,
> Þe best norissched eke þat myȝt[e] be,
> Goodly of speche, fulfilde of pite,
> Facundious, and þer-to riȝt tretable,
> And, as seiþ Guydo, in loue variable –
> Of tendre herte & vnste[d]fastnes
> He hir accuseth, and newfongilnes. (II, 4755-62)
>
> "Despite her good looks she was also completely natural and gentle, full of decency, also the best educated possible, kind in her words, full of empathy, eloquent and in addition very sociable, and, as Guido says, mutable in love – he accuses her of her tender heart and her mutability, and her changeability."[4]

Emphatic praise of Chaucer both introduces the descriptions and ends the passage about Troilus and Cresseyde's love story. Lydgate deviates from Guido in that he does not scold Troilus for his naivety and women in general but he intermingles his praise of the great poet with an antichronological report of the beginning and the development of the love between Troilus and Cresseyde, until Fortuna makes an end of it and delivers Cresseyde into the enemy's camp (Lydgate III, 4201-33). This distinctive finale is placed roughly in the second third of the third of five books; Chaucer had situated the union of the lovers at a similarly

[4] Lydgate reserves an echo of Chaucer's description of Criseyde as *slydynge of corage* for Troilus, who is, contrarily, described as "stedefast of corage" (II, 4875). In this way he establishes a contrast between the two figures which is not found in Chaucer.

central and dramatically relevant place. Given that Lydgate appears to have been influenced by Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* when he chose a five-book structure for his *Troy Book* (Finlayson 149), he seems to award the love story of Troilus and Cresseyde central relevance within the story of Troy.

3.2 Cresseyde as a Double Pawn Sacrifice

After the turning point at III, 4201-33, the catastrophe takes its course and Criseyde will be sacrificed twice, namely as a figure on the chessboard of the Trojan War and as a tribute to the prevalent rhetorical taste of the literary world of Lydgate's time. From then on, Lydgate's Cresseyde is Guido's *double* Cresseyde/Briseida. She betrays Troilus and, with him, the city of Troy and all Trojans, thus fulfilling her function in the epic. Her mutability, scolded by Guido, is now given central importance. Cresseyde grows into a woman who gives her heart *very quickly* to Diomede to end her new suitor's suffering.[5] Cresseyde's infidelity is therefore rooted in female empathy and mercy (see also Crocker 319). There is no doubt that the judge Guido delle Colonne takes Briseida's deed as a justification to punish one half of the human race collectively, that is, all women. Lydgate transforms Guido's remarks into an extensive, rhetorically elaborated accusation of female mutability, as the following excerpt shows:

> But Guydo seith, longe or it was nyȝt,
> How Cryseyde for-soke hir owne knyȝt,
> And ȝaf hir herte vn-to Dyomede
> Of tendirnes and of wo*m*manhede,
> Þat Troilus wexe in hir herte as colde,
> W*ith*-oute fire as ben þese asshes olde.
> I can noon oþer excusacio*u*n,
> But only kyndes transmutacio*u*n,
> Þat is appropred vn-to hir nature,
> Selde or neue*r* stable to endure,
> Be experience as men may ofte lere. (III, 4435-45)
>
> "But Guido tells how Cresseyde gave up her devoted knight and, long before it was night, gave her heart to Diomede out of compassion and womanly kindness of heart so that Troilus grew as cold in her heart as are old ashes without fire. I do not know any other excuse but mutability of the female sex alone, which belongs to its nature and may rarely or never endure stability, as men can often learn through experience."

Most scholars agree that Lydgate surpasses Guido's scolding of women by a wide margin. At the same time, Lydgate consistently stresses that Guido claims such things but not he, Lydgate (e.g. III, 4343). The same argumentation can be found in the cases of Helena and Medea: Lydgate superficially distances himself from

[5] The only passage which mitigates this effect is the hint at Chaucer's depiction of a talk between Calchas and Cresseyde (Lydgate III, 4428-34).

his source while at the same time he extends it. Thus, he affirms that he does not want to talk about the case any more (e.g. III, 4330) but then he goes on with it nonetheless; he asserts that there is only one bad woman in a hundred (or two or three in all women; III, 4361-69) and that 11,000 virgins were martyred in Cologne and that all female patron saints were truthful and steadfast (III, 4370-83) – but all of this appears to be wiped out when Lydgate concludes:

> For ȝif wo*m*men be double naturelly,
> Why shulde men leyn on he*m* þe blame? (III, 4408-09)
>
> "Because if women are false by nature, why should men blame them for it?"

Thus, the nature of women appears to be crystal clear to Lydgate; his blame of Guido's scolding seems to be ironic, reaching its zenith in a long statement on the questionable mercy of women, amplified by metaphorical references:

> Loo! what pite is in wo*m*manhede,
> What mercy eke & benygne routhe –
> Þat newly can al her olde trouthe,
> Of nature, late slyppe a-syde
> Raþer þa*n*ne þei shulde se abide
> Any man in meschef for hir sake!
> Þe change is nat so redy for to make
> In Lombard Strete of crowne nor doket –
> Al paie is good, be so þe prente be set:
> Her lettre of change doth no man abide!
> So þat þe wynde be redy and þe tyde,
> Passage is ay, who-so list to passe!
> No man is lost þat list to seke grace –
> Dau*n*ger is noon but cou*nterf*et disdeyn;
> Þe se is calme and fro rokkis pleyn:
> For mercyles neu*er* man ne deide
> Þat sou ȝ t[e] grace! – recorde of Cryseyde,
> . . . (IV, 2148-64)
>
> "See which compassion women have, and also which pity and benign empathy – who may let all her old pledges of fidelity slip away at once, according to their nature, rather than to see any man be afflicted because of them! You can barely exchange a crown or a ducat any quicker in Lombard Street – any payment is right given that there is an imprint on it: no man can cope with her bill of exchange! Therefore, if the wind and the tide are favourable, the passage is always possible for whoever wishes to pass! No man is lost who wishes to seek favour – there is no danger except feigned disdain; the sea is calm and free of rocks: because no man who sought favour has ever died without pity! – as witnessed by Cresseyde, . . ."

In the light of such accusations it is no wonder that scholars have tended to blame the historical author, Lydgate the man, monk of Bury St Edmunds, for his misogynist stance: thus we read that Lydgate refuses Guido's blame superficially but

shares his opinion "in reality",[6] that the scholar Lydgate displays a failed academic humour (Benson, "Critic and Poet" 26, 32-33), and that some of his works are replete with an "unsympathetic" presentation of women.[7] Renoir asks the question whether Lydgate "really" believed in women's guilt,[8] and Pearsall (*John Lydgate* 238) replies that "[the poetry's] success here is a matter of literary technique, of balance and irony. What Lydgate actually thought of women is irrelevant: I doubt whether he thought much about them at all."

Of course we do not have any indication about Lydgate's 'real' state of mind, and the official rhetoric and literary types of the Middle Ages place a large distance between author and work. The introduction of a narrator figure may reduce this distance and may also evoke closeness to the audience, in particular if it is the author himself who recites his work. Fifteenth-century audience taste may be similar to today's, as it is apparent in the reception of many of Chaucer's works, for instance, but it may be fundamentally different, as seen in the reception of elaborate scoldings of women.[9] Naturally, writers knew that women would be among their audience, and very often they functioned as patrons of literature; Lydgate could boast at least eight such female patrons (Utley 26; see also below).

Now when Derek Pearsall points out that the poet Lydgate absorbed Chaucer to the official literary taste of the fifteenth century,[10] he relates to a literary tradition which rhetorically amplified such *topoi*. According to Geoffrey de Vinsauf's *Poetria nova*, amplification arises when poets "[l]et one and the same thing be concealed under multiple forms – be varied and yet the same" (24). Francis Lee Utley compiled an index of works which relate to the argument about women and were written in England and Scotland up to 1568. He lists and discusses 403 of these, of which about a mere 85 were written in defence of women (see Utley 50). Utley (55) thus witnesses continued popularity of this topic, rising at the beginning of the fifteenth century and, paradoxically, triggered by writers in the tradition of

[6] "Lydgate's approach to the question of women's nature is always the same: he denigrates and then defends by attributing to Guido the blame for the denigration of which he in reality approves" (Torti 183).

[7] Edwards claims that some of Lydgate's works "offer an unsympathetic, satiric presentation of women" (32).

[8] "At times, Lydgate allows his official misogyny to take on such blatantly unwarranted vehemence that we wonder whether he really believes women guilty of the atrocities with which he reproaches them, or merely wishes to amuse himself and his audience at the expense of an overworked clerical convention" (Renoir 10).

[9] As a side remark, it may be interesting to note that Henry Bergen, the early twentieth-century editor of the *Troy Book*, assumed a similar humour to Lydgate's in male readers of his time ("Bibliographical Introduction" 29; "Introductory Note" xvii).

[10] "What Lydgate did was to absorb Chaucer to the official taste of the fifteenth century, by praising and imitating him in ways that were acceptable to that taste" (Pearsall, "Chaucer and Lydgate" 39). However, the end result is deemed as rhetoric at its worst, as art without matter (46).

Chaucer. There are manuscripts of the *Troy Book* in which readers reacted to the respective passages. Among these, MS Oxford, Bodleian Library Digby 230 from the third quarter of the fifteenth century stands out; here passages on fickle fate, Troilus and Cresseyde and the scolding of women in particular are highlighted (Bergen, "Bibliographical Introduction" 29). Four observations will now address the stylistic function of Lydgate's digressions on women in general, which take their start from Cresseyde's crime.

The first observation: in the epilogue to his *Troy Book*, Lydgate courts the favour of his future Queen Katherine, Princess of France, and hopes that her intervention will bring peace. Would the author have spoken of "grace enprentid in hir wo*m*manhede" (Lydgate V, 3427) 'compassion imprinted in her womanly kindness of heart' if she and his audience would have directly connected these words with the description of Cresseyde's 'favour' for Diomede and even her venality? It is a notable fact that the same words, *wommanhede*, *grace* and *prente* 'imprint', are chosen to refer to both women. Lynn Shutters claims that such parallel constructions were only possible because Lydgate had introduced a second type of woman, the constant woman, in his *Troy Book* (89). This type is exemplified by Penthesilea, Penelope, Cassandra, Hecuba and Polyxena and was less suitable for rhetorical amplification than the wicked type (see also Utley 50). However, it appears that by the beginning of the fifteenth century it was not necessary to address an *excuse* for misogynist comments to a female patron, or to compare the patroness' virtue to the Virgin Mary – who is always the trump card against hatred of women – such as Benoît had done. Crocker claims that rather than being considered living human beings, contemporary notables are addressed as mere "icons, whose agency is suspended by their prized exemplarity" (312). Even if this was the case, it should be stressed that apparently the audience and patrons alike were generally aware of the rhetorical, stylistic function of the scolding of women in Lydgate's time.

The second observation: there are undeniable indications that literary circles in their desire for entertainment exchanged scoldings of women and replies to them as an intellectual game, in which not rarely the same author is known to have taken both sides (Utley 27-30). Thus, Lydgate also wrote works in defence of women (Utley 60). Some marginal glosses in a *florilegium* of misogynist comments from *The Fall of Princes*, another one of Lydgate's writings, underline this point. The glosses were written by the author and editor John Shirley about the year 1440 (Utley 192-93; Pearsall, *John Lydgate* 73-75). In anger or pretence of it (Brusendorff 462), Shirley remarks, "Ye have no cause to say so" ('You [the author] do not have a reason to say so'), or "late hem compleyne that neode have" ('let those complain who need it'), or even "Ye wilbe shent" ('You will be punished'). On the matter of women's mutability, Shirley writes, "Be pees or i wil rende this

leef out of your booke" ('Shut up, or I will rip this leaf out of your book'). This gloss echoes the trouble that Chaucer's famous pilgrim Alison in the *Canterbury Tales*, the Wife from beside Bath (better known as Wife of Bath), encountered with her fifth husband, Jankyn. Alison hated Jankyn's "book of wikked wyves" ('book of bad women'), his favourite reading, so that she decided to take action:

> Now wol I seye yow sooth, by Seint Thomas,
> Why that I rente out of his book a leef,
> For which he smoot me so that I was deef.
> He hadde a book that gladly, nyght and day,
> For his desport he wolde rede alway . . .
> And every nyght and day was his custume,
> Whan he hadde leyser and vacacioun
> From oother worldly occupacioun,
> To reden on this book of wikked wyves. (Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" 666-70, 682-85)

> "Now I will tell you truly, by St Thomas, why I ripped a leaf from his book, because of which he struck me so that I became deaf. He had a book which happily, by day and night, he would always read for his amusement . . . . And it was his habit to read, every night and every day, when he had leisure and was free from other business of the world, in his book of bad women."

What the glossator only threatens to do corresponds to a literary fact by the self-assured figure of the Wife of Bath, and this intertextuality opens up new perspectives for the whole discourse.

The third observation: there are six longer digressions in Lydgate's *Troy Book* which condemn misbehaviour. Half of them are about women (Medea, Helena and Cresseyde), two treat of the veneration of idols, and the final one of the (proverbial) greed and mutability of – priests. The last is a rhetorical *topos* in which Lydgate follows in Chaucer's footsteps, too. Again, a tiny hint by Guido sets off an amplification which amounts to the length of a whole chapter (Lydgate IV, 5833-92). Starting from the despicable deed of the priest Thonant, who sold the palladium (that is, an image of the Goddess Pallas/Athene) to Antenor, foreshadowing the Fall of Troy, greed is described as the root of all evil, and this is where it is found:

> who-so list auarice knowe,
> Amonge prestis he shal it rathest fynde; . . . (IV, 5866-67)

> "those who wish to get to know greed shall find it most likely among priests; . . ."

