

DANNER, MICHELLE E., M.A. *Game of Love: Chess and Agency in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*. (2016)
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Chaucerian women have long been the subject of scholarly fascination. However, while some of Chaucer's principle women have been the subject of a wide variety of scholarly perspectives, others have received less consideration, being locked into the same examinations of certain themes and critical viewpoints. Chaucer's tragic romantic heroine, Criseyde, is rarely considered in terms of agency and influence. Her literary reputation as the epitome of bad lovers cripples her potential as an active figure in charge of her own fate. However, when examined outside of generic expectations, Criseyde's situation and the reasoning behind her maneuvers and decisions becomes clearer, and, thus, she may be viewed as less culpable. The game of chess, with its emphasis on learnable skills and effective strategy, illuminates more of the nuance that Chaucer included Criseyde's action in the tragic poem. When read through the lens of chess strategy—where chess represents not only romantic courtship but more importantly violent war—Criseyde's trajectory can be better understood as active and invested in her own survival and, more importantly, devoted to a cause entirely different than love. Criseyde is then freed from the negative stereotypes of women's agency achieved only through their duplicitous cunning. Chess, as a game accessible to both men and women, thus presents a new avenue then for examining agency in medieval women, both in literature and in medieval culture and society.

DANNER, MICHELLE E., M.A. She will Suffer no Grates: Spatial Tensions in Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure*. (2016)
Directed by Dr. Michelle Dowd 30 pp.

Modern readers occasionally find it difficult to accept that the ending of Margaret Cavendish's drama, *The Convent of Pleasure*, is indeed a "happy" one. The female-only convent that Lady Happy operated throughout the play is suddenly dissolved, given to a nearby fool, and the fates of the convent's residents are left entirely unknown. Most disturbingly, Lady Happy, who was vocal and passionate throughout the play, turns suddenly quiet and stilted upon marriage. This sudden return to patriarchy and the heteronormative status-quo can seem understandably shocking or upsetting to modern readers. What seems to have not been noted, however, is that Cavendish leaves numerous hints to this exact return to patriarchal ideals. Lady Happy's convent exists as both a private convent and a domestic household; early modern English societies had specific expectations about both of those social spaces, and resistance to those expectations could lead to intense personal and communal anxieties. Such tensions threaten personal livelihood and social stability and therefore must be resolved by the end of the play to prevent upheaval and ultimately chaos. Cavendish can only restore order by returning all of the spaces involved to the status-quo. To do so, she must convert the Convent into an acceptable domestic household, subject to patriarchal norms through the introduction of masculine performance.

GAME OF LOVE: CHESS AND AGENCY IN
CHAUCER'S *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*
AND
SHE WILL SUFFER NO GRATES: SPATIAL TENSIONS IN
CAVENDISH'S *THE CONVENT OF PLEASURE*

by

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GAME OF LOVE: CHESS AND AGENCY IN CHAUCER'S

TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

Chaucerian women have long been the subject of scholarly fascination, particularly when questions of medieval agency and power are brought into consideration. However, while some of Chaucer's principle women have been the subject of a wide variety of scholarly perspectives,¹ others have received less consideration, being locked into the same examinations of certain themes and critical viewpoints. In particular, Chaucer's tragic romantic heroine, Criseyde, is rarely considered in terms of agency and influence; indeed, scholars who do include her in their examinations of medieval literary women tend to be careful to downplay her "cruel" choices: she betrayed the "true" lover, Troilus.² Criseyde's literary reputation as the epitome of bad lovers cripples her status as an active, powerful female figure in charge of her own fate because Criseyde made the worst of all possible choices. However, when examined outside of generic, especially romantic, expectations, Criseyde's situation and the reasoning behind her maneuvers and decisions becomes clearer, and, thus, she may be viewed as less culpable. The game of chess, with its emphasis on learnable skills and effective strategy, was a popular literary motif both before and during Chaucer's career; when applied to *Troilus and Criseyde*, chess illuminates more of the nuances

¹ While hardly exhaustive, Elaine Tuttle Hansen's "The Power of Silence: the Case of the Clerk's Griselda" and Katherine Jacobs' "Mate or Mother: Positioning Criseyde among Chaucer's Widows" are excellent examples of such discussions of women's (and widows) power.

² For example, Jacobs' study spends only a little time establishing Criseyde within the literary tradition, and Chaucer's playing thereof, of the widow. She is also careful to keep most of her discussion of Criseyde focused on the early action, negating questions of Criseyde's "goodness" with a single, penultimate paragraph that only casually mentions Criseyde's betrayal.

that Chaucer included in his tragic poem. When read through the lens of chess strategy—where chess represents not only romantic courtship but more importantly violent war—Criseyde’s trajectory can be better understood as active and invested in her own survival and, more importantly, devoted to a cause entirely different than love. Moreover, by using the chess strategy lens, Criseyde is freed from the negative stereotypes of women’s agency being achieved only through their duplicitous cunning. Chess then, as a game accessible to both men and women, presents a new avenue for examining agency in medieval women, both in literature and in medieval culture and society.

Locating agency, active choices, and decision making in the lives of medieval women continues to be a crucial avenue of scholarly inquiry. Not only does this perspective undermine misconceptions about medieval gender dynamics, including women’s permitted activity and power in the home, church, and community, but it also allows for new questions and considerations regarding how power and influence express and present themselves within societies. Medieval scholars have already compiled excellent studies on various examples of women’s agency and social influence: from the home to the church to the community to the literary circle.³ Examining Criseyde’s agency through effective chess strategy will only further these examinations; as a metaphor not only for love but also for war, chess provides a lens that will allow scholars to understand the agency of medieval women on a vast, socially significant playing field. More importantly, the representation of chess play in the text further undermines some of the negative stereotypes associated with

³ Among these studies are Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowalski’s essay collections *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* and *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, as well as Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor’s collection *Women, the Book, and the Worldly*.

active women. As Joan Ferrante notes, while historical medieval women's agency is viewed often as positive and socially significant, literary women's agency tends to be regarded as devious or cunning. Women, particularly in romances, achieve agency only through covert manipulation: through words, deeds, or, as the last resort, magic (216).⁴ For these women, even the good results they can occasionally achieve become questionable through their deceptive, potentially evil means. The metaphor of chess, however, presents more of an unbiased field to examine women's agency. While chess is not without its own social stigmas in the Middle Ages, as a game that is acceptable for both men and women to play, and as a game that demands a high level of logical intelligence, chess allows for Criseyde's activity and personal decisions to be viewed less as cunning and more as cautious. Coupled with the game's dual symbolism of love and war, chess presents a lens through which Criseyde can finally be seen outside the limiting restraints of a courtly lover as an active, pragmatic character focused on survival.

Before examining Criseyde's agency through chess strategy, we must first have a brief overview of how chess operated both as a social game and literary device in the Middle Ages. As a physical game, chess had two, almost counter-intuitive reputations. On the one hand, it was highly prized in certain social spheres, specifically the nobility and the gentry. It was an educational, intellectual tool and was considered by some royal courts to be one of the seven knightly skills (Bubczyk 26). It was commonly added to the education of aristocratic children, including wards placed in other royal courts, as it was intellectually

⁴ Ferrante, Joan. "Public Postures and Private Maneuvers: Roles Medieval Women Play." *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1988. 213-229. Print.

stimulating and both demanded and cultivated strategy and logic (Orme 52-53). Contrary to most assumptions, chess was not limited to boys' education; it was also included in noble and gentry girls' education, allowing young women access to skills that demanded and heightened intellectual prowess (54-55).⁵ Such expectations also made the chess board a safe space for interaction and intellectual competition between the sexes (Taylor, "Chess" 299). The quiet, intense mental acuity of chess play allowed men and women to gather socially and engage in entertainment in a way that was acceptable and, for women especially, encouraged intellectual excellence.

Of course, on the other hand, chess had something of a well-deserved; nefarious reputation. Among some of the aristocracy but especially among the clergy, chess was considered intensely threatening. In the first place, chess did not always enjoy the stable rules and regulations that modern players now follow. Chess rules and mechanics were far more fluid in the Middle Ages, and many of the regional rules allowed for gambling in chess, which introduced the threat of significant economic loss to the game (Taylor, "Chess" 306; Adams "Pawn" 127-130). The intensity of the game also worried chess detractors. Clergymen in particular were concerned that the intense concentration of chess would drive all other thoughts from players' minds, making them incapable of leaving the board and pursuing daily life (and worship) (Bubczyk 25). Most threatening, though, was chess' ability to act as a gateway to other temptations (25-27). While the temptations of the most concern to clergy were sins such as avarice, there was also an unusual threat of carnality in chess.

⁵ Orme's section on girls' education is, unfortunately, brief due to the lack of source material on the education of girls as opposed to boys. However, he makes quite clear that there is enough material, between manuals and literary references, to safely suggest that aristocratic girls were encouraged, and in many ways expected, to acquire proficiency in the same skills as their male counterparts. Such skills included games.

Chess, in addition to being a game of mental strategy, is a game of intimacy and violence, of attrition and conquest. Playing it effectively involves slowly wearing down the opponent, backing them into corners as their defenses are steadily chipped away, and then forcing the opponent to topple at last in submission. Especially when played against an opponent of the opposite gender, chess is a game of intimate conquest—of knowing the opponent better than themselves, of steering them into positions already foreseen, and forcing them to submit. Used as it was, then, as a metaphor for courtly love, chess is highly erotic, sexual in both the physical and mental intimacy, and dangerous in its overtones of total destruction and conquest.

Authors used every aspect of the game's contentious reputation when they applied the chess motif to their literary works. Depictions of chess as instructional, with long extended metaphors attached to its pieces; as nefarious and financially decimating; and as romantic and passionate all had their place with medieval literature—occasionally within the same literary piece. More importantly, however, in each of these literary showcases, medieval writers allowed women as well as men to engage in all forms of chess play. In *Le Jeu des esches de la dame moralis*,⁶ for example, a woman engages with the Devil at the chess board, vying for her soul and eternal salvation. Each of their pieces corresponds to virtues or vices and the entire ordeal becomes an extended educational metaphor for personal salvation and holy behavior (Juel 89-91). In other literary texts, the romantic and economic overtones of chess tend to be highlighted. In each of *Les Eschez d'Amours*, *Garin de Montglane*,

⁶ A single manuscript, (Ms. Add. 15820) can be found in the British Museum. It is dated as an end of the fifteenth century text, but little else is known about its author or origins.

and *Huon de Bordeaux*,⁷ men and women meet across the board for hardly-subtle amorous encounters. Interestingly enough, the women are often the players with skilled advantages and are thoroughly able to decimate the men. The lady of *Les Eschez*, however, is the only female player to do so; although her skills are greater than Huon's, the king's daughter, for example, who plays against him ends up throwing their game for the sake of her affection for Huon (Adams "Pawn" 130-131). She, like her female counterpart in *Garin*, is more concerned with participating in the economic side of the game, where riches and women's bodies are put up as stakes for the romantic heroes (129-130). Although these are only a small selection of literary examples of chess, the crucial point to recognize is that in each of these examples, there is an open allowance of female intelligence and dominance. Whether the outcome is love or salvation, romance or sex, women are allowed to be excellent chess players, therefore highlighting a literary and social acceptance of female power, intelligence, and excellence in the Middle Ages. When viewing Criseyde as an effective chess player, then, her actions and decisions become less connected to bad loving and more connected to strategic prowess. She wields the same types of power at the chess board as she does in her social sphere, opening up her range of movement and revealing the methodology behind her decisions. Such a transfer, however, does complicate social reactions to her. Women are permitted intellectual and strategic excellence on the board, but the board is supposed to

⁷ *Les Eschez d'Amours* is a French text of unknown authorship that survives in several manuscripts, the longest being the Dreden Oc. 66. In this long allegorical piece, the narrator plays a bumbling game against his lady, where he loses. The pieces have direct corresponding virtues and tactics found in courtly love. *Garin de Montglane* is a late medieval French text. The hero Garin plays Charlemagne, who proposes the following stakes: Garin will win Charlemagne's kingdom and wife if he wins, but Garin will lose his head if he loses. While Garin wins, he does not accept the prize. *The Boke of Duke Huon of Bordeaux* is a sixteenth century translation of the fourteenth century French text *Huon de Bordeaux*, translated by Lord Berner. Huon, the hero, plays against the emperor's daughter. Again the emperor arranges the stakes: if Huon wins, he may sleep with the daughter, but if he loses, he will die. Although she is a better player than Huon, the daughter is so infatuated with him that she throws the match.

remain a separate sphere from the social sphere, from “reality.” In transferring that gaming prowess from the chess board to her social situation, Criseyde blurs the supposed boundaries of the game space and the real space, violating Troy’s patriarchal ideas about acceptable women’s power.

Chaucer already has a reputation for manipulating the various implications of chess and chess metaphors. He overtly references chess only a handful of times, most famously in his early dream-vision *The Book of the Duchess*. In his dream-elegy for Blanche, the recently deceased wife of John of Gaunt, Chaucer has the Black Knight narrate his fateful game of chess against Fortune. This moment has already received quite a bit of scholarly attention, although it is only fairly recently that the apparent confusion of the chess metaphor has been thoroughly challenged.⁸ Both Jenny Adams and Mark Taylor effectively demonstrated that through the detailed references in the Black Knight’s game, Chaucer shows not only a mechanical mastery of chess but also an intimate understanding of chess’ various uses, reputations, and risks, including economic and personal loss (Adams, “Pawn”; Taylor “Chess”). Most recently, Nora Corrigan notes that in *The Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer also plays with the fluidity of the chess metaphor, particularly in how it can turn characters into players and pieces, sometimes simultaneously; such is the case with the Black Knight. He is figured as Fortune’s opponent as well as her pawn to manipulate through a game played

⁸ In particular, Margaret Connolly, Guillemette Bolen, and Paul Beckman Taylor have suggested *The Book of the Duchess*’ chess match is confused. Connolly in “Chess and Chaucer” (*The Chaucer Review*, 1994) argues that Chaucer overestimates the value of the queen in the game, and that the correlation between the Black Knight/White and Blanche/John of Gaunt does not operate effectively. The more Chaucer pushes it, the more the metaphor unravels until entirely impractical. Although their two-part article was initially a response to Connolly’s study, Bolens and Beckman Taylor still suggest that the opening allegory is confused, albeit the confusion is intentional on Chaucer’s part, situating the game as part of a larger metaphor centering time and grieving (“Chess” and “Game” respectively).

previously: his courtship with White. Fortune plays the Black Knight against White and her mostly silent resistance (155). Considering she is dead at the time of retelling, the actual interaction between the Black Knight and White is limited in the poem. It is, however, significant to recognize the Black Knight and White as opponents, as well as pieces, across the board:

With hool herte I gan hire beseche
 That she wolde be my lady swete;...
 And wan I had my tale al y-doo,
 God wot, she acounted nat a stree
 Of al my tale, so thoghte me.
 To telle shortly ryght as hyt ys,
 Trewely hir answeere hyt was this—
 I kan not now wel counterfete
 Hire wordes, but this was the grete
 Of al hire answeere: she sayd ‘Nay’
 (1224-1243)⁹

The Black Knight approaches White as her lover, her opponent across the chess board, and she trounces him with a singular utterance. Unskilled as he is, he cannot win against her in their match. Although he cannot repeat the details of her response, it is clear that White is entirely unimpressed with him as both a lover and an opponent; his strategy of a heartfelt plea is unmoving. Of course, this is not their only meeting, merely their first. When the Black Knight encounters her a second time, he is able to win her. A year separates these two matches, and during that time the Black Knight must have learned some additional strategy to combat White’s silent resistance. He describes himself prior to their meeting as “ryght yonge, soth to say,/And ful grete need I hadde to lerne” (1090-1091). Obviously he is

⁹ Textual references to Chaucer’s *The Book of the Duchess* are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, third edition, edited by Larry D. Benson, published in 1987.

unskilled in the game of love and effective strategies of play. In the time between their meetings, though, the Black Knight could have studied strategies or *jeopardies*, manuscript chess problems designed for skill acquisition and cheating. Armed thusly, he is able to confront White again, where “My lady yaf me al hooly/The noble yifte of hir mercy.”(1269-1270) The Black Knight is now able to play and best her, thereby winning her love.

By including their actual encounter, however brief, Chaucer shows that the Black Knight *is* a chess player pitted against White. By extension, this also allows White to occupy the dual spaces of player and piece; it also permits her to showcase momentary excellence as she bests the ineffective player in their first match. Through narrating their courtship, the Black Knight acknowledges his matches with White, where he played (at the direction of Fortune) White for her love and her body. It is no surprise, then, that their names are opposing colors of the board. Chaucer then recognized early on in his literary career the slipperiness of chess, as both a game and a literary device, and the roles of pieces and players.

Corrigan also elaborates on the importance of Chaucer’s exploitation of the multifarious, fluid nature of chess in her study chess motifs in “The Knight’s Tale.” Her study is particularly important since, although “The Knight’s Tale” has received scholarship regarding games, the implications of examining it through the lens of chess strategy have not yet been explored in depth. Although no overt chess game appears in the text, Corrigan notes the close parallels between chess and the tournament. In “The Knight’s Tale,” however, there is no slippage among the mortals between chess piece and chess player. Arcite and Palamon are only ever pieces pushed about by the unseen gods that intervene in their affairs. A similar lack of slippage, although not a total absence, exists in *Troilus and*

Criseyde, where Criseyde is, for the most part, a player in charge of her own survival. It is society that, momentarily, determines her actions, but she is never a piece shuffled around by gods and fate, as Arcite and Palamon are. In his final major work, then, Chaucer uses chess to highlight chance, agency, and gameplay not just at the board but also in the “real” world (Corrigan 151-157). He pushes the fluidity of the chess metaphor past the established boundaries of the chess board and gaming sphere, thereby showing how the game space affects the social space. Especially when the game is played for different, or entirely invisible, reasons, this collapsing of the game space and the social “real world” space can have tremendous effects on the participants.

Since *Troilus and Criseyde* is the only other Chaucerian work that overtly references chess, albeit briefly in Book 2, Corrigan’s examination of chess motifs in “The Knight’s Tale” has a profound effect on examining chess metaphors in his tragic poem. In a poem already replete with gaming discourse and hyper-aware of the nature of exchange both on the board and in the larger social sphere (Adams, “Anxieties” 95-96), we can extend the chess motif outwards from Criseyde’s cry of “Chek mat” to the rest of the poem; if “The Knight’s Tale” can be read through the chess lens, where human players are transformed into pieces controlled by unseen immortal players, then the chess motif can also be extended in new ways in *Troilus and Criseyde*. I have already discussed that Chaucer had an intense interest in chess mechanics and motifs throughout his literary career. In the middle of that literary career, there is the potential another type of chess motif. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer experiments specifically with chess strategy, using Criseyde and her tenuous relationship not only with Troilus and Pandarus but also with the city of Troy itself to explore the literary and social potential of chess strategy. Unlike chess mechanics or

metaphors, chess strategy allows for the revelation of character motivations and applies pressure on generic expectations. By using chess strategy, Chaucer not only allows Criseyde's actions and decisions to be viewed outside of the expectations of the romantic heroine, but he also plays with what Jenny Adams elsewhere calls the "fuzzy bounds" of chess as a space and activity, exploring ways that games "effect the players themselves and the observers around it" (Adams, "Colonizing" 128).

The first book of *Troilus and Criseyde* opens with a showcase of skills directly related to chess, even though Chaucer does not invoke the game specifically. Although the rules and mechanics of the game have necessarily shifted since its earliest versions, both medieval and modern renditions of chess demand many of the same skills from successful players. Among these are foresight, long-term strategizing, risk assessment and risk acceptance. In particular, foresight, or the ability to read the board and foresee not only potential moves but also countermoves for a number of turns, is crucial. Medieval manuscript chess problems were often circulated to introduce and hone this ability to read the potentiality of the board for specific outcomes (Taylor 306-308). By the same token, the precariousness of Criseyde's situation in Troy necessitates her understanding and effectively using foresight and other chess skills, both for her success and ultimately for her survival. Her introduction lays out the threatening nature of her position:

Gret rumor gan, whan it was first aspied
 Thorough al the town, and generaly was spoken,
 That Calkas traitour fled was and allied
 With hem of Grece, and casten to be wroken
 On hym that falsly hadde his feith so broken,
 And seydes he and al his kyn at-ones
 Ben worthi for to brennen, fel and bones.

Now hadde Calkas left in this meschaunce,
 Al unwist of this false and wikked dede,
 His doughter, which that was in great penaunce,
 For of hire lif she was ful sore in drede,
 As she that nyste what was best to rede;
 For bothe widewe was she and alone
 Of any frend to whome she dorste hire mone.

(I. 85-98)

Criseyde is utterly alone in a situation where she absolutely needs support, particularly patriarchal support. Her status as a widow allows her a number of unique social privileges, including controlling her own finances and estate, managing her own affairs, and facilitating her own potential marriage prospects; her power in future courtship could be quite significant if her estate or wealth are vast (Jacobs 63, 72). However, the social status and abilities of widows were still greatly limited in the Middle Ages, especially when it came to social, legal, or physical protection. Without a husband, and now without a father, Criseyde has no named male relatives to intercede on her behalf or defend her reputation and livelihood. More importantly, the sheer depth of Calkas' betrayal prevents any intercession on her behalf by non-family members. Because of their familial connection, Criseyde is now reviled by the Trojan citizenry and sought out for punishment for her father's crime. Despite being not at all aware of Calkas' plans to desert, Criseyde is still suddenly considered a traitor and threatened with execution by fire. Troy's fury is overt enough and vocal enough that Criseyde is fully aware of the threat against her life. She also realizes that any action or more importantly inaction on her part will lead to injury or death. For one crucial moment, Criseyde is struck with body-numbing fear at the knowledge that she is marked for death.

That inaction, however, does not last long. Having witnessed the hostility of the Trojan citizenry and recognizing that she has no male relatives to rely on, Criseyde takes control of her own situation. She seeks out patriarchal protection by allying herself with the most powerful man in Troy (I 108-112). It is a risk, of course; should Hector not pity her, Criseyde could end up in the same, or even more precarious, situation. Chess always involves risk as pieces can be blocked or captured at any time and one's strategy can be undermined at any turn. If Criseyde does not attempt it, however, she will most likely be killed. Comparing the two, seeking out a male ally is a worthwhile risk. Criseyde is also careful, though, to approach Hector only when she can sway the meeting more towards her favor. Some scholars have seen Criseyde's throwing herself upon Hector's mercy as a masculine act, partly because she does so entirely of her own accord but also partly because Criseyde arguably adopts a momentary, almost knightly persona in beseeching him (Weisl 117-118). However, her decision is actually more strategic than "masculine," especially since she is careful to cultivate a particular appearance before meeting Hector. The narrator's description of her dress is deceptively simple, "In widewes habit large of samit broun,/On knees she fil biforn Ector adown" (I 109-110). Laura Hodges notes that, although brief, the narrator's description allows for a very detailed understanding of the importance of her dress (39-40). The expense and sheer volume of the sumptuous fabric highlight her upper-class status, allowing her the option of approaching Hector. The somber color and design of her dress also highlight her humility, grief, and, most importantly, loyalty. Criseyde's loyalty is what the city questions, so it is her loyalty that she frontloads in her appearance, dressing in the mourning clothes of a woman grieving her husband and remaining constant to his memory. This visage of the young, vulnerable widow secures Hector's sympathy for her and

ensures his protection over her wellbeing. More importantly, however, showcasing her status as a widow is the first step in creating the long-term strategy that Criseyde employs throughout the rest of the poem. Like any effective chess player, Criseyde decides on a pattern of behavior and action that will work in her favor as she maneuvers through her dire circumstances.

Criseyde cultivates and maintains the visage of the constant widow even after she secures Hector's patriarchal protection, using it as a long-term chess strategy to control as much of her situation as possible. After her initial meeting with Hector, she largely withdraws from society, returning to her estate and leaving only when it would be socially appropriate for her to do so (such as going to the Temple of Pallas or Pandarus' home). In both the comfort of her home and out in society, she is careful to maintain the widow's garb, augmented only slightly with changes of jewelry or hairstyle as her relationship with Troilus and her situation in Troy changes (Hodges 53. 56-57). The widow's habit, then, becomes part of her long-term strategy to maintain herself in Troy. She is careful to not let anything damage her reputation of being loyal and discreet and any decision that she makes, as shall be seen during the courtship, is heavily weighted against potential damage to her reputation.

From the beginning, then, Chaucer sets up Criseyde as an effective strategist, which is the foremost skill of a successful chess player. She uses foresight and risk assessment with apparent ease, takes necessary but reasonable risks, and shows herself capable of developing and adhering to long-term strategies. Crucially, though, Criseyde showcases these skills not as responses to a potential lover but as responses to the Trojan citizenry's outrage.

Criseyde's initial, and what will eventually be her ultimate, opponent is not a lover but

society. Unlike the traditional chess motif, where lovers play on the more private board of personal courtship and romance, Criseyde engages in a game on a vaster social sphere. This is not to say that the romantic chess motif does not occur—it most certainly does as Troilus and Pandarus court her—but that love game motif only pushes the greater social game aside for a time. It does not completely replace it. More importantly, by having Criseyde begin with engagements against society rather than love, Chaucer shows that Criseyde plays for an entirely different reason than most romantic heroines, and indeed for a different reason than Troilus or Pandarus. The king she longs to protect is not her heart or her sexual body but her life and her physical body. From the outset, Criseyde's primary goal is personal safety and survival in a city turned against her. This goal is never supplanted. By making Criseyde's primary goal survival rather than love, Chaucer allows Criseyde, and by extension other literary and historical women, a role outside of the romance: one of a social citizen concerned with social issues and one of a human with personal, individual needs. He divorces women from that singular role of the "romantic" and "sexual" conquest.

In a more traditional application of the chess motif, Troilus would be Criseyde's primary opponent across the metaphorical chess board. It would only be appropriate that, when the larger social game stepped back for a more intimate, romantic match, Troilus, as her potential courtly lover, would meet her move for move and response for response. *Troilus and Criseyde*, however, hardly operates under the traditional chess motifs; in fact, Troilus barely engages intellectually or strategically with Criseyde. Numerous scholars have noted Troilus' unusual lack of activity when it comes to the actual courtship of Criseyde; most of them attribute it to Troilus' emasculation through love. Gretchen Mieszkowski, however, rightly points out that Troilus' seemingly debilitating lovesickness is not at all

unusual in medieval romances nor was it linked with the potential feminization of otherwise epitomized masculine men (44). Some of the greatest heroes of the romantic tradition, including Lancelot, languished in their lovesickness, routinely fainting, weeping, and even occasionally suffering near-death over their passion for their lady (45-47).¹⁰ Moreover, Troilus' masculinity actually seems to be heightened by his passionate obsession with Criseyde. Once the courtship is underway, Troilus returns to his social sphere, particularly the battlefield, and performs feats of amazing prowess. He slaughters countless Greek soldiers and becomes the beloved warrior of Troy (I. 1072-1077). He returns from battle in a particularly gruesome, masculine image:

This Troilus sat on his baye steede
 Al armed, save his hed, ful richely;
 And wounded was his hors, and gan to blede,
 On which he rood a pas ful softly...
 His helm tohewen was in twenty places,
 That by a tyssew heng his bak byhynde;
 His shield todashed was with swerdes and
 Maces,
 In which men myghte many an arwe finde
 That thried hadde horn and nerf and rynde;
 And ay the peple cryde, "Here cometh oure
 Joye,

And, next his brother, holder up of Troye!"
 (II. 624-644)

In this portrait of romantic valor and masculinity, Troilus' strength and vigor are greatly magnified by his lovesickness and the potentiality of Criseyde's love. He is the living picture

¹⁰ Mieszkowski also points out that Troilus' dependency on Pandarus (which will be discussed shortly) is also not highly unusual in the romantic tradition. Romances routinely made use of an intermediary—either a handmaiden or a knight—to forward the courtship between the hero and heroine.

of Mars, god of war, and second only to Hector in terms of martial prowess and masculine strength according to the Trojan citizenry. Moreover, Troilus reacts with appropriate nobility and humility, blushing only some at the people's praise (II. 645). In these social spheres, the public and the battlefield, Troilus is the epitome of noble masculinity, and Criseyde's love is the force that allows him to thrive. Only in the privacy of his own bedroom does Troilus turn passive and languishes. This sudden change illustrates Troilus' inability to engage with Criseyde for her love. He lacks the skill, and therefore he cannot be an active participant in the game of love, although he successfully participates in the game of war.

Unlike other romantic heroes, however, Troilus is only able to navigate that shift between passive privacy and active public presence by completely relinquishing his role as Criseyde's opponent. Troilus passes his autonomy as a potential player to Pandarus, Criseyde's uncle. The moment of his gifted autonomy is overtly depicted:

“Whi frend,” quod he, “now do right as the
leste.

“But herke, Pandare, o work, for I nolde
That thow in me wendest so gret folie,
That to my lady desiren sholde
That toucheth harm or any vileyne;
For dredeles me were levere dye
Than she of me aught ells understode
But that that myghte sownen into good....

Now, Pandare, I kan no more seye,
But, thow wis, thow woost, thow maist, thow
art all
My lif, my deth, hol in thyn hond I leye.
Help now!”

(I. 1029-1054)

Troilus places the complete success—or failure—of his courtship with Criseyde in Pandarus' hands, including the right for Pandarus to direct him as he wishes. On the one hand, this is an intelligent move for Troilus. He has no experience with love, apart from mocking it relentlessly, and therefore has no skill or knowledge of how to woo Criseyde. Pandarus, as will be explored shortly, has experience with love and courtship and is therefore better equipped for the game. On the other hand, however, Troilus gives Pandarus too much freedom, essentially demoting himself to an unimportant piece on the metaphorical chess board. He fully expects Pandarus to initiate all parts of the courtship, stipulating only that Pandarus speak kindly of him and not divulge his foolishness to her. Troilus later insists that Pandarus cause no reason for Criseyde to distrust him and his intentions, but he does not provide any examples on inappropriate tactics nor does he set workable boundaries for Pandarus to operate within. Pandarus ends up with free reign, able to do as he wishes to win Criseyