Chaucer's Thread Of Suggestiveness: An Analysis Of A Theme Of Incest In Troilus & Criseyde

Annette Mills
Carroll College, Helena, MT

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.carroll.edu/langlit_theses

Part of the Literature in English, British Isles Commons, and the Medieval Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholars.carroll.edu/langlit_theses/21

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Languages and Literature at Carroll Scholars. It has been accepted for inclusion in Languages and Literature Undergraduate Theses by an authorized administrator of Carroll Scholars. For more information, please contact tkratz@carroll.edu.
CHAUCER'S THREAD OF SUGGESTIVENESS: 
AN ANALYSIS OF A THEME OF INCEST IN 
TROILUS & CRISEYDE

A SENIOR HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED TO 
THE DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE 
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS 
TO GRADuate WITH HONORS.

BY ANNETTE MILLS 
CARROLL COLLEGE 
HELENA, MONTANA

APRIL 22, 1998
This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of Languages and Literature

Director
Dr. Ronald Stottlemyer
Department of Languages and Literature

Reader
Dr. Valerie Gager
Department of Languages and Literature

Reader
Mr. John Downs
Department of Psychology
For Todd and our three beautiful children.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and guidance of certain people. First of all, I would like to thank Dr. Ron Stottlemyer, my thesis director and mentor. Because of Dr. Stottlemyer's academic enthusiasm for Medieval literature, I have come to realize that the Middle Ages were in no way "dark." I would also like to thank Dr. Stottlemyer for his encouragement to pursue this thesis, his attention to detail, and his persistence to see this thesis polished, not just completed.

I am grateful to my readers: John Downs who read for cohesion and grace, and Dr. Valerie Gager who read for shape and focus. I am also grateful to Kay Satre who has been my steadfast academic advisor at Carroll, and as always, lent her support to see this project through the difficult times.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the wonderful love and support of my family. Kate, who fully comprehends the importance of my tackling this thesis, thanks for your love, strength, and, most of all, for being crazy with me. Heather, thanks for your faith in me when had I lost my own; your words of encouragement kept me on track. Renee, thanks for keeping my head out of the oven and laughter in my heart, and for listening to me whether I babbled or cried. Todd, thanks for believing in me, and honey, thanks for putting up with me when the writing got tough and the writer got grumpy. Allison, Brianna, and Kyle, my joyful blessings in life, thanks for letting "Mom" finish her thesis.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION ........................................ 2

II. THE SET-UP........................................... 13

III. THE EXCHANGE........................................ 32

IV. THE MORNING AFTER................................... 41

V. CONCLUSION............................................ 49

WORKS CITED.............................................. 58
INTRODUCTION

Chaucer's masterpiece, *Troilus and Criseyde*, materializes before the reader like an intricate medieval tapestry. A mindful artesian, Chaucer weaves together a copious variety of psychological details to produce the story of a hero's double sorrows, his search for happiness with the help of a friend/mentor, his courtly love affair with a beautiful heroine, her ultimate lack of faithfulness, and the hero's death. With these threads of detail, Chaucer creates a rich complexity of character and plot which underlies the basic story of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Moreover, it is a completed work, unlike *Cantebury Tales*, a fully articulated narrative.

John H. Fisher, editor of *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer*, sets the tone for modern studies of the poem by describing *Troilus and Criseyde* as a sophisticated work of art:

The elegance of its design, the refinement of its sentiments, and the polish of its rhyme royal stanzas indicate that Chaucer intended it as a major accomplishment (400).

To create his major accomplishment, Chaucer deliberately had to choose each descriptive thread to develop fully the story and its major characters, Troilus, Criseyde, and Pandarus. In fact, many contemporary scholars attest to the complexity of Chaucer's tapestry-like design of *Troilus and Criseyde*. One of these contemporary scholars, Jane Chance, examines
the role of the poem's rich tapestry of myth in her book, *The Mythographic Chaucer*. Likewise, Donald R. Howard comments on the poem's woven artifices in his biography, *Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World*. Other modern critics and scholars look beyond the poem's aesthetic dimensions to uncover its social intertextuality. Allen J. Frantzen, for example, explores *Troilus and Criseyde* as social document in the historical context of late fourteenth-century England in *Troilus and Criseyde: The Poem and the Frame*. Even more recently, Richard W. Fehrenbacher analyzes the gender roles of Criseyde and Pandarus in "'Al that which chargeth nought to seye': The Theme of Incest in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Although Fehrenbacher discusses a theme of incest in *Troilus and Criseyde*, he does not actually trace the thread of suggestiveness woven throughout the poem's text. A more detailed analysis of Chaucer's narrative suggestiveness reveals that there does indeed exist a subtle thread of incest weaving an ulterior relationship between Criseyde and her uncle, Pandarus. In fact, Chaucer's often ambiguous choice of words and meanings suggest incestuous behaviors between Criseyde and Pandarus in three key scenes. A detailed analysis of the suggestiveness found in these three scenes provides the reader a deeper understanding of Criseyde and Pandarus. Consequently, this understanding of characters and motivation not only alters how the reader perceives the relationship between Criseyde and her uncle,
but it also creates other psychological dynamics to examine among all three main characters of *Troilus and Criseyde*. This suggestive portion of the tapestry, moreover, communicates how imbalances of power between and within genders can lead to incest. It may also reveal Chaucer's intent to forewarn readers of England's downfall as well as to disclose an incestuous secret of his own.

While one examines this suggestive thread of incest, it is important to keep in mind that the thread becomes distorted when pulled out for closer inspection. Therefore, the thread must remain in the tapestry so it can be viewed in context of the poem's complex pattern of meanings. Often, these meanings are ambiguous because Chaucer does not clarify specifically the primary meaning of certain suggestive words or narratives. Without this explicitness the reader can chose to either ignore or recognize the incestuously suggestive meanings, but when several of these ambiguities occur consistently between specific characters, we begin to see the thread of incest emerge. However, before we can trace ambiguities of language that define the tread of incest in *Troilus and Criseyde*, we must first establish what constitutes incest.

Incest involves kinship, societal rules and certain behaviors. Yet, any typical dictionary definition limits the complexity of incest. For example, the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines incest as, "sexual union between persons who are so closely related that their marriage is
illegal or forbidden by custom." According to this traditional definition, Criseyde and Pandarus would have to engage in sex in order for their relationship to be construed as incestuous. But the actual destructive practice of incest extends far beyond sexual union and thus comprises more subtle forms of oppression and suffering. For these reasons, the anthropological definition for incest taboo is especially useful for reading a poem as sophisticated as Troilus and Criseyde: "a rule that forbids sexual behaviors between designated kin" (Crapo 185). If the incest taboo forbids sexual behaviors, then incest involves more subtle forms of behavior than sexual union. As we will see in Troilus and Criseyde, certain behaviors between Criseyde and Pandarus that are less explicit than sexual union reveal Chaucer's thread of incest.

If we are to consider more fully the sexual behaviors of incest, then it is also important for us to consider the psychological and emotional implicitness of these behaviors since we will not be looking for explicit revelations of sexual union between Criseyde and Pandarus. Incest is not always a physical violation; it can violate a person psychologically and emotionally as well. E. Sue Blume in Secret Survivors: Uncovering Incest and Its Aftereffects in Women points out that what defines incest is how "incest--unlike abuse by a stranger or acquaintance--violates an ongoing bond of trust" (2). Pandarus's behaviors, as we will see, violate Criseyde's trust in her uncle.
To help explain the types of sexual behaviors that violate a bond of trust between kin, the following continuum developed by Sue Evans and Susan Schaefer (qtd Covington 166) is particularly useful:

PSYCHOLOGICAL INCEST

1. Blurring of generational lines
2. Closed system
3. Enmeshment/disengagement
4. Telling child inappropriate secrets
5. Disrespect of privacy needs
6. Emotional abuse

COVERT INCEST:

1. Inadvertent touch
2. Household voyeurism
3. Physical punishment while naked
4. Sexual hugs
5. Ridicule of developing bodies
6. Lewd reading/video watching with child

OVERT INCEST:

1. French kissing
2. Exhibitionism
3. Fondling
Evans and Schaefer's continuum shows how sexual behaviors vary in degree from psychological incest to covert incest to overt incest. The latter two of these behavioral categories are self-explanatory, but psychological incest requires further description.

First, blurring of generational lines occurs when the perpetrator (which in Chaucer's poem would be Pandarus) negates the generational lines that separate him from his victim. For instance, Pandarus blurs the generational line between himself and Criseyde when he behaves more like her confidant or lover than her uncle.

The second behavior, a closed system, is a family's means of psychological and social functioning separate from the rest of society. It includes family members' reading and responding to body language, to specific words or phrases, and to silence. A closed system may reveal a familial intimacy, but it may also reveal an absence of trust, security, or honesty (Blume 72). As we will see, Criseyde's apparently intimate behavior with her uncle often disguises such things as her fear that Pandarus will not take offense to her true feelings of aversion to his intimate behavior.

The third behavior under psychological incest is the
duality of enmeshment/disengagement. Enmeshment is a state in which a victim (which would be Criseyde) "has no sense of herself as separate from his agenda, his needs and wishes" (Blume 40). Disengagement follows enmeshment. It is a psychological term explaining how a victim detaches from her identity of self and "loses her own feelings, desires, thoughts, and opinions" (Blume 40). An example of how enmeshment/disengagement operates is illustrated when Pandarus intends to seduce Criseyde for Troilus, but she desires to allow Troilus only sight of her. By the time Pandarus enmeshes Criseyde to his agenda, he has disengaged her from her original intention. Pandarus's enmeshment has made Criseyde vulnerable to his manipulations of her emotions.

The next behavior, disrespect for privacy needs, requires special consideration. We must consider that the idea of privacy has evolved from the Middle Ages until present time. Today, the word "privacy" is defined as, "1. The condition of being secluded or isolated from the view of, or from contact with, others. 2. Concealment; secrecy" (Morris 1042). The Middle English derivative of the Latin "privatus" means "not belonging to the state or not in public life" (Morris 1042). The medieval concept of privacy had less to do with individual privacy than our concept of seclusion. Privacy for Criseyde may not have been an individual privacy as we think of it but, regardless, she would have been aware of her personal space
separating her from others. This space is described by proxemics, a sociological study of "how people structure the space around them when interacting with others" (Crapo 222). So, when Pandarus invades Criseyde's space by seizing an impulsive kiss from her, he may not be disrespecting her privacy according to Middle Age standards, but he certainly is disrespecting her personal space.

The final behavior under psychological incest is emotional abuse. This type of abuse covers a broad range of behaviors which violate non-physical boundaries. Stephanie Covington, a noted psychotherapist, explains what these emotional boundaries entail. She compares them to their physical counterparts:

When someone stands too close to you for comfort, you feel that your physical boundaries have been violated. You may keep stepping back to get the right amount of distance for your comfort. Emotional boundaries operate in the same way. For example, you may feel emotionally violated when someone tells you that you shouldn't feel the way you do (95).

All the behaviors listed under psychological incest are actually examples of emotional abuse. A pattern of emotional abuse will become apparent as we follow Pandarus's treatment of Criseyde.

Now that we have defined incest and clarified its associated behaviors, we must ask ourselves whether or not
Chaucer understood incest as we late 20th Century readers of *Troilus and Criseyde* do. Are we reading for incest in *Troilus and Criseyde* with a modern knowledge that Chaucer lacked? Or are our terms, descriptions, and continuums of incest merely our contemporary renaming of human behaviors well understood in Chaucer's time? Incest would not have been an unfamiliar human phenomenon to Chaucer. However modern we may consider our insights on incest to be, incest and its associated behaviors have existed within our western civilization as long as the idea of kinships.

According to modern anthropologists, the incest taboo is "one rule that seems to be found in almost all cultures" (Crapo 185). Incest seems to be universally understood in ancient as well as modern times. For instance, according to K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, Athenians instituted religious sanctions against incest (166). Dover does not elaborate on these sanctions, but explains that they are based on "Plato's appeals to the animal world to establish what is natural and what is not" (167). The Greeks understood incest as unnatural and so did Christians in medieval times.

Jeffrey Richards explains in *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation* that according to the Christian teaching, "any form of sexual activity which did not lead or could not lead to procreation was a sin against nature" (132). Furthermore, Richards also notes that the medieval teachings of the Church proclaimed, "any act leading to sexual arousal
or sexual pleasure was sinful" (30). So even in Chaucer's time, any of the psychological behaviors listed in Evan and Schaefer's continuum would have been deemed sinful if they resulted in sexual arousal or pleasure.

Although incest was dutifully noted as a prohibitive behavior in western civilization, it was not explored beyond its unnatural character until Sigmund Freud founded psychoanalysis. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, notes that Freud explored the behaviors surrounding incest and "revealed incest as a desire rather than a conduct" (130). But whether we view incest as an unnatural conduct or a human desire, people have designated incest as a prohibited behavior since the beginning of civilization. Chaucer may not have named the behaviors of incest as our modern continuum does, but he would have recognized the same behaviors contemporary psychologists have observed.

Chaucer himself was somewhat of a medieval psychoanalyst. He noted and duplicated psychological details about people which lends to the realism of his characters in *Troilus and Criseyde*. In the introduction to *Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World*, Derek Brewer praises Chaucer for the comprehensiveness of his genius in presenting the entire scope of human behavior: "the range of his experience and interests is amazing, from common life and bawdy tales to puritanical religion" (1). Brewer points out that Chaucer knew and observed a vast variety of people and behaviors. Certainly incest would have been one of
those behaviors Chaucer noted. In fact, Jane Chance even asserts in her preface to The Mythographic Chaucer that such scandalous human follies as incest were what interested Chaucer:

> The concealment of embarrassing secrets, often sexual in nature, and the burden of political alliances and strategies—what together might be termed sexual politics—motivated Chaucer in much of his work (an idea long evident but for the most part ignored by Chaucer critics) (xix).

Incest definitely would have intrigued a medieval poet motivated by sexual politics. For this reason it seems likely that Chaucer explores the secret of incest in his most erotic poem through the suggestive relationship between his characters Pandarus and Criseyde.

Throughout the text of Troilus and Criseyde, the thread of incest appears and disappears. It can be subtle and is often cloaked in the ambiguities of language, but in certain scenes we sense what Donald Howard calls, "the vicarious or sublimated eroticism beneath Pandarus's designs" (364). Pandarus's designs (or agenda) include convincing Criseyde, who is a widow, to love Troilus, who is a young warrior prince. Panadrus's proposed relationship between Criseyde and Troilus would be a secret affair, just as incest is kept hidden from public scrutiny. But in order to succeed, Pandarus must first obliterate Criseyde's sense of self, her opinions, needs, and wishes, and then betray her trust. In
doing so, he commits incest. The sexual overtones of Pandarus's actions have thus been aptly described as "the seduction of Criseyde" (Chance 119-129).

There are three key scenes roughly in the center of Troilus and Criseyde that expose Pandarus's seduction of Criseyde from beginning to end: II.78-596 (The Set-up), II.1094-1302 (The Exchange), and III.1555-82 (The Morning After). An analysis of each passage individually will reveal Pandarus's and Criseyde's interactions as the associated behaviors of incest. This analysis will also uncover suggestive ambiguities that constitute incest throughout all three scenes. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the evidence of incest that emerges constitutes one possible reading for these passages. Still, this reading explains a great deal about the complex relationship that exists between Criseyde and her uncle.
THE SET-UP

The "Set-up" is the initial scene to suggest Chaucer's thread of incest. The first and longest encounter between Criseyde and her uncle, the "Set-up" begins in book II with line 78 as he approaches Criseyde's palace and ends at line 596 when Pandarus departs. Although Pandarus has come to persuade Criseyde to take up Troilus's suit for her love, he witholds this information from his niece. Pandarus even teases Criseyde with his secret intent, then drops the subject. When Pandarus finally divulges his secret to Criseyde, he has already started a psychological mind game with her. The point of such a game is for Pandarus to manipulate Criseyde into accepting Troilus's suit of love. This complex, game-like interaction between uncle and niece plays with the thread of incest. In the "Set-up," we see Chaucer's ambiguities weaving suggestions of psychological incest and sexual seduction. Moreover, we see a pattern of behaviors emerge between Criseyde and Pandarus that suggest an incestuous relationship.

As the scene begins, the narrator appeals to Janus, the god of entry, to allow Pandarus access. Of course, we assume Pandarus seeks access through Criseyde's palace walls, but the appeal is ambiguous as it simply calls upon Janus to be Pandarus's "gyde" (II.77). Janus presides over all gates and avenues and he is represented as having two faces as he sees both the past and the future (Lempriere
It may be a touch of Chaucerian irony that a two-faced god is asked to be Pandarus's guide. After all, Pandarus will stoop to deceiving his niece to seduce her as a lover for Troilus. Jane Chance, however, sees meaning beyond Pandarus's desire to access Criseyde's palace walls, and equates it to Pandarus's intent to enter Criseyde's emotional inner walls. Chance views Pandarus as the gatekeeper of Criseyde who will "succumb to Pandarus's entreaties, his verbal rape, be overcome by a flood of emotion, enter a hell of temporal good, and lose her self" (120). In this ambiguous appeal to Janus we can already see Pandarus's psychological intent to enmesh and disengage his niece for his own purposes. The intent of incest emerges.

Pandarus does enter the palace and finds his niece in her garden, listening to her female companions read. She greets him:

"Ey, uncle myn, welcome ywys." quod she.
And up she ros, and by the hond in hye
She tok hym faste, and sayde, "This nyght thrie--
To good mot it turne--of yow I mette" (II.87-90).

It is important to note that Criseyde addresses Pandarus as "uncle." Not only is she distinguishing a position role in Pandarus's relationship to her, but she is also showing him the full respect due his position. If Criseyde felt distant from Pandarus, she could have referred to him by a lesser kinship term such as "cousin." In her Internet article, "Who's a Relative? Kinship Terminology in the
Middle Ages," Tasmin Hekala explains how kinship terms express a degree of closeness: "the closer one was to an individual, the closer the kinship term" (4). Also, Criseyde emphasizes this closeness by adding "myn" to her address of "uncle."

The manner in which Criseyde greets her uncle is also telling. She takes Pandarus by his hand which Donald Howard calls, "the immemorial gesture of hospitality and honor" (358). The personal boundaries Criseyde establishes become ambiguous; her gesture seems appropriate, even formal, but also intimate. In addition to the gesture, Criseyde also mentions that she dreamt of her uncle three times the night before. There is no explanation offered as to why Criseyde would dream so abundantly of Pandarus in a single night, but she does hope it is a sign of good fortune. We are led to wonder, by this greeting, how close Criseyde and her uncle are, and we can not help but notice how their familiarity begins to take on sexual overtones.

After accepting Criseyde's welcome, Pandarus inquires about the book she and her companions are reading:

"Is it of love? Some good ye me lere!"

"Uncle," quod she, "youre maystresse is nat here."

With that thei gonnen laughe (II.97-99).

Donald Howard explains this dialogue as a joke (357) which indeed it seems to be since they laugh about it. How is it, though, that Criseyde would be privy to her uncle's love life? As readers, we understand the joke because the
narrator has already revealed earlier that Pandarus suffers his own woe: the man taking charge of Troilus's love life has none of his own. However, Criseyde's familiarity with an intimate, even sexual, aspect of her uncle's life pushes the boundaries of appropriateness. And this familiarity is wrapped up in the ambiguity of Criseyde's remark that her uncle's mistress is not there. The remark suggests she may know sexual secrets concerning her uncle or that she may find it necessary to remind him she is not his mistress. The ambiguity of her reply may not offer the reader a clear understanding of Criseyde's relationship with Pandarus, but it certainly introduces the sexual overtones that frequent their interactions with each other. Such sexual overtones blurr the generational lines between Criseyde and Pandarus.

This increased familiarity continues after Criseyde and Pandarus briefly discuss the book when Pandarus suddenly says to Criseyde,

"Do wey youre barbe and shewe youre face bare. Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce, And lat us don to May som observaunce" (II.110-112).

Criseyde rejects Pandarus's invitation and replies with outrage:

"I? God forbede!" quod she, "Be ye mad? Is that a wydewes lyf, so God you save?" (II.113).

The intent of Criseyde's reply has raised questions for readers. John P. Hermann writes in his essay, "Gesture and
Seduction in *Troilus and Criseyde,* that Criseyde's response is "presented without comment by the narrator. Yet it is quite unclear what the reader is to make of it" (Shoaf 147). What we can say is that Criseyde is no longer joking with Pandarus. Perhaps the familiarity between Criseyde and Pandarus became too directly sexual. A dance that shows observance to May has sexual implications, implications that Criseyde may understand, but leave the reader feeling uncertain. This interaction between Criseyde and Pandarus suggests that an enmeshed situation may already exist between uncle and niece and that they are reacting to discursive gestures only they fully understand.

Either ignoring his niece's outraged reply, or ready to change the subject, Pandarus reveals that he has a "thyng" to tell her. Because of Pandarus's teasing, Criseyde thinks his "thynge" is some sort of joke, saying, "Som jape, I trowe, is this" (II.130). But Pandarus assures her that his secret would please her, and he uses it to distract Criseyde from her emotional state. Pandarus does not disclose his secret, however, and closes in on Criseyde emotionally. Thus, in the space of 45 lines, Pandarus deftly manipulates Criseyde's emotions. In this short time he greets her, broaches the subject of sexual love, offends her, and even incites her curiosity. Clearly, Pandarus controls the encounter.

In the face of Criseyde's curiosity, it is interesting to note her next reaction:

Tho gan she wondren more than byfrn
A thousandfold, and doun hire eyen caste,
For nevere sith the tyme that she was born
To knowe thyng desired she so faste (II. 141-144).

Although John P. Hermann acknowledges the sheer difficulty of reading this gesture of Criseyde casting down her eyes, he determines that "the outcome of Criseyde's gestures, which at the same time conceal and reveal her character, is an act of compliance" (Shoaf 149). Since Pandarus goes on to dominate the conversation, which centers around the heroic worthiness of Troilus, he seems to acknowledge Criseyde's gesture as compliance as well. This sort of nonverbal communication reveals some sort of closed system that exists between Criseyde and Pandarus. The sexual overtones revealed earlier in this scene are replaced by behaviors of psychological incest.

Although Pandarus slyly uses this opportunity to praise Troilus, he also alternates telling Criseyde about the young knight's virtues with tales of Troilus's skills in battle. In doing so, Pandarus establishes more than Troilus's worth as a respectable suitor. He points out the virtuous nature of Troilus's character, how he is royal, fearless in battle, and therefore powerful:

"He was hire deth, and lyf and sheld for us;
That al that day ther dorste noon withstonde,
Whil that he held his blody swerd in honde
Therto he is the frendlyeste man
Of gret estat that ever I sawh my lyve"
(II.201-204).
Criseyde not only hears how strong and virtuous this prince is, but she must also imagine such vivid battle descriptions of Troilus holding a bloody sword in his hand. What must a man's bloody sword mean to a widow at the mercy of men in ancient Troy? On one hand, the bloody sword could represent the protection of Troy and its citizens, but on the other hand it could symbolize the power men hold over women. To this end, Pandarus is not taking chances. If he fails to seduce Criseyde with tales of Troilus's nobility, then he can appeal to her fear which a warrior can protect her from or further instill. Since we know Pandarus's intent, we see how he would want to plant influential images of Troilus in Criseyde's head, images that may sway her when Pandarus reveals Troilus's suit.

Suddenly, when Pandarus rises to leave Criseyde expresses fear that she has displeased her uncle:

"Nay blame have I, myn uncle," quod she thenne.
"What eyleth yow to be thus wery soone,
And namelich of womman? Wol ye so?" (II.210-12).

She seems to attempt to revive the earlier joke by alluding to Pandarus's lack of womanly company. Then she tells him that she needs to speak to him about some serious business and

every wight that was about hem tho,
That herde that gan fer awey to stonde
While they two hadde al that hem liste yn honde
(II. 215-217).
According to John P. Hermann, the servants may understand the closed system of paralanguage between Criseyde and Pandarus, and goes on to suggest, "perhaps this idiom was a verbal signal for private conversation" (Shoaf 149). Criseyde's servants and companions afford Criseyde and Pandarus some measure of privacy, although to what degree we are not certain.

Chaucer skims over the serious business portion of the conversation, granting it only a vague two lines. After Criseyde relates her serious business, Pandarus once again implores her to dance, but insults her again by making a disparaging remark about her widow's garb: "What lyst yow thus youreself to disfigure" (II.223). Then Pandarus reminds her of her good fortune; he is ready to reveal his secret. Earlier in this scene, Criseyde strongly reacted to her uncle's invitation to dance, but now she does not respond even to her uncle's insult. Pandarus seems to have the ability to invade her emotional space with knowing manipulations. He knows she has been pressed by her own curiosity since he admitted he had a secret to tell her. Yet, something other than emotional manipulation seems to be at work the second time Pandarus invites Criseyde to dance. It may have to do with privacy. Without a public audience, such as servants and companions, Criseyde may not have to respond to Pandarus's inappropriate and suggestive offers to dance. She may not feel obliged, for the sake of her public virtue, to have to protest Pandarus's pleas to dance.
Besides, she is eager to learn of her uncle's teasing secret.

But Pandarus delays his revelation once more under the guise that he does not want her to take it wrong because he loves her. He then professes his love for her:

"Ye be the womman in this world lyvynge--
Withoute paramours to my wyttyne--
That I best love and lothest am to greve,
And that ye wete wel yourself, I leve"

(11.234-238).