A little later Lydgate continues thus:

> For, in sothnes, þer is no degre
> Gredier nor more ravynous
> Of worldly good, nor more coueitous
> Þan prestis ben to cacche what þei may: . . . (IV, 5870-73)

> "Because there is truly no estate which craves worldly goods more greedily or voraciously than priests in fetching what they can: . . ."

Finally, after about half a dozen rhetorical variations, Lydgate closes his scolding of priests quite parallel to his scolding of women on the case of Cresseyde thus: "Recorde I take of þe preste Tonau*n*te" (IV, 5892; 'My witness is the priest Thonant').

Lydgate's scolding of his own estate provides the context in which his agitation against the female sex should be seen: as a moralist, he is decidedly against unfaithful women, idolatry and greedy priests. All these are topics which were traditionally objects of rhetorical amplification in his time.

4. Rhetoric and Morals: Cresseyde and Diomede in Lydgate's *Troy Book*

The fourth observation is this paper's final consideration. It seems to have so far escaped scholarly attention that Cresseyde features once more in the *Troy Book* after her accepting Diomede because the story is embedded into the whole Troy narrative. This later passage indicates that Lydgate's measure could in fact be the same for females and males alike: the 'little difference' might emerge as a matter of rhetorical quantity rather than moral quality.

In the context of the whole story, the figure of Diomede is most important. He is the one who keeps on fighting after Cresseyde has long fallen into oblivion and Troilus has long met his death on the battlefield. Still, Cresseyde is not completely forgotten right until the last Book: Lydgate, the historian, remembers her when Diomede returns home. His wife Egra (the classical name is Aigialea) is waiting there, who had been married unto Diomede long before medieval authors invented his love affair with Cresseyde. While Guido ignores this issue, Lydgate addresses it:

> And she [Egra] was wyf vn-to Diomede, –
> Al-be to-forn þe story of hym saide
> þat he whilom loued wel Cressaide –
> I can nat seine wher it was doubilnesse,
> But wel wot I, Guydo bereth witnesse
> And in his book, sothly, seith non oþer, –
> And how Assandrus, his owne wyves broþer,
> Ful lusti, fresshe, & ful of manlihede
> To Troie went wiþ þis Diomede; . . . (V, 1222-30)

> "And she [Egra] was Diomede's wife, – although the story had told about him before that he some time ago had loved Cresseyde very much – I cannot say whether it was falseness, but I know exactly, Guido is my witness [of Diomede's marital status and his love for Cresseyde], and does truly not say anything else in his book, – and how Assandrus, his

> wife's brother, most happily, fresh and full of virility had gone to Troy together with this Diomede; . . . "

Embedded in Lydgate's typically loose syntax, which often allows for more than one interpretation (Pearsall, "Chaucer and Lydgate" 42), he is the first one to ask whether Diomede has potentially committed the crime of infidelity, too. However, Lydgate does not pass a judgement.[11] Elsewhere, however, he is much less reserved when it comes to the moral judgement of a man's infidelity. When Jason leaves Medea, Lydgate writes (I, 3709-10):

> How falsely he, I can hym not excuse,
> Loued another þat called was Ceruse; . . .
>
> "How vilely he, I cannot excuse him, loved another woman called Ceruse; . . ."

Generally speaking, then, men's infidelity appears no less wrong and inexcusable than women's. Had the rhetorical tradition given him the chance for amplification, we would probably find it right here. However, in Diomede's return home to his wife, his two masters Guido and Chaucer leave Lydgate in the lurch; and since the story has to continue in given ways, Lydgate quickly reverts to it, and Diomede is allowed to act in his full epic grandeur and regardless of his episode with Cresseyde as "Þat gilt[e]les worþi Diomede" (Lydgate V, 1306; 'that guiltless, honourable Diomede'). The impression remains, however, that both Lydgate's Cresseyde and his Diomede are broken figures, much like Chaucer's.

Is the beginning of our factual novel, then, in need of rewriting? It certainly seems that it is, and the framework of a criminal story would disappear:

> It was the 31st of October 1412. The weak afternoon sun fell on Brother John as he, commissioned by Henry, Prince of Wales, lined up his books to tell the true story of the Fall of Troy in English verse. As he sharpened his quill, John planned to unfold once more the ample flowers of his rhetorical art. He knew and appreciated the favourite topics of his time, and his sources lent themselves to them perfectly: it was a story with false gods, greedy priests, and, above all, mutable women.

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[11] At another place, Lydgate, beyond Guido, has Troilus accuse Diomede of deceit and treachery because of Cresseyde when they engage in a fight (IV, 2067).

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