

TROILUS & CRESSIDA



GEOFFREY CHAUCER

A Complete Modernisation by

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ABOUT THIS WORK

Troilus and Criseyde is a re-telling, in the Middle English vernacular, of the legendary tale of Troilus and Cressida, which is set during the Trojan War. Chaucer composed the poem in *rime royale*, probably in the 1380's and the finished and highly polished work is often considered his finest achievement. The narrative appears to have been based by Chaucer on the tale *Il Filostrato* in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and though a tragedy in essence Chaucer introduced elements of humour, while drawing a sensitive portrait of Troilus as the deserted lover, and Criseyde as the unfortunate betrayer. Classed as a courtly romance, the poem helped to bring the Medieval Renaissance to English literature, with a subtle blend of classical story, medieval courtliness and English character depiction. The eloquent and cynical Pandarus who leads Criseyde astray (hence the obsolete term 'pandar' for a pimp or procurer), is a type that recurs in later literature, for example as the Shakespearean characters Iago in *Othello* and Iachimo in *Cymbeline*.

This version aims to provide a readable and accessible modernisation of the poem while preserving Chaucer's rhymes and diction wherever possible, at the same time eliminating all archaic words which would require marginal notes to explain.

9.

It is well known how the Greeks, strong
in arms, with a thousand ships, went
there to Troy, and the city long
besieged, near ten years without stint,
and in diverse ways, and with sole intent,
to take revenge for the rape of Helen, done
by Paris, they strove there as one.

10.

Now it fell out that in the town there was
living a lord, of great authority,
a powerful priest who was named Calchas,
in science a man so expert that he
knew well that Troy would fall utterly,
by the answer of his god that was called thus:
Dan Phoebus or Apollo Delphicus.

11.

So when this Calchas knew by his divining,
and also by answer from this Apollo,
that the Greeks would such a host bring
that, through it, Troy must be brought low,
he planned out of the town to go.
For he well knew by prophecy Troy would
be destroyed, whether or not it should.

12.

For which purpose to depart quietly
was the clear intent of this far-seeing man,
and to the Greek host, most carefully
he stole away: and they with courteous hand
gave him both worship and service, and
trusted that he had cunning in his head
for every peril they might have to dread.

13.

A noise rose up when this was first spied,
through all the town, and generally was spoken,
that Calchas was fled as a traitor and allied
with them of Greece: and vengeful thoughts were woken
against him who had so falsely his faith broken:
and it was said: 'He and all his kin, as one,
are worthy to be burnt, skin and bone.

14.

Now Calchas had left behind, in this mischance,
all ignorant of this false and wicked deed,
his daughter, who was doing great penance:
for she was truly in fear of her life, indeed,
like one that does not know what advice to heed,
for she was both a widow and alone,
without a friend to whom she dared to moan.