This love is questionable as to whether or not it is avuncular. It is an ambiguous admission of love between a niece and an uncle, and simply because of the kinship roles we are willing to accept it as avuncular. Yet, certain words jar the innocence of this admission of Pandarus's love for Criseyde. First, Pandarus does not say Criseyde is the "kin" or "niece" that he loves most, but the "woman." Then the ambiguous qualifier, "without paramors" can be read several ways. Is Pandarus saying Criseyde is the woman he loves best besides his paramors? If so, then why not say "maystresses" which would clearly indicate female lovers. "Paramours" does not denote gender. Pandarus could also be referring to Criseyde's lack of lovers, since she is a woman without her own paramours, Pandarus loves best. And if this is an innocent admission of love, why mention paramours at all? Whatever kind of love this is, Chaucer cloaks it in ambiguities that suggest Pandarus has a sexual love for his niece.
Criseyde's reply is guarded, as if she feels uncomfortable with Pandarus's disclosure of his love for her, but still fears displeasing him. She accepts his love as friendship, but adds that she would not want to offend her uncle:

"I am to no man holden, trevely,
So much as yow, and have so litel quyty,
As in my gylt I shal yow nevere offende,
And yf I have er this, I wol amende" (II.240-2450).

She then tells Pandarus that he, too, is "he that most I love and triste" (II.247). Either she may truly trust her uncle or feel compelled to trust him because she has no choice. Another possibility is that she is reminding Pandarus not to break her trust because there is none other she trusts as much as him. Whatever the case, Criseyde concludes with compliance: "Lat be to me youre fremde manere speche,/ And sey to me, youre nece, what yow lyste" (II.248-249). Criseyde wants him to say what it is that pleases him, but at the same time she also seems to be reminding him that he is speaking to his "nece."

The narrator relates what happens next: "And with that word hire uncle anoon hire kiste" (II.250). Pandarus seems extraordinarily pleased following the kiss as he calls her, "leve nece dere" (II.251). The impulsive kiss follows Criseyde's compliance and may mark Pandarus's feeling of victory. After all, he has gained Criseyde's love, trust, and compliance. Of course, since the narrator fails to
explain the kiss, we are not certain even if it is avuncular and can only imagine where Pandarus kisses Criseyde. At this point they seem emotionally enmeshed, even if Criseyde has inner reservations about her uncle's "strange manner of speech." Through this emotional enmeshment, Pandarus may have found his way through Criseyde's inner walls. Perhaps Pandarus believes that his first step to become Criseyde's gatekeeper is to win her admission of her love for him, and then he can win her love for Troilus. Criseyde's admission that she loves and trusts her uncle makes her vulnerable to his emotional power over her. If Pandarus has won his niece's love and trust to fulfill his own agenda, then he is deliberately betraying that trust.

Since the kiss is ambiguous, we can also read it as the surfacing of Pandarus's sexual frustration. Pandarus could be so excited by the talk of love, in private, that he steals an illicit kiss from his niece, who is more physically available than his unseen, unavailable lovers. However we look at the kiss, it remains inappropriate. The kiss may not be considered overt incest, but its impulsiveness does make it more than an inadvertent touch. Another reason to consider the kiss inappropriate is that Pandarus did not greet Criseyde with a kiss, and it was Criseyde who established the formality of their greeting. Criseyde responds to this kiss and her uncle's delight to tell her finally of his "thynge" in a manner of continued compliance: "With that she gan hire eyen down to caste"
(II.253). Again, this gesture reveals the closed system of behaviors between Criseyde and her uncle. Clearly, Pandarus has great sway over Criseyde, who is unwilling or unable to protest.

After Pandarus's impulsive kiss, he delays disclosing his secret again. He stops his speech and intensely stares at Criseyde's face, while inwardly calculating the best way to sway her to his cause without Criseyde suspecting his deception:

\[
\text{Thanne he thought he thus: "Yf I my tale endite} \\
\text{Ought hard, or make a proces only while,} \\
\text{She shal no savour han theryn but lite,} \\
\text{And trowe I wold hire in my wyl bygile" (II.267-270).}
\]

Pandarus anticipates her suspicion as "tendre wittes wenend al be wyle" (II.271). His anticipation indicates that he is deliberately seeking to manipulate Criseyde to accept his cause.

By the start of the next stanza Pandarus is still staring at her "yn a besy wyse" (II.274). Criseyde feels invaded by his stare and does not understand his behavior:

"'Lord, so faste ye me avyse!/ Sey ye me nevere er now?" (II.275-276). John P. Hermann rightly explains Criseyde's remark as "signifying her discomfort, a well-documented reaction to a direct stare" (Shoaf 150). Pandarus excuses his staring since he wondered if he could see in her how fortunate she is (because of the secret he still has not
shared with her). Pandaruss's behavior may seem strange to Criseyde, but he is planning how to snare her in his trap so he can deliver her to Troilus. To succeed Pandarus first must isolate Criseyde from her own needs and desires. He does not care about her maintaining her own sense of identity; he sees Criseyde only as a means to his intent.

Pandarus's strategy emerges as he attempts to convince Criseyde how fortunate she is. He will seduce and abuse her emotionally to enmesh her to his agenda. He even goes so far as to threaten her with abandonment:

"And ye be wroth therfore, or wene I ly, Ne shal I nevere seen yow eft with eye"

(II.300-301).

We have already seen Criseyde's fearful reluctance to displease her uncle and she has admitted that she trusts him more than any other man. Even if Pandarus is an incestuous threat to Criseyde, he can, at least, protect her from those who would see her burn for her father's crime. As a widow and fatherless, Criseyde is vulnerable to abandonment by a male kinsman who can protect her from the real cruelties of their society. In a situation like Criseyde's, Blume points out that "Because of her dependence on her abuser, incest is rape of her trust as well. In this sense, the sexual aspect of incest is secondary" (13). So the threat is real. In fact, she physically reacts as Pandarus notes, "'Beth nought agast, ne quaketh not. Wherto?/ Ne chaungeth not for fere so youre hewe" (II.302-303). Although Pandarus is the
one to cause Criseyde's distress, he soothes her with words that she can trust him. He would not, he says, tell her of anything "unsittynge" (II.307), that is anything unfitting.

Her reply indicates that Pandarus has rattled her: "For both I am agast what ye wol sey,/ And ek me longeth it to wyte, ywys" (II.311-312).

Finally, nearly three hundred lines after Pandarus arrives at Criseyde's palace, he reveals his purpose. For the first time in this scene, he uses the word "myn" in conjunction with the kinship term, "nece." His "thynge" to tell Criseyde is a mere two lines, yet he goes to extraordinary verbal lengths to enmesh Criseyde emotionally to his designs. He says, "The noble Troylus, so loveth the,/ That, bot ye helpe, it wol his bane be" (II.319-320). What follows this revelation is over one hundred lines of emotional abuse, sprinkled with deadly threats. First, Pandarus holds Criseyde responsible for Troilus's life: "Doth what yow lyst to make hym lyve or deye" (II.322). And if that weren't enough, Pandarus would make Criseyde responsible for his death, too:

"But if yow late hym deye, I wol sterve.  
Have here my trouthe, nece, I nel not lyen,  
Al sholde I with this knyf my throte kerve" (II.323-325).

The word "this" implies that he shows Criseyde the weapon. Even if Pandarus is threatening to shed his own blood, he is also threatening Criseyde by brandishing his knife in front
of her. However Criseyde interprets the threat, Pandarus means for Criseyde to comply with his request to become intimate with Troilus. Pandarus continues this verbal abuse for seventy lines before he pauses to allow Criseyde to respond. No wonder Jane Chance calls this scene the "verbal rape" (120) of Criseyde.

Amidst Pandarus's cajoling and threatening speech, he indicates his intent that she make Troilus happy and thus save Troilus's life. Significantly, Pandarus considers only Troilus's feelings and not Criseyde's. Pandarus does attempt to appease her, though, by explaining that he is not arranging a marriage:

"Now understande, for I yow nought require
To bynde yow to hym through no beheste,
But oonly that ye make hym bettre chere
Thanye han don er this, and more feste,
So that his lyf be saved atte leste-- (II.358-360).

If Pandarus is not arranging a marriage between Criseyde and Troilus, then it seems as though he intends to pimp his niece to cheer his friend's spirits. He appears to admit that is the case when he adds that it is "playnly oure entente," (II.363) which is a phrase echoed later by the narrator after Pandarus succeeds in getting his niece in bed with Troilus: "And Pandarus hath fully his entente" (III.1582). Of course, Pandarus tries to gloss over his pimping proposal as a simple offering of Troilus's friendship to Criseyde as if he expects Criseyde (and us) to
believe that Troilus will absolutely die if she denies his "love of frendshipe" (II.371).

As is typical of women dealing with this sort of threat, Criseyde carefully considers how she will respond to her uncle. Chaucer accordingly allows us to examine Criseyde's thoughts before she replies to her uncle's speech. She reasons that she needs to "fele what he meneth, ywis" (II.387). Her reply to seventy lines of verbal abuse is guarded:

"Now em," quod she "What wol ye devyse?
What is youre red I shal don of this?"
(II.388-389).

Criseyde's reply shows that she chooses a cautious path, remaining noncommittal. Pandarus seems delighted at his niece's reply, noting that it is "wel seyd" (II.390) and concludes by advising her to love Troilus for his "lovynge." Then Pandarus changes his strategy, attempting to frighten her about getting old. He reminds her that she is not getting any younger, that every hour age wastes her beauty. Such statements equate to bodily ridicule listed under covert incest. This insensitive insult must touch a vulnerable spot in Criseyde because she bursts out weeping. She feels that Pandarus has betrayed her trust by advising her to love Troilus and to bring up her age:

"Allas for wo, why nere I ded?
For of this world the feyth is al agoon.
Allas, what sholde straunge to me doon,
Whan he that for my beste frend y wende
Pandarus has further betrayed her trust because he intended from the beginning to manipulate Criseyde into accepting Troilus's suit. As we have already established, the violations that constitute incest betray an ongoing bond of trust (Blume 2). Criseyde seems to understand the betrayal because she feels Pandarus should be protecting her from Troilus's suit, not pressing it.

In return, Pandarus is outraged that he is "mynstrusted thus" (II.431). He accuses Criseyde of not caring about "oure deth" (II.433), referring to his earlier threat that Troilus would die and Pandarus would kill himself. Pandarus then begins his emotionally abusive tirade again and accuses Criseyde of responding "wikkedly" (II.441). He rises to leave as if to carry out his threat to which Criseyde "wel neigh starf for fere" (II.449). Her fear shows that Pandarus has succeeded in distressing Criseyde. She realizes she needs to act cautiously: "It nedeth me ful sleyghly fot to pleye" (II.462) Finally, she gives in to Pandarus not out of free choice, but from a sense of survival, as she makes clear immediately: "For myn estat now lyth in jupartie,/ And ek myn emes lif lyth in balaunce" (II.465-466). She also agrees to Pandarus's designs because, "Of harmes two, the lesse is for to chese" (II.470).

Since the beginning of the "Set-up" we have seen
Pandarus and Criseyde enmesh boundaries, but always to Pandarus's favor. After all, he is the man in control of the interactions throughout this scene. Ultimately he violates Criseyde's trust. She even seems to distrust him now since she cautiously asks him, "Ye seyen ye nothyng elles me requere?" (II.473). Pandarus quickly responds, "'No, ywys,' quod he, 'myn owene nece dere'" (II.474). His reply not only indicates his delight (she is "dere"), but hints at ownership as he once again calls her "myn" and adds "owene" to the address, as if he owns her now. After his response, Criseyde tries to distinguish her own boundaries from her uncle's by telling Pandarus what she is and isn't willing to do. She will not love a man against her will. Pandarus promises to agree to her boundaries, but we have seen how little he values them. Criseyde is now enmeshed to Pandarus's plans.

The narrator tells us that the two talk of other tales for a while until Criseyde begins to question her uncle about Troilus. She wants to know if Troilus can, "wel speke of love" (II.503) and how Pandarus found out about Troilus's love for Criseyde. Pandarus, "litel gan to smyle" (II.505) and says, "'By my trouthe, I shal yow telle" (II.506). Yet, his account is a lie. As readers we know that it is a lie because we already witnessed the scene. Donald Howard points out Pandarus's disrespect for Criseyde by his penchant for lying to her: "Pandarus, who never lies to Troilus, lies to Criseyde with abandon" (363). Pandarus's
dishonesty shows how little respect he has for his niece. If Pandarus is a liar and lied to others throughout the story, then we could understand his lies to Criseyde. But he lies only to her. Pandarus finishes his elaborated account of how he learned of Troilus's love for Criseyde by congratulating her on her fortunate catch. It is ironic that Pandarus tells Criseyde she has caught a fish (referring to Troilus) without a net when she is the one snared by Pandarus. After bidding her not to be angry, he exits at line 596.

The thread of incest is intricately woven throughout the ambiguities of language and gesture of the "Set-up." It is difficult to point to a few lines as evidence because the thread weaves in and out, binding the lines as it goes. Sometimes the thread emerges, suggesting sexual implications, and other times it suggests psychological incest. The characterizations of both Criseyde and Pandarus are as complex as the phenomenon of incest itself. Although Criseyde could fit the part of an incest victim, she also plays along with Pandarus's psychological games. David Burnley concurs, noting that "uncle and niece share a common sphere of allusion, and each understands the role the other has elected to play" (174). In this complex game of psychological manipulations, the thread of incest weaves a subtle pattern of behavior that intensifies in the next two scenes.
THE EXCHANGE

The second key passage that reveals the thread of incest, II.1094-1302, may be referred to as the "Exchange" because it pivots around Pandarus's exchange of letters between Troilus and Criseyde. Once again Pandarus directs the action of this scene when he arrives at his niece's palace with a letter from Troilus. Pandarus also seeks a letter from Criseyde on Troilus's behalf. Besides having an exchange of letters, this scene culminates in an exchange of glances between Criseyde and Troilus which is a situation Pandarus slyly prearranges. The psychological game of incest continues between Criseyde and Pandarus, but at times it becomes physical and increasingly sexually suggestive. As in the "Set-up," ambiguities figure a major role in suggesting incestuous behavior.

Unlike Pandarus's first arrival in the "Set-up," Pandarus does not hesitate or implore Janus for entry to Criseyde's palace. Hardly able to contain his excitement to deliver Troilus's letter to Criseyde, he arrives earlier than is acceptable, although he swears, "that it was passed pryme" (II.1094). Once again he alludes to May, the month for lovers: "I may not slepe nevere a Mayes morwe" (II.1098). The narrator tells us that "Criseyde, whan that she hire uncle herde,/ With dredful herte and desirous to here/ The cause of his comynge" (II.1101-1103). She exhibits the same emotional turmoil
that Pandarus caused before in the first passage: fear and curiosity combined. Since his excitement seems to be love oriented, she asks him, "How ferforth be put ye in loves daunce?" (II.1106). Perhaps she thinks Pandarus has finally overcome his love woes, but he jokingly replies, "I hoppe alwey byhynde!" (II.1107). Pandarus's comment could also suggest a voyeuristic position of standing behind lovers and watching love's dance rather than participating.

There is no gesture of greeting this time, but plenty of joking and Pandarus's playing the fool to encourage his niece's laughter. Once again, Pandarus lies to Criseyde. He fabricates a story to draw her into the garden alone:

There is right now ycome into towne a geste,  
A Griek espie, and tellth newe thynges,  
For which I come to telle yow new tidynge (1111-1113).

He whisks her off to the garden so he can tell her his story which may be a verbal signal as "serious business" was in the "Set-up." The servants respond by leaving the two of them alone. Once Pandarus has her alone he never mentions any Greek spy, but instead produces Troilus's letter. Pandarus reminds Criseyde that Troilus "may nat longe lyven for his peyne" (II.1127).

Once again, Pandarus manipulates Criseyde's emotions to further his intent. First he jokes with her so that she will let down her guard, then he isolates Criseyde from her household to present her with something unexpected. She
probably suspected Pandarus's intentions at first because she feared his news, but he put her at ease and tricked her into going to the garden alone with him. She must feel the betrayal of being tricked because the narrator tells us how, "Ful dreedfully tho gan she stonde stille" (II.1128). Criseyde also refuses to take the letter, feeling betrayed, telling her uncle, "To myn estat have more rewarde, I preye,/ Than to his lust" (II.1133-1134). She fears that the letter could harm her position. Pandarus placates her fear, claiming "Wolde I a lettre unto yow brynge or take/ To harm of yow!" (II.1147-1148). He begins to chide her for not caring about Troilus. Then, after Pandarus has violated Criseyde's trust and emotions, he physically violates her by seizing "hire faste,/ And in hire bosom the lettre doun he thraste" (II.1154-1155). This act is not only physical, but violent as implied in the word "thraste." It seems that once Pandarus gained entry through Criseyde's inner emotional walls in their initial encounter, he continues to use the gate. Not only has he enmeshed Criseyde to his own designs, but he now violates her physically as if he were the new owner of what lies within her inner walls.

Criseyde, however, appears stronger in this passage, unlike the timid creature we see in the first passage. During her first encounter with Pandarus she seemed overwhelmed and fearful. But where she was cautious before, she is now bold, taking a stand against her uncle. After Pandarus warns Criseyde, not to tear up the letter because,
"folk may sen and gauren on us tweye" (II.1156), she retorts, "'I kan abyde til they be gon'" (II.1157). Criseyde then smiles and informs Pandarus, "For trewely I wol no lettre write" (II.1161). But she loses ground to Pandarus, who has the final word that he will write the letter, but expects her to compose it. After that, Pandarus changes the subject and jokes about his lack of love. Their shared laughter seems intimate, especially over jokes about Pandarus's love-life. As noted before, this intimate familiarity is an inappropriate sharing of sexual matters between an uncle and niece. Their laughter also reflects Pandarus's excitement; he nearly has his niece seduced for Troilus. As for Criseyde, it is easier for her to laugh with Pandarus than to struggle to maintain her emotional and psychological distance from him.

Next, Criseyde leaves her uncle to be alone in her chamber, which is another bold act because she risks offending him. She reads the letter in private and, after dining with Pandarus, returns to her room to compose her response in private. Criseyde may lack the ability to escape Pandarus's designs, but she is on guard and still fearful, which may be why she reads the letter alone. She also reads it "out of drede" (II.1175) because she is uncertain about how far Troilus wishes to press his suit for her love. Criseyde does not know Troilus, and judging by Pandarus's manipulative behavior, she may have reason to fear that Troilus will ignore her needs and wishes just as her uncle has.
Criseyde returns to her uncle after reading Troilus's letter (which lacks the excitement we see building in Pandarus). She sneaks up on her uncle, who is lost in thought. Criseyde teases, "'Ye were caught er that ye wyste'" and Pandarus replies, "'Do what yow lyste'" (II.1182-1183). This exchange seems like an intimate moment as if Pandarus's enmeshment of Criseyde to his own agenda is bringing them closer. The intimacy seems displaced, as it should be developing between Criseyde and Troilus, not Criseyde and Pandarus. The intimacy of the moment is marked by Troilus's absence, but thanks to Pandarus's trickery, Troilus is about to enter the scene.

After their meal, Pandarus takes Criseyde to a window seat above the street where he has arranged for Troilus to parade past. So that Pandarus and his niece can share Troilus's entrance in privacy, Pandarus "sawh wel that hire folk were alle aweye" (II.1194). He behavessecretively and begins to build his own emotional walls around her. While waiting, Pandarus questions Criseyde about the letter, asking her if she thinks Troilus can write well because he claims "by my trouthe" that he does not know how Troilus can write. We know Pandarus is lying because he was present when Troilus wrote the letter.

While Pandarus's excitement for Troilus's entrance increases, we notice that Criseyde's embarrassment deepens. She turns "rosy hewed" and "waxe as red as a rose" (II.1197 and II.12) over this matter with Troilus. Blushing is a
gesture that signals discomfort or, as John P. Hermann notes, "the signal [that] reveals a secret" (Shoaf 148). But it is also an ambiguous gesture, one not explained in this scene. Criseyde may or may not know if her uncle read Troilus's letter to her, but her blush indicates her emotional state associated with the letter. An outward gesture like blushing suggests that the psychological game of incest between Criseyde and Pandarus is becoming more physically revealing.

Pandarus disregards Criseyde's need for privacy in this matter and continues to batter her emotions so that she will write a response to Troilus: "Now, for the love of me, my nece dere,/ Refuseth not at this tyme my preyere!" (II.1210). Criseyde leaves her uncle to write the letter, as if to escape his influence. If he violates her boundaries and enmeshes her to his plans, Criseyde must feel a need to retreat. Alone, she can be with her "self" that Pandarus denies. Criseyde then establishes her own boundaries for Troilus's suit in a written response:

"She wolde nought ne make hireselven bonde
In love, but as his suster, hym to plese,
She wolde ay fayne to don his herte an ese"

(II.1223-1225).

She writes that she can love Troilus as a sister, which reflects her intent, not Pandarus's. Pandarus is not there to tease and manipulate her emotionally and psychologically.

After writing her letter, Criseyde returns to the
window seat with her uncle and gives him her reply to Troilus: "I neve re dide thing with more peyne/ Than write this, to which ye me constreyne'" (II.1231-1232). She acknowledges that Pandarus has manipulated her into doing something she would not freely choose to do, but he doesn't seem to care that Criseyde feels manipulated. He is pleased to have the letter and informs Criseyde, "That ye to hym of hard now be ywonne" (II.1236). Yet, up to this point Troilus has done nothing to win Criseyde; Pandarus has accomplished the seduction. Even when Troilus appears "at the stretes end" (II.1248), the dynamics of the moment are clouded by suggestions of incest.

Criseyde wants to flee, but Pandarus makes her stay by saying, "O fie naught—he seeth us, I suppose—/Lest he maythynken yhat ye hym eschuwe" (II.1154-1155), and Troilus appears pale, stiff, and awkward. The narrator relates how stiffly Troilus proceeds on his horse:

"With that he gan hire humbly to saluwe
With dredful chere, and oft his hewes muwe,
And up his look debonairly he caste,
And bekked on Pandare, and forth he paste"

(II.1257-1260).

Despite Troilus's timidity and dependence upon Pandarus, Criseyde likes what she sees: "His person, his array, his look, his chere,/ His goodly manere, and his gentilesse"

(II.1267-1268). For the first time since Pandarus entered Criseyde's inner walls, Criseyde herself feels sexual
excitement and "hath now kaught a thorn" (II.1272). Even though Criseyde's desires begin to awaken, Troilus fails to exhibit any sexual excitement. Instead, it is Pandarus "which that stod hire faste by,/ Felt iron hot" (II.1275-1276)!

Upon feeling iron hot, Pandarus moves in on Criseyde, taking advantage of the moment to bully her about any modesty she may be feeling:

"Lat be youre nice shame and youre folye
And spek with hym in esyng of his herte.
Lat nicete not do yow bothe smerte" (II.1286-1288).

Criseyde considers Pandarus's suggestion, but recovers her senses and decides she can not accept Troilus's love because, "For shame, and it were ek to soone/ To graunten hym so gret a liberte" (II.1291-1292). But Pandarus, who has felt his nieces's desire, decides, "It shal not be so." In other words, Pandarus won't give up pressing Troilus's suit until Troilus has Criseyde's heart.

The "Exchange ends with Pandarus's departure, but it is important to note how excited Pandarus feels after this scene:

And on his wey ful faste homward he spedde,
And right for joye he felte his herte daunce
(II.1303-1304).

Although Pandarus's excitement is ambiguous, it is directly related to the events of the "Exchange." The excitement seems joyful, but also suggests sexual excitement if we
consider the desire Pandarous felt in Criseyde. The excitement builds and culminates in the third scene. The thread of incest becomes more obvious as the psychological game becomes more physically exciting to Pandarus.
THE MORNING AFTER

Key scene #3, II.1555-1582, which might be referred to as "Morning After," unfolds as Pandarus enters Criseyde's sleeping chamber after Troilus has left. Pandarus knows that the two of them have spent their first night of sexual union, so he teases his niece about her sleepless night, citing the rain as the reason. Criseyde knows he is teasing her and that he is responsible for arranging her rendezvous with Troilus. She acknowledges Pandarus's prying into her sexual affairs then hides her face from embarrassment. Pandarus, still teasing, pries beneath the sheet to feign guilt, asking for her punishment, calling for his sword. Then he thrusts his arm beneath her neck and kisses her. She forgives him and soon they are laughing and playing. Later when she goes home, Pandarus is content because he succeeded in his mission to get Criseyde into Troilus's bed.

The "Morning After" is the most revealing scene of incest between Criseyde and Pandarus because of Pandarus's salacious behavior. Their relationship intensifies in these twenty-eight lines and dwindles from there until the end of the poem. In the previous two passages, we have seen evidence that Pandarus's excitement grows as he plays the part of the seductive go-between for Troilus and Criseyde. In this passage that excitement culminates as Criseyde and Troilus consummate their affair. It is the last passage to
reveal the thread of incest between Criseyde and Pandarus, although the tragic story of their relationship is far from over. Pandarus's seduction of his niece, however, reaches its conclusion.

Scholars and critics argue about how the lines of this scene, lines III.1555-82, should be read. Since this argument has bearing on an exploration of the thread of incest, it is important to look at the two extremes positions critics have taken on it. On one hand, Fehrenbacher claims that many recent Chaucerians, "have intimated or asserted outright that the passage suggests that Pandarus and Criseyde engage in an incestuous relationship" (1). On the other hand, the author of the explanatory notes on the poem in the Riverside Chaucer disagrees: "The now widespread view that Pandarus here seduces or rapes Criseyde, or that Chaucer hints at such an action, is baseless and absurd" (Benson 1043). However scholarly opinions may vary regarding the "Morning After," incest is a theme that animates Criseyde's and Pandarus's behavior.

The "Morning After" opens with Pandarus entering Criseyde's sleeping chamber. We do not know if he knocks or asks permission to enter, or even whether Criseyde is attired when he walks into her chamber. From the previous passage we already know that Criseyde's women did not share sleeping quarters with her and that her uncle has secret access to her room. Whether or not Pandarus watched the
love scene unfold between Criseyde and Troilus remains vague, but he also seems to have been awake during the night, for he admits to his own sleepless night saying, "'Al nyght,'quod he, 'hath reyn so do me wake,/ That som of us, I trowe, hire hedes ake" (III.1560-61). Since Pandarus knows why his niece did not sleep, we suspect sounds other than rain kept him awake. One critic, Jane Chance, calls his comment "Pandarus's own voyeuristically incestuous violation of his relationship with his niece" (Chance 125). Whether he watched, listened, or fantasized about Troilus and Criseyde's lovemaking, we are not certain, but any of these behaviors are voyeuristic. To put it another way, Pandarus's knowledge of Criseyde's night with Troilus amounts to a form of sexual intimacy.

Criseyde is uncomfortable with her uncle's knowledge of her sleepless night. She reacts by burying her face, "With the shete, and wax for shame al red" (III.1570). As in previous passages, however, Criseyde's physical reaction does not stop Pandarus from continuing his incestuous behavior: "And Pandarus gan under for to prye,/ And seyde, 'Nece, yf that I shal be ded,/ Have here a sword and smyteth of myn hed!" (III.1571-75). In fact, after making this statement, he becomes more physical with Criseyde. Once he pries the sheet away from her face and verbally tease her, he kisses Criseyde. Whether or not the kiss is one of overt incest, it is certainly not avuncular if we consider its context.
Pandarus actions leading up to the kiss, however, suggest an incestuous intent. After he has teased Criseyde and exposed her face from the sheet, "With that his arm al sodeynly he thriste/Under her nekke, and at the last hire kyste" (III.1574-75). His action is sudden, almost impulsive. He does not "place" or "cradle" his arm beneath her neck, but "thriste" it. "Thriste" is Middle English for thrust which means to "push or drive forcibly" and carries a sexual connotation. Also, the word "thriste" originates from the root, "tread-" which means oppression. The type of incest Criseyde experiences is oppressive. This is not the first time Pandarus impulsively crosses a physical boundary with Criseyde, nor is it the first time Chaucer uses the word "thriste." Chaucer also uses "thraste" in line II.1155: "And yn hire bosom the lettre doun he thraste"(II.1155). The same connotations apply to this line as well.

The kiss in the third passage is a good example of this ambiguity. One translation gives it an avuncular tone by reminding readers that it was his niece Pandarus kissed (Krapp 167). Chaucer, however, never includes such a distinction and leaves it up to the reader to decide how to interpret the kiss. Donald Howard even says that Pandarus kisses Criseyde in "a sufficiently avuncular way" (363). Yet, it is the suggestiveness of the Middle English line that implies something more incestuous. The ambiguity of this line relies on the different actions Chaucer has
written into the text. First, there is the verbal action. Pandarus teases Criseyde that she could punish him with death for his "sly" actions. Then, there is the second action of Pandarus's kissing his niece. If we combine the two actions, line III.1576 can support either action. The line can pass over the needless explanation that Pandarus and Criseyde reconciled, or it can pass over any further mention of their kiss.

The next line, following the kiss is puzzling. The narrator decides not to mention part of the scene: "I passe al that which chargeth nought to seye" (III.1576). But what part is the narrator withholding from the readers and why? This line accounts for much of the scholarly interest concerning this passage. For example, Fehrenbacher uses part of the line in the main title for his article on the poem: "'Al that which chargeth nought to seye': The Theme of Incest in Troilus and Criseyde. In doing so he seems to imply that line III.1576 sums up a relationship of overt incest between Criseyde and Pandarus. Accordingly, one translator of the passage, Nevil Coghill, renders the lines in Modern English as "I will pass over all that needs no saying" (167). Even in Modern English, this line still sounds curious, and we wonder what is unmentionable about this kiss. Another translator suggests an alternative reading of the same line: "No need to tell how they were reconciled!" (Krapp 167). If we read the stanza prior to the kiss and the one which begins with line III.1576,
Krapp's translation makes sense (although his is more of a loose interpretation of line III.1576 than a word-for-word translation).

The reconciliation refers to the previous stanza when Pandarus facetiously entreats Criseyde to punish him for his part in setting up Troilus and Criseyde as lovers: "Where is that sword of mine? Chop off my head!" (Coghill 167, III.1573). The next line, III.1577, explains that Pandarus was forgiven: "God let him off his death, and so did she" (Coghill 167, III.1577). Thus, as Krapp suggests with his Modern English rendition, they are reconciled. Another consideration is the placement of line III.1576. Pandarus kisses his niece in the previous line, which makes the narrator's comment, "I passe al that which chargeth nought to seye" (III.1576) sound as if the narrator does not want to talk any more about the kiss. Yet, line III.1576 begins a new stanza and links the kiss with the idea of reconciliation more than the narrator choosing to pass over any suggestiveness associated with the kiss. Once again, ambiguity surrounds the thread of incest, and Chaucer seems to suggest an incestuous union between Criseyde and Pandarus without committing himself to it.

The "Morning After" ends with Criseyde and her uncle enjoying the rest of their day together involved in some vague "pleye" (III.1578). It is the last time they will share each other's company, but Pandarus does not seem to mind for, "Pandarus hath fully his entente" (III.1582). All
along we have watched Pandarus seduce Criseyde for Troilus, and now he has succeeded. Pandarus's intent won over Criseyde's, which would have allowed Troilus to enjoy only the sight of her, nothing more. Pandarus exits victorious; the game of seduction is over for him. By the time Criseyde leaves Troy (and Troilus), Pandarus shows little concern for her. The earlier excitement that build in the first two passages and culminates in the final one is not seen again in Troilus and Criseyde. When Pandarus learns of Criseyde's betrayal, he is "As stille as ston—a word ne koude he seye" (V.1729). What can he say? At this point he no longer has a relationship with Criseyde; he has played out his excitement of seduction. It is Troilus who grieves.

Pandarus's own increasing excitement throughout the three key scenes has sexual overtones. In fact, his growing excitement reflects the male sexual response cycle (Covington 239-241). According to Covington, this cycle is composed of four phases which correspond to Pandarus's behaviors during and after the three key scenes. The first phase is called excitement which is marked by sexual stimulation, direct or indirect (such as voyeurism). Pandarus is anticipates his own seduction of Criseyde in the "Set-up" as we see him prolonging the emotional control over Criseyde as if he were playing an enjoyable game. The next phase is called plateau which is a period of heightened sexual excitement. In the "Exchange," Pandarus stands next to Criseyde as she watches Troilus parade by, and his
excitement increases feverishly until he feels "iron hot." The third phase is orgasm and the "Morning After" acts as a climax of Pandarus's excitement as the kiss and "thraste" imply. After that passage Pandarus fades from Criseyde's life since the excitement has ended between them. This fading corresponds to the final phase called resolution, which is characterized by a refractory period when the male becomes sexually unresponsive. Pandarus may not physically rape Criseyde, but the sexual overtones of his behaviors cannot be ignored.
CONCLUSION

We have explored the thread of incest as it weaves in and out of the language and behaviors surrounding three exchanges between Criseyde and Pandarus. There are places within a tapestry where a distinct thread may not be seen separate from the overall scene, but if it is pulled out, the picture is altered. If we pulled out the thread of incest from *Troilus and Criseyde*, we would be left with a different story. So how does this thread enhance the overall picture in places where it is not distinctly evident? The answer has broader implications for considering of gender in the poem. Incest is about more than taboo and desire; incest speaks of an imbalance of power. The story of *Troilus and Criseyde* operates around such imbalances which can be seen between genders and within them. We can also see how balance between the three main characters is sought through various relationship substitutions. Finally, incest is a deliberate theme Chaucer created in his refashioning of Boccaccio's *Filostrato*. The master of the mask, the writer rarely revealed in his own works, may have let the mask slip slightly to expose the imbalances of power in his own life and times.

Stephanie Covington puts the gender aspects of power into perspective when she observes that power always entails oppression: "[power inevitably means] the ability to control others. Historically, that power has been supported and
buttressed by physical might and violence" (146). We associate power with a hierarchy arranged according to those who have it over others. In medieval times God sat at the highest position with power over heaven and earth. According to this view, the spirit world came next, then human beings followed by plants and animals. The terrestrial hierarchy placed men in the position of all-powerful. They subjugated women to this power as Pandarus does with Criseyde. But also, some men were more powerful than others. So even men were subjugated to their own idea of power in social hierarchies such in feudal systems of Europe. Men resorted to threats of violence to gain power over each other as well as the subjugated women of their society.

However, as Chaucer's poem makes abundantly clear, power is not always about physical force. Pandarus does not physically force Criseyde into bed with Troilus (or himself for that matter), but he does not have to resort to the physical. Pandarus would not need to use such physical power. Criseyde submits to his intentions because, as Blume points out, "The closer the relationship, the less necessary force is and the less likely the perpetrator is to use violence" (6). Likewise, the force of Pandarus's character would largely preclude his using physical force to get his way with Criseyde. Pandarus is a soldier as well as Troilus, and tales of bloody swords and battle violence would suffice as a reminder of an underlying physical
threat. If Criseyde refuses Troilus's suit, she may wonder if Troilus would come after her in a more violent way. This reading seems likely since Pandarus carefully entwines Troilus's battle deeds with Troilus's more gentler qualities when persuading Criseyde's opinion of the knight. What Pandarus does resort to, however, is secrecy. He talks to Criseyde out of hearing range from her companions, he delivers secret letters between Troilus and Criseyde, he arranges a secret meeting between the two soon-to-be lovers under the guise of Troilus's "illness" and Criseyde's need for political protection, and, finally, he secrets the lovers away in his own house complete with a hidden passageway. The secrecy he instigates is a necessary component for his control of both Criseyde, and Troilus and is, as Blume suggests, typical in cases of incest (Blume 7).

Another aspect of power is authority. Pandarus had authority over Criseyde as would have been his right according to the power hierarchy of his time. So why the incest? Where is the imbalance of power? Pandarus's character is similar to the incest perpetrator described by Blume:

The incest perpetrator who is unable to have—or to take--his share of power in the real world or in his adult relationships is a man whose self-esteem is threatened and who feels cheated of his "rights." But he knows in his family absolute authority is given (3).
This sort of deprivation seems to describe Pandarus's situation. He has failed in love in his own adult life. His sexual desires are frustrated, and yet he is committed to pimping his niece to his friend, Troilus. Even if Pandarus does not physically satisfy his frustrated sexual power with Criseyde, Troilus becomes his substitute. If Troilus carries out what Pandarus can not, Pandarus regains some of his lost power through Troilus. If he can make a man out of Troilus through a sexual affair with Criseyde, then Pandarus in effect makes a man of himself. This possibility could explain the displaced desire Pandarus exhibits towards his niece. Through incest, Pandarus is not cheated of his "rights."

There also exist power imbalances between Troilus and Pandarus as well. Pandarus is older, but Troilus as a prince has a higher status. Because of Troilus's youth and lack of experience (and fortitude), he is unable to approach Criseyde with his love (desire) for her. But Pandarus is able to approach Criseyde. We see Pandarus go through the stages of male sexual response, but we fail to see Troilus do so, even though he actually becomes sexually involved with Criseyde. It is as if Pandarus makes up for this lack in Troilus and acts as substitute for Troilus's sexual excitement.

Another power imbalance between Pandarus and Troilus has a homoerotic element. Pandarus is not only older than Troilus, but in this matter of love, he becomes Troilus's
master. They form a master-student bond. In male-dominated cultures like from ancient Troy, male mentorships were a common bond formed between elder and younger warriors (Crapo 184). Mentorships are same-sex relationships between older and younger partners in which the older person has a role of husband to a same-sex wife....mentorships often come into existence as a way of solidifying an important social bond such as....teacher-student relationship by which younger members of society are socialized into specialized adult skills or knowledge (Crapo 184).

The mentorship is in effect because Pandarus is socializing the younger Troilus into the skills of love, yet Pandarus is unable to fulfill the bond because he is of lower status than Troilus. Troilus as a prince can not become a "wife." So Criseyde then becomes a substitute for the failed mentorship. She is the connecting element between the two men.

Chaucer lived in a time dominated by the male power hierarchy. He keenly observed his fellow humans well enough to create characters that remain psychologically complex even after five centuries. Donald Howard reminds us, Chaucer "imagined striking small details because they were part of that vicarious experience--details that astonish us for their truth to human nature or individual character " (374). Chaucer was observant of and sensitive to others'
behavior. But, as a writer, Chaucer could have added elements of power imbalances that did not involve incest. His inclusion of the thread of incest throughout *Troilus and Criseyde* is deliberate.

Fehrenbacher accordingly points out that Chaucer includes three elements of incest that are not found in Boccaccio's *Filostrato*. These elements include the narrative of Procne in Pandarus's early morning dream-state, the reading of the Theban romance, and Criseyde's relationship to Diomede (9-11). First, Procne is the swallow singing outside Pandarus's window before he embarks to Criseyde's palace. Procne's sister Philomena was raped by Procne's husband Tereus, and the rape of a sister-in-law was considered incestuous. Criseyde falls asleep after her uncle's first visit listening to the nightingale, who is the victim, Philomena. Then Fehrenbacher goes on to point out that the story Criseyde and her companions are reading is a "narrative of incestuous desire" (11). Last, he also explains Chaucer's inclusion of an interesting familial detail:

> In the *Filostrato*, Criseyde's only named relatives are Calkas and Pandarus; Chaucer expands this genealogy... Diomede and Criseyde are first cousins."

Chaucer rewrote or added to the original Boccaccio version all three key scenes that reveal the thread of incest. These narrative additions show deliberation on Chaucer's behalf.
But what, we may ask, was his motivation for doing so? Chaucer may have chose to add a theme of incest to *Troilus and Creseyde* because the Medieval view sees incest as leading to the downfall of society. As Fehrenbacher notes, "in Medieval literature it is often just the transgression of this taboo that brings about the fall of a society" (3). Even more telling, Chaucer's contemporary and friend, John Gower, writes about how incest results in social chaos. Perhaps Chaucer's inclusion of incest served as a societal warning to England against perversions, materialism, and lack of spirituality. Perversions in the home threatened what Norman F. Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, points out the foundation of Medieval society:

> Whatever the strength of national, regional, and urban institutions, the family household still remained the most important institution in the lives of western European people in the latter Middle Ages (477).

If Chaucer saw the demise of the family structure perverted by incest, it is possible that the other human institutions were doomed as well.

Or perhaps Chaucer's inclusion of a thread of incest was more personal and less a societal statement. Even in the 14th Century, society defined incest according to ideas about kinship, although it would have differed from our modern interpretations. The medieval concept of incest would have included relationships beyond consanguinity. As Tasmin Hekala notes
individuals of the time also understood affinal connections and who was related to whom in the connectives of marriage (2).

So when Chaucer includes the story of Procne in *Troilus and Criseyde*, he acknowledges Teresus's rape of his sister-in-law as incestuous. By our modern standards we would call it rape and adulterous, but not incestuous.

The incest narrative of Procne may be, therefore, Chaucer's disclosure of a personal secret. That embedded narrative forms a triangle between Procne, Philomena, and Tereus. Such a triangle may have existed in Chaucer's life. Donald Howard suggests something of such an incestuous relationship existing in Chaucer's own household:

Thomas Chaucer, who was so well favored in future years—and who took his mother's coat of arms rather than his father's—was the bastard son of John of Gaunt by Philippa Roet, and that Chaucer was used (and favored) to cover up this fact (94).

If Philippa bore a bastard by her sister's lover and future husband, it is not difficult to see how the triangles of incest match up:

Perhaps Chaucer did not keep quiet about the affair after all, and his thread of incest holds personal meaning.
Despite his presumed purposes, Chaucer did choose a thread of incest for his work.

Psychological incest and covert incest, then, weave in and out of the text of Troilus and Criseyde. It attests to the complexity of Chaucer's writing and to his ability to observe and duplicate the psychology of humans. The thread of incest is woven so intricately in three key scenes that it mirrors the entanglement of real incest. Criseyde's and Pandarus's characterizations, however ambiguous, are psychologically accurate of human behaviors surrounding incest. Incest stretches beyond the taboo and desire and haunts the failing of a society to structure itself around power. Perhaps Chaucer's warning still holds true today: incest is a symptom of our impending downfall, a self-destructive element of a power-based culture. Or maybe Chaucer revealed more of himself than we know in his suggestive thread of incest. Whatever Chaucer's purpose for weaving an ambiguous thread of incest throughout his complex narrative poem, Troilus and Criseyde, we can not help but admire the court poet Jane Chance sums up:

in the delicious ambiguity that Chaucer traces, of "in bono, in malo," rests all his art (preface xxvi).


