

Loci of Solitude: the Idea of “Pryvetee” in Chaucer ❖

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ABSTRACT

Few studies of solitude in the Middle Ages have been able to transcend the influence of Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of Renaissance in Italy*, in spite of the fact that it does not tackle the issue of solitude but rather that of the rise of individualism in the renaissance.. In this paper, while not questioning the central debate of Burckhardt's thesis, I wish to examine the idea of privacy as it arises in the work of Chaucer. My paper places particular emphasis on *loci* of solitude concerning Criseyde and Nicholas in order to argue that, as I see it, a distinctive bourgeois ideology of privacy emerged in later medieval England. By looking at what Chaucer specifically says about his characters' environment, their physical surroundings, their behavioral patterns, and their social interactions in *The Miller's Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, I hope to show that in Chaucer's work collective privacy did exist, but we can detect signs of personal privacy within the collective privacy. I am particularly interested in cases where Chaucer's idea of privacy refers not merely to *loci* of solitude or places of “pryvetee” (say, bedchambers, gardens, or one's cold grave) but the activity of being alone, with private thought, or to access of solitude, a kind of privacy of the psyche. Such an enquiry of the idea of “pryvetee” in the late medieval time strives to open a new way to appraise the modernity of Chaucer's poetry.

KEY WORDS: Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Miller's Tale*, privacy, solitude, medieval English literature

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摘 要

研究中世紀時期關於「孤獨」這方面的論述鮮少能超越柏克哈在【義大利文藝復興時期的文明】宣揚文藝復興時期個人主義的影響，儘管柏氏的主張與「中世紀獨處之道」這個議題相去甚遠。本文無意於挑戰柏氏的核心論述，而是順著晚近相關議題的研究脈動，檢視西方個人隱私的概念如何呈現於喬叟詩作之中。本文特別著重喬叟「磨坊匠的故事」及「特洛史與葵希姐」兩個作品裡角色之間的對話、互動、獨思、獨處與其行為模式與週遭環境的交互關係。本文主張喬氏對於「個人隱私」的看法偏重主觀的心理層面而非客觀的環境，因而詩作中對於個人獨處冥思的意識活動及內心世界多有著墨。喬氏詩作中注重個人隱私的概念印證其文學作品的現代性，也間接證實關於西方個人隱私的概念早在中世紀晚期已經形成，文藝復興時期個人主義的興起只是其延續發展的結果。

關鍵詞：喬叟，《托愛斯勒與克萊希達》，《磨坊主人的故事》，中世紀英國文學，獨處，個人隱私

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Few studies of solitude in the Middle Ages have been able to transcend the influence of Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of Renaissance in Italy*, in spite of the fact that it does not tackle the issue of solitude but rather that of the rise of individualism in the renaissance (Peter Goodall 1). In this paper, while not questioning the central debate of Burckhardt's thesis, I wish to examine the idea of privacy as it arises in the work of Chaucer.¹ None of Chaucer's major characters seem to enjoy solitude or seek it for pleasure's sake. *The Knight's Tale* ends with a sense of alienation with Arcite's final aloneness: "now in his colde grave/Allone, withouten any compaignye" (*CT* I. 2778-79).² Being alone is most typically treated as a tragic predicament, forced upon one, in *alienatio*. However, we must not conclude that in Chaucer's time self-consciousness did not exist or that his major characters take no pleasure in private/individual life so that they have no interest in defending it. Rather than attempting to define Chaucer's idea of privacy, I would like to discuss the practice of privacy in reclusive spaces in two of Chaucer's most well-known works—*Criseyde and Troilus* and *The Miller's Tale*. The medieval sense of solitude was associated first with a specifically urban value system of household space, then with a style of domestic living

¹ Burckhardt's 1860 *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (*The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, English translation, by S. G. C. Middlemore, in 2 vols., 1878, rpt. by Penguin, 1990) has many powerful insights and reflections to offer those who seek to broaden their understanding of individuality in western history. The term Renaissance in Burckhardt's view suggests the transition from a society of communal life to one that idealized the self-conscious individual. It would be pointless to enter into all the scholarly disputes over Burckhardt's thesis, but discussions that focus on the social practice of individuality in later medieval times are more fertile: some (though more and more) base the practice of individuality on the public and private spaces; others consider that the medieval concept of individuality was born from a transformation of "structure of feeling" or a usurpation of powers and public rights. Both positions are not mutually exclusive. For the phrase "structure of feeling," I am indebted to Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (London: Oxford UP, 1977). Though Peter Goodall's topic ("Being Alone in Chaucer," 1-27) is complementary to mine, his article leads to a conclusion rather different from mine. Similar to but more succinct than Peter Goodall's is the critical account offered by Barbara Hanawalt (*The Middle Ages*). Here there is a stress on the medieval landed rights and property law missing in Burckhardt's pioneering work. Diane Shaw's study of the construction of the private in medieval London also offers an alternative to Burckhardt's critical approach. Shaw does not subject the word "individual" to the same critical scrutiny that she applies to "the construction of the private," and she is far at an advantage of using the latter rather than the former ("The Construction of the Private in Medieval London" 447-65). It would be only fair to say that the scholarship of Burckhardt already has a long history in the western Europe, especially in Germany, for over 150 years, so much so that few western studies of the western development of the individual can do without Burckhardt's influence, in particular, when it comes to the issue of individuality in pre-modern as well in modern times.

² *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. Larry Benson (Oxford UP, 1987). All references to *The Canterbury Tales* (*CT*) and *Troilus and Criseyde* (*TC*) are from this edition.

that, unlike that of ours in the 21st century, combined private and public business within a “domestic geography” that fostered hospitality, privacy, orderliness, and the routine management of time within the stability and security of the body politic.³ In this essay, I am particularly interested in cases where Chaucer’s idea of privacy refers not merely to *loci* of solitude or places of “pryvetee” (say, bedchambers, gardens, or one’s cold grave) but the activity of being alone, with private thought, or to access of solitude, a kind of privacy of the psyche. First, I will discuss Chaucer’s idea of privacy as practiced by Criseyde and Nicholas in reclusive places, or spaces of seclusion, both in public and in private, in light of how the architectural design of medieval houses in Chaucer’s time relates to his idea of privacy, and finally I will conclude that a distinctive bourgeois ideology of privacy emerged first in later medieval England, as shown in Chaucer’s work, not in the modern period, as other scholars have claimed.⁴ Such an enquiry of the idea of

³ For a discussion on the usage of the term “domestic geography,” see Norman F. Cantor, “Privacy in Medieval Europe: 1100-1300: A Report Submitted to the Association of the Bar of the City of New York.” Unpublished paper, Columbia University, 1964. Quoted in Diane Shaw. “The Construction of the Private in Medieval London.” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 26:3 (fall 1996): 447-65. Drawing on the medieval English Assize of Nuisance records Shaw has investigated the ways that nuisance laws and building codes protected property-based definitions of personal privacy within the dense medieval fabric of London.

⁴ For example, John Tosh concludes that “home,” in its nineteenth-century form of a “state of mind” defined by privacy and comfort with the physical structure of a house, was a product of the modern period, or even of seventeenth-century Holland (*A Man’s Place*, 16). For a general introduction of how the term *bourgeoisie* has been widely used as an equivalent for *upper class* under capitalism and how it evolved to be taken mostly synonymous with the *middle class* until the nineteenth century, see John Tosh’s *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-class Home in Victoria England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999). Etymologically, the word *bourgeoisie* is derived from the Old French word *burgeis*, meaning “of a walled town.” In the French feudal order, the *bourgeois* referred to a class of city-dwellers who were wealthier members of the Third Estate. The term “bourgeois” has been widely used as an approximate equivalent of the mindset of city dwellers in the history of urbanity. The term thus refers to the merchants and traders, the middle class in the broad socioeconomic spectrum between nobility and peasants. For useful discussions on how the modern concept of *burgeis* may be etymologically linked to notions of the Self and privacy, see Diane Shaw’s excellent study of *London Assize of Nuisance, 1301-1431* (“The Construction” 447-66); John Schofield, *Medieval London Houses* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), Felicity Riddy, “The Concept of the Household in Later Medieval England,” *History Compass* 4(2006): 5-10 and Sarah Rees Jones, “The Later Medieval English Urban Household,” *History Compass* 5(2007): 112-58. In late medieval times (the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), as cities were emerging, artisans and merchants formed the early bourgeoisie, as evidenced in their socioeconomic ability to pay the fines for breaking sumptuary laws, and by paying to be called citizens of the city in which they lived. Chaucer medievalizes the legendary tale of Troilus and Criseyde in that Criseyde is more a urban lady of the late fourteenth century than a noble widow of antiquity. See Lilian M. Bisson’s *Chaucer and the Late Medieval World*. For a critique of how one can apply the term of bourgeoisie to the medieval English gentry society and peasantry, see P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd, eds., *Thirteenth-century England III* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991) and Barrington Moore, Jr. *Privacy: Studies in Social and Cultural History* (London: M. E.

“pryvetee” in the late medieval time strives to open a new way to appraise the modernity of Chaucer’s poetry.⁵

By looking at what Chaucer says about his characters’ environment, their physical surroundings, their behavioral patterns, and their social interactions in *The Miller’s Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, I hope to show that in Chaucer’s work collective privacy did exist, but that we can also detect signs of personal privacy within the collective privacy.⁶ In Chaucer’s work, the world of Troilus the young warrior is as far removed from that of Criseyde the widow in black, as is that of Nicholas the scholar from that of John the carpenter, yet all occupy physical structures that constitute spaces, which are built, organized, and furnished in ways that are consciously or unconsciously reflective of their particular cultural values, and which bring together greater or lesser numbers of people tied by association of kinship, friendship, service

Sharpe, 1984). I am here using “ideology” not simply as a pejorative synonym of “deformation” or “concealment,” but in the more general sense of a broad complex of variously motivated cultural and political structures that sustain a given social formation. On the distinctions between these two senses, see Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Oxford UP, 1983), 153-57, and *Marxism and Literature* (London: Oxford UP, 1977), 191.

⁵ I should be concerned particularly with the distinctions among “modern,” “pre-modern” and “postmodern,” if the present scope and scale of my thesis were something else. It should also be pointed out that the definitions of “modernity” are equally debatable. The variety of definitions of “modernity” and/or “post-modernity” and the limitations imposed on their relevance are confusing. Equally disconcerting is the pervasive tendency on the part of those who use the word to reify the concept in order to employ it as a standard by which to rank and measure areas or societies. The distinction between “modernity” and “modern” did not arrive until the 19th Century. I am here using “modernity” in its simple and general sense that the present is discontinuous with the past, that is, it is associated with the replacement of traditional by new institutions, practices, and ways of thought. What I suggest about the modernity of Chaucer may be understood as being very much in line with the “postfeudal” used by Paul Strohm to explain the historical implications of Chaucer’s social experience in *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989).

⁶ One way of thinking of collective privacy is as secrecy shared by a group of people, in terms of *amicittae* (friendships), while personal privacy is an individual’s subjective experience in isolation or reclusive spaces. In the cases of Criseyde and Nicholas, they enjoy their privacy in public with *compaignye*. We can spot “a code of common life” in their behavioral patterns, social interactions and speech-acts. People can be secretive while in solitude, or in the midst of a crowd. If it is hard for us to make a “clear distinction between collective privacy and personal privacy,” perhaps, without discarding the terms, we should, rather than seeking lines of division, look for points of intersection and ask how far we can understand the collective *as* personal, and vice versa, in the cases of Criseyde and of Nicholas. It is in the changing location of such points of intersection in the daily life of an individual that we can make some useful inferences about the bourgeois ideology of privacy in late medieval England and about its formation and its adaptation to social changes. The emphasis of my present study lies more on contemporary self-consciousness than on material change. To be more precise, I am in particular interested in those points at which social developments of collective and personal privacy in the late fourteenth-century London influenced textual representation of the Self by Chaucer.

or neighborliness.⁷ It is therefore necessary to address the diverse cultural, material, and ideological paradigms in which men and women lived their lives in the later medieval England. Every residence of every great lord in the Middle Ages had two focal points, the lord's chamber and the hall (Given-Wilson 29). At the center of the great lord's lifestyle is his household, and at the root, household peace based on personal ties, in which the behavior of each individual was both transparent and predictable to others. This is a peculiar fact of the daily life of medieval people: the household was the cell of the collective life. In the words of Given-Wilson, "the size, splendor and cost of [medieval] noble household is testimony to one of the most striking differences between medieval and modern society, that is, the extent to which the public and private lives of medieval people were interwoven, and this is especially true to the great. Constantly surrounded by servants, and companions, constantly mixing business with pleasure, the medieval noble was hardly ever actually alone, or even alone with his wife and children" (87). The hall is where the household, the court, the civilized community, assemble; it is also where the lord and his council exercise their public power, starting law, delivering judgment, presiding over the communal meal, taking political decisions. The chamber, on the other hand, is a private space; it contains a bed, usually itself enclosed by curtains, and it is the setting for intimate behavior, including sexual behavior. As Georges Duby puts it, discussing the chamber, "Masculine power ended on the threshold of the room in which children were conceived and brought into the world and in which the sick were cared for and the dead washed. In this most private sanctum, woman ruled over the dark realm of sexual pleasure, reproduction, and death" (80).

In the context of later medieval England—loosely the era from the eve of the Black Death to the Henrician Reformation—the sense of privacy, of familiarity, of intimacy, of emotional warmth and security that the word "pryvetee" conveyed to contemporaries is perhaps a useful starting point for understanding the modernity of the work of Chaucer. According to the definitions of "privete" in the MED, the word's primary meaning as "secret" appears as early as the *Ancrene Riwe* and continues with fourteenth-century

⁷ For detailed information on the building process in medieval England, trades, building types, and their constituent parts, see L. F. Salzman's *Building in England Down to 1540* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) and Margaret Wood's *The English Medieval House* (London: Studio, 1994). For an excellent description of the dwelling rooms and work spaces of London house and lots, see Schofield 62-93.

citations from Chaucer, Gower, the Wyclif Bible, and Richard Rolle.⁸ In *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, alchemy is characterized as “the secree of secrees” (CT G. 1447), and a “pryvetee” which is conducted after the door is shut (G. 1137-38). “Pryvetee” is action conducted in the guise of spatial protection. As the Canon's Yeoman stresses, “privee” actions, when they turn upon the use of the “privee stone,” can make an *adversarie* of God. “Pryvetee,” “privee,” and “prively” are all positions and modes of behavior accepted as a norm by the characters in *The Miller's Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. To be “privee” is to be at once “sleigh” (I. 3201) and “deerne” (I. 3623). “Pryvetee” is physical or spatial (I. 3493), on the one hand, and psychological, on the other, when it refers to private counsel (I. 3603). In his discussion of the concept of solitude in early modern Europe, Professor Martin Elsky aptly draws our attention to Petrarch's fourteenth-century treatise *On the Solitary Life* (*De Vita Solitaria*) in which Petrarch touches upon the issue of ideal solitude in an ideal space of seclusion in domestic living quarters.⁹ Petrarch's ideal solitude is not absolute but flexible. For Petrarch, the proper location of intellectual activities is in spaces of seclusion to satisfy the goal of self-cultivation and transcendence. Although such spaces create an ideal setting for cultivating the “right” habits of thought recommended in Christian learning for the obtaining of virtues through the restraint of emotion, for the wider community, solitude is also a suspect quality, as Petrarch has noted, carrying objectionable connotations of having something to hide from the community. In Chaucer, however, we find that one's solitude often takes place in two different settings, one solitary, the other crowded with people: the *closet* and the public places.

In general, medieval private space in the later medieval times was

⁸ Middle English Dictionary under *privete*.

⁹ Here I owe much to Professor Martin Elsky for his analysis of the words Petrarch uses to describe *loci* of solitude in the context of Christian doctrines (“The Dark and Secret Chamber” 32-49). Petrarch quotes a number of phrases from Quintilian that describe the place of nocturnal study by the lamp (*lucubration*): dark, reclusive, locked, narrow spaces, that are *secretus*, which imply “being apart” and “solitary” as well as “secret” in our modern sense. The words he uses to describe such isolated places are *locus*, *angustia*, and *cubiculum*. He also quotes Augustine on Cyprian's negative description of the indoor “abode” of study: “a chamber in a secret spot, girt about with walls, secured with locks, darkened, and favored by a marble vault” (Petrarch 159). Petrarch uses the advice of Cicero and Quintilian to students where one must concentrate on study in a “practical” solitude not always available: “In the midst of crowds, on a journey, and even at festive meetings, let thought secure privacy for itself” (Petrarch 145). I am grateful to Prof. Martin Elsky for pointing out the utility of Petrarch's notion of ideal solitude for a study of Chaucer's idea of privacy.

composed of two distinct areas: one fixed, enclosed, attached to the house; the other mobile, free to move through public space, yet embodying the same structure of feelings that were maintained by a power, as an invisible wall, as solid as the enclosure that surrounded the house. And if privacy meant secrecy in the medieval times, it was a secrecy shared by all members of the household, hence subtle and easily violated. If privacy meant independence, it was independence of a collective sort. Enclosed settings symbolize the world of human civilization, a realm of safety which is also one of constraint and repression. Power means constraint. Modern scholarship has focused on the rise of individualism and the control and presentation of the body beginning in the Middle Ages.¹⁰ Medieval manner books in particular show a distinctive bourgeois ideology of privacy and modern sense of property in concealing bodily operations, particularly in public spaces, including in the public household. The guides urged discretion. The implicit admonition is that a person should be guarded against overt scrutiny. The Athens of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, where the same wall encloses both the garden in which Emelye celebrates the courtly rites of spring and the tower where Palamon and Arcite are imprisoned, is a memorably compressed image of this double function of enclosed space. Similarly, open spaces have a double function, offering both freedom and danger, as we can see in Gawain's journey to the Green Chapel in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

For medieval men, the body is a fortress, a hermitage, but one constantly under threat, besieged, surrounded by the Devil; hence, it is essential that the body be kept under surveillance, especially when being alone. Criseyde's whole ambiance is created by her relationship to walls, pillars, windows, gardens, closet, memory rooms, and bedrooms—her setting is nothing but one of design and space.¹¹ Put Criseyde outside and she is lost; sheltered, her fear is gone (III 477-83).¹² The first picture of Criseyde

¹⁰ For the medieval concept of the body and society's role and interest in controlling it, see Caroline Bynum and Michel Foucault. Also see Chris Given-Wilson and Georges Duby for detailed discussion on the history of private life.

¹¹ The female body itself was entitled to privacy only within the boundaries of private property. The definition of private space included both the physical property and the body within. For a useful discussion on how the modern concept of property may be etymologically linked to notions of the Self and privacy, see Diane Shaw's excellent study of *London Assize of Nuisance, 1301-1431* (447-66).

¹² For a critique of how one can apply the ideology of gendered separate spheres to the medieval gentry society and peasantry, see P.J.P. Goldberg, "The Public and the Private: Women in the

interacting with other people is in a very public space, the large temple, where the people of Troy gather for worship. She is properly dressed in conservative widow's attire and wears a "barbe" on her hair, signifying her social status as one who is sexually unavailable. As Chaucer's audience would know, such formal social settings allowed for a great deal of informal interaction, yet were also governed by the approved codes of behavior.¹³ Criseyde is alone in the crowd,

And yet she stood full owe and stille alone.
 Byhynde other folk, in litel brede,
 And neigh the dore, ay under shames drede.

(TC I 178-80)

As a politically suspect person she must seem humble and appear without fail at community gatherings such as the temple services, lest she be thought to have profited from her father's treason. If she wants *pryvetee*, that is privacy, intimacy, a reclusive space for personal reflection, she must be very careful when and how she seeks it. In the following, I will explore the influence of space on the ways that Criseyde and Pandarus speak to each other, that is, their speech-acts, within the physical structure of the living quarters where they conduct their interchanges in public. The parlor in her house is a room where she could receive visitors and hold conversations with them with *compaignie*. With the *compaignie* standing watch and only withdrawing from earshot when Criseyde announces her intent to discuss financial matters with Pandarus: "And everi wight that was aboute hem tho,/That herde that, gan fer away to stand,/Whil they two hadde al that hem liste in honed" (II 215-17). Clearly in such a social setting, the need to discuss private matters in a public space is understood by both the characters and by Chaucer's audiences—the visitor and lady of the house are given privacy but are *not* left alone. Here, both uncle and niece seek *pryvetee* in public. The presence of the servants affords them witnesses to ensure that their behavior follows the social norms, even if they conduct their interchange with servants standing watch, "fer away to stoned," allows at least the need for discretion..

Pre-Plague Economy," in P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd, eds., *Thirteenth-century England III* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991), 75-89.

¹³ This account relies upon Chris Given-Welson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 87-103.

When Pandarus leaves, Criseyde withdraws into a private space, her “closet” (II 599), where she can sit and think all alone by herself. The “closet” is a small room where the owner of the house is able to retreat for private prayer and meditation. Criseyde might keep her treasured books, her household accounts, and other documents to be read in private. But such private time is rare time as she is expected to be in company both “inside” and outside the house (II 813-19). Her meditations do not last long and she goes into her garden to join her nieces and a “gret route” of her women (II 819). Before she descends into the garden to walk with her nieces, Criseyde is occupied in solitary debate over the course she will take concerning Troilus. In the first part of her soliloquy (II 703-63), she considers the reasons why it will be to her advantage, with no harm to herself if she accepts Troilus as lover. Then, “A cloudy thought gan thorough hire soule pace,/That overspradde hire brighte thoughtes alle” (II 768-69), and she reviews the drawbacks of involving herself with love (II 771-805). She questions herself: “Sholde I now love, and put in jupartie/ My sikernesse, and thrallen libertee?” (II 772-73). Her picture of love is as a stormy life in which there is “For evere some mistrust or nice strif” (II 780). Criseyde’s *closet* has a window through which she can hear the noise from the street and from which she will eventually see Troilus ride by. While windows in the medieval times were devices for letting light and air in as well as gazing out, gardens were social spaces for decorous public interaction.

The next day, Pandarus returns to Criseyde’s house, and manages to speak “pryvely” with her in her garden:

With that they wenten arm in arm yfeere
 Into the gardyn from the chaumbre down;
 And whan that he so few was that the sown
 Of that he spak, no man heren myghte,
 He seyde hir thus, and out the letter plighte. (II 1114-20)

Medieval manner books are full of admonitions for women to keep busy so as to avoid occasions of sin and to make sure that their *compaignye* behave properly as well, because the codes of behavior observed by a household commonly result in the exercise of a judgment of the character and condition of the landlord or the lady of the house by the community. As the behavior surrounding domestic rituals became more formalized and orderly, so too did

the organization of domestic space in the hall and separate rooms, which include the lord and the lady's chamber, closet, bower, garden, etc. Pandarus takes advantage of the social practice of strolling in gardens to thrust Troilus' letter into Criseyde's bodice, knowing that none of her *compaignye* is close enough to see or hear their communication. Here, Pandarus takes control of Criseyde's "privee" space within her house. Again, we find both uncle and niece seek *pryvetee* in public.

After the meal, Pandarus draws Criseyde into a window seat in her parlor and waits until "hire folk were all awaye" (II 1194). When he finally convinces her to write a return message to Troilus, she retires again to her *closet* upstairs to sit and think, and write her letter, and shortly returns to her parlor to converse with Pandarus at the window seat again, where she will see Troilus ride by, according to the plan of Pandarus. A series of private actions then take place in these very public spaces in the poem. When Criseyde and Troilus finally meet at Deiphebus' house, Criseyde is left "alone" with Troilus without supervision in their private rendezvous. Troilus' bedchamber is a public, not a private, space, as carefully contrived by Pandarus. Eleyne and Deiphebus also visit the "ailing" Troilus in his private chamber before Criseyde is fetched to meet Troilus in his bedchamber. Again, we see the ways in which Chaucer underlines how the characters seek *pryvetee* in public. Likewise, Troilus and Criseyde's love spurs the desire for autonomy that burns within the homogeneity of community. Thus, that Criseyde sets out for Pandarus' house with "certain of hire owen men,/And with hire faire nece Antigone,/And other of hire women nyne or ten" (III 596-98) is a necessary public parade to show that her behavior is chaste: observance of the norms of social conduct is particularly important to Criseyde in that her father violated them by his treachery.

Upon her arrival, Troilus is watching her from a "litel window" in Pandarus' "stuwe," a small hidden room in the attic, a *closet*. Following the dinner, a convenient heavy rainstorm provides an excuse for Pandarus to insist that Criseyde spend the night. Now the interior layout of Pandarus' house now becomes crucial, particularly with regard to the sleeping arrangements. Criseyde will sleep in a curtained bed in the bedroom suite; her women will lie in a middle chamber around the inner room with the open door between the rooms covered only by a curtain. In contrast to our modern expectations of privacy, her bedchamber will be shared by her women and there will be with

servants sleeping nearby, in other beds in the outer chamber (III 676). After they are all set in beds, Pandarus then unlocks the door to his *closet* where Troilus is waiting and opens a trap door that leads to his chamber. The two men enter Criseyde's presumably "private" bedroom and Pandarus stealthily "goth to the dore anon, withouten lette,/Ther as they laye, and softly it shette" behind the curtain (III 748-49). The bedchamber has now become truly "private" as the chaperones are locked out. Then we see Criseyde wakes from sleep and begs "Let me some wight calle" (III 760) but in vain. Pandarus insists that Criseyde must receive Troilus at once, not even allowing her to rise and dress. Then we see Troilus, on his knees at the head of the bed, with Criseyde twisting to kiss him and Pandarus hovering by their sides. While the lovers talk, Pandarus the go-between retires to the chimney corner, within earshot but out of sight. Here, truly, nothing is private. The chivalric "luf talk," with the images of sovereignty and service and yielding and kneeling, expresses, in an intriguing Chaucerian way, the different structures of feeling between Troilus and Criseyde.¹⁴ So too are the references to secrecy, to a private realm opposed to the public.¹⁵

Unlike Troilus, Criseyde does not fall in love "sodeynly" (II 673). Many critics have pointed out that Chaucer has presented Criseyde as a conventional courtly lady, yet one with a reasoning ability and sophisticated life experience (Delany 29-46; Hanning 120-37; Aers "Criseyde" 177-200). To make up her mind, she argues in an elaborately formal way with herself "allone, withouten any compaignye" in the closet: reasons for loving Troilus (II 703-931), reasons for leaving Troy (IV 1528-95), and finally reasons for not returning to Troy (V 689-707, 1023-29). She reasons against the love

¹⁴ Derek Pearsall in his "Criseyde's Choices" (17-29) gives a very good analysis of Criseyde's state of mind as she debates Pandarus's offer of Troilus, and of the ways in which she attempts to do as she pleases, but all the while deluding herself into believing that she has yielded to outside pressure.

¹⁵ B. A. Windeatt discusses the role of privacy and secrecy in *Troilus* as compared to *the Filostrato* and argues that Chaucer's displacement of the story back to a courtly, rather than urban, setting imposes a completely different dynamic of public and private, most notably in the need for self-identity along the lines of certain codes of sexuality ("*Love that Oughte Ben Secree*" 116-31). See also Stephen Knight's historicizing conception (which echoes Windeatt's) of the tension between public and private worlds which Chaucer so remarkably inscribes into his romance ("*Troilus and Criseyde*" 32-65). In this essay, I have not the space to provide the useful comparison with Boccaccio's text in relation to the present argument, but it is worth noting how Chaucer deliberately turns Boccaccio's setting into a courtly, aristocratic one. Similarly, it is significant that Chaucer deliberately calls our attention to Criseyde's practical character, her social situation, and her subversion of the courtiers' "luf talk," a central part of Chaucer's transformation of Boccaccio's heroine.

affair, arguing that she is a free woman (II 771), uneager for a new husband who might be either “ful of jalousie,/Or maisterfull, or loven novelrie” (II 755-56). Certainly, she will not put her safety in Troy in jeopardy and enthrall her liberty (II 772-73). She worries about the stormy life of love (II 778-84), the wicked tongues of people (II 785-86), and the fickleness of men’s love (II 787-91). She knows well that their love affair can only last in the ideal chivalric world of Troy and that their joy is transient (“O brotel wele of mannes joie unstable!/ . . . /Either he woot that thow, joie, art mutable,/Or woot it nought . . . ” III 820-23). Criseyde’s soliloquy weighing the pros and cons of becoming Troilus’s lover expresses a strong vein of cool, socially nuanced, and skillfully effaced self-appreciation. Chaucer here underlines the role of privacy and secrecy in the tale. The tension between public and private worlds, that is, the drag of the dynamic of public and private, is most notable in Criseyde’s need to attain her self-identity in lines with the medieval codes of sexuality. When she comments on the idea of remarriage, she says:

I am my owene woman, wel at ese,
 I thank it God, as after myn estat,
 Right yong, and stoned unteyd in lusty leese,
 Wtihouten jalousie or swich debat:
 Shal noon housbonde seyn to me “check mat!” (II 750-54)

Criseyde is practical and reasonable enough to understand that there is no true happiness in this world (“Ther is no verray weele in this world here.” III 836), a concept an ideal courtly lover like Troilus will not be able to grasp until death. The ideal chivalric knight “sodeynly” (I 209) falls in love with Criseyde at the whim of the God of love, yet the practical worldly woman contemplates the question “to love or not to love” at the whim of the God of Fortune. In the consummation scene in Book III where Troilus is in bed at last with Criseyde, Criseyde’s reply to Troilus’s demand that she yield to him: “Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere,/Ben yold, ywis, I were now nought here!” (III 1210-11) lays bare a profound, negative reaction to Troilus’s execution of his “courtly” love: “Now be ye kaught, now is ther but we tweyne!/Now yeldeth yow, for other bote is non! (III 1206-08). Thus, when Criseyde responds to Diomedes’s overtures in the Greek camp, the phrase reappears and resonates with irony: “I say nat therefore that I wol yow love,/N’y say nat nay;” (V 1002-03). Her words are even more open-ended

than her earlier reply to Troilus's demand. Such a discourse of love significantly opens up or generates debate about the ideals of "courtly love." As McGerr aptly points out, her participation in the wars of words that the men around her play is defensive: as the narrator says of Criseyde's first letter to Troilus, "Al covered she the wordes under sheld" (II 1327) (McGerr 190). In her letter (II 1197-1225), she informs Troilus that she will not "make hirselves bounde/In love," and in Book III, 169-72, she again reminds Troilus of this in a superb speech on love. Away from the conventional discourse of courtly love, Criseyde voices her real and justifiable "entente." In her final letter to Troilus, Criseyde talks about her most unhappy situation in the Greek camp with the aim of manipulating the sympathies of the ideal courtly lover she has betrayed:

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

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

Illicit love is perfectly compatible with gregarious familiarity, as a social game played in the midst of a group. Criseyde and Troilus in Pandarus' house are given privacy but *not* left alone in the private bedchamber. They must seek *pryvetee* in public. The lovers continue to meet secretly for at least three years, moving their trysts to Criseyde's house as well. Chaucer gives no evidence that their love affair is ever suspected. Now comes the part that modern readers find most interesting: the rules of the game of love in medieval courtly romance. The most mesmerizing rule of the game of love was discretion. Criseyde and Troilus' love is no exception.

They live within an invisible enclosure, where they construct, in the midst of a crowd of families, a more private place, a tragic solitude, constantly threatened by jealous rivals. Like those unhappy in love, they must be patient and discreet in order to merit its joy while avoiding gossip. Their illicit love creates intimacy and enforces silence, obliging the lovers to communicate by means of signs; they make gestures, exchange glances, wear particular emblems and colors. Among others they must always lie, or keep quiet, silence is the law of love.

Nicholas's secrecy in *The Miller's Tale* brings to light, too, Chaucer's idea of privacy and its complexities. The narrator stresses that Nicholas's situation is isolated, "Allone, withouten any compaignye" (I. 3204). The Miller advises the Reeve in the prologue to the tale, "An housbonde shal nat been inquistyf/Of Goddes pryvetee, nor of his wyf" (I 3164-65). The Miller uses the phrase "Goddes pryvetee" twice more in the tale: first, in John's nervous apostrophe to St. Frideswyth after he has been advised of Nicholas's plight (I. 3454); and then in Nicholas's caution to John while telling him about the impending flood (I. 3558). The word "pryvetee" and its variants, such as "pryvely," is a leitmotif through the tale.¹⁶ It refers to secret communications, such as Alison's advice to Nicholas to be secretive around John (I. 3295) and John's telling Alison about the plan with the tubs, a "pryvetee" of which "she was war, and knew it bet than he" (I. 3603-4). Actions in *The Miller's Tale* are deliberately set within enclosed places. The window heightens this fact. William Woods explains that the spatial setting of the tale is concentric in that John's house is the locus of the tale's action (166). The house is John's private property and it contains as well as constructs property and privacy.¹⁷ Similarly, Nicholas's room in John's house,

¹⁶ Useful studies include Kathryn Walls, "The Significance of 'arca' and 'Goddes pryvetee' in 'The Miller's Tale'," *Notes and Queries* 42(1991): 24-26; D. Thomas Hanks, "'Goddes pryvetee' and Chaucer's Miller's Tale," *Christianity and Literature* 33(1984): 7-12; Thomas J. Farrell, "Privacy and the boundaries of fabliau in the *Miller's Tale*," *ELH* 55(1989): 773-95. See also E. D. Blodgett, "Chaucerian *pryvetee* and the opposition to time," *Speculum* 51(1976): 477-93, and Robert W. Hanning, "Telling the private parts: 'pryvetee' and poetry in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*," in *The Idea of Medieval Literature*, ed. James M. Dean and Christian K. Zacher (Newark, 1992), 108-25. Louise M. Bishop argues that the tale plays with the concept of bodily knowledge by alluding to divine genitalia in its varied intellectual and bodily meanings with purposeful punning on "secret" and "private parts" ("*Of Goddes pryvetee nor of his wyf*" 231-46).

¹⁷ While Louise Bishop's interpretation of God's *privatee* in the *Miller's Tale* has a theological basis, William Wood's has a psychological basis. Though their topics are complementary to mine, both lead to rather different conclusions.

high and solitary, containing his books and instruments of astrology, is appropriate for one craving for knowledge of God's *pryvetee* and the secrets of *derne love* (I. 3200) for his landlord's young wife. Nicholas wishes to get as close as possible to his landlord's most private possession, his wife, so that "She sholde slegen in his arm al nyght,/For this was the dear and hire also" (I. 3406-7). Nicholas is a student who could have lived in university dorms where he would have had little privacy but he chooses to rent a room in the carpenter's house, a room with relatively more privacy. In John's house, visions of God's *pryvetee* are conceived in Nicholas's little solitary room upstairs, and then staged in the public space over the main room downstairs by John's unfortunate fall with his tub all alone by himself. The private vision of God's divine backside (or the heavenly paradise), shared first in the little room of Nicholas, then in the bedroom of Alisoun, becomes a public vision when the villagers gape up at John's tubs.

In order to acquire privacy with Alisoun, Nicholas engages John's propensity to be inquisitive. Thus John is urged to *know* his boarder's *pryvetee*. But in his effort to know, John orders his knave to act *prively*, by peering deeply into Nicholas's privacy. Absolon decides that he shall "ful pryvely knocken at wyndowe" (I. 3676), then he is provided with an opportunity to kiss Alisoun in a *pryvee* place; and he returns to greet Nicholas with a coulter when "out his ers he putteh pryvely" (I. 3802). In order to fulfill his desire, Nicholas encloses himself within the private room, physically and psychologically. He stocks the room with food and water and cuts out any attempt from the outside to reach him. He thus uses his room as a "cloister" in the sense of "a place of solitude." However, whereas the medieval religious retreat also functioned as an indication of a "desire to renounce the world," as portrayed, for instance, in relation to recluses like St. Jerome, Nicholas uses his act of retreating to lure others to susceptibility. In the tale, the attraction of isolation and privacy for Nicholas is destabilized by another attraction. He rents a room in John's house not because he needs a private place as a scholar's study room, but as a cover for his illicit love with Alisoun. The use of a retreat not as the enclosure of a celibate scholar, who insists on clear boundaries between his "inside" world and the outside one, but as the unruly play of a lecher who aims to fornicate with a member of that outside world, is indeed obscene. Such use of household space illustrates Chaucer's idea of privacy; when Nicholas is physically alone in the room,

Alisoun is already there as a dominant presence in his mind even before the sexual liaison takes place between them.

The relations between Nicholas and John underscore, too, Chaucer's idea of privacy and its complexities. Nicholas's "retreat" arouses John's curiosity and desire to know his *pryvetee*. John uses every possible means to invade his tenant's space, to check on him, to take him "out of his studying" (I. 3467), and to uncover his secrets. In medieval culture, Georges Duby points out, "the most important sign of appropriation and privacy was not the banner, but the barrier, the enclosure, the hedge" (ix-xiii, x). The barrier between the inside and outside of the scholar's room is not hermetic; there is a hole in the wall, the narrator tells us, that is bigger than a mouse, indeed, big enough for a cat who "was wont in for to crepe" (I.3441). So John's knave can use the hole to look "in ful depe./And at the laste he hadde of hym a sight" (I. 3442-43). When John and his servant knock the door down from the outside, Nicholas's "inside" world, however, remains intact. Nicholas uses his body as a house. He shuts himself within, seemingly disconnected from the outside world, lying "as stille as stoon" (I. 3472). The stone image denotes Nicholas's body as a tightly bound space. In addition, Nicholas denies access to his inside through the holes of his eyes. He avoids eye contact by keeping his eyes "evere caped upward into the air" (I.3473). Unlike John, Nicholas does not labor physically, but mentally. As a scholar, who has been trained to acquire knowledge stored in the rooms of his brain, he is a master in managing his most private space, his mind. This type of spacing, which makes available both living space and mental space, becomes the imagined site of one's privacy so prevalent in Chaucer's work, as discussed earlier. Nicholas's studio/body may represent the setting in which the dynamics of his inner world are played out and within which the idea of privacy emerges and struggles to transform itself into *loci* of solitude.

The fact that access to what is innermost and most private leads to a moment of public exposure does not mean that privacy in this tale is an illusion. The spatial configuration subsequent to John's ejection indicates that privacy, as the boundary between one individual and others, cannot break down completely. At the end of the tale, John's surrounding neighbors act as "visible" walls of the house that have ceased to contain him. None of the characters manages to keep his lover *pryvely* as he wishes; John's rest with Alisoun is disturbed by the singing of Absolon; Nicholas's play with her is

similarly disrupted by Absolon's wooing; Absolon, planning "Ful pryvely to knocken at wyndowe" (I. 3673), finds Alisoun "not being alone" with surprise, jealousy and rage. No one attains solitary bliss in the tale. Here we find the mundane given devotional resonance. Private rooms were common in the later medieval English household, but in Chaucer's work their use as *loci* of one's privacy suggests their function went beyond mere display of the separate spheres of men and women's lives in the fourteenth century. All three men in the tale receive their punishment at the lowest level of the lord's house, at the periphery between the private space of one's bedroom and the public space of John's household.

In Chaucer's work, the relation between the need to conceal what is private and the need to make what is private public is not one of a tension between contraries. Instead these seeming contraries are co-implicated. The more one progresses towards the inside, that is, towards what is private, the more one finds oneself confronted with what is alien and outside. The very distinction between what is private and what is public, what underpins the impulse to conceal and what calls for the impulse to reveal, is undone in a "communal entertainment" so that one becomes part of the other. Medieval men and women sought out their privacy in public. The mistaken assertion that the idea of privacy was absent in medieval society perhaps derives from our modern assumption that privacy is individual and unconditional, rather than communal and relative. Understood in terms of Chaucer's idea of *pryvetee* rather than in terms of the modern concepts of isolation and individuality, the love stories of Criseyde and Troilus and of John and Alisoun portray them as male and female trapped in their own social spheres, behind the walls of their own constricted understanding of self and privacy. Their love imposes the structure of feelings upon the community; lovers are obliged to live in secret solitude, as if there were nothing between them. In these refined relations between male and female, in the subtlety of this difficult ordeal of discretion and silence, may have been sown the first seeds of what would become intimacy in the modern sense. Reading Chaucer's major characters as constrained and isolated by the social norms of their time allows us to evaluate their private and public actions and choices within the context of the social light in which Chaucer so deliberately placed them.

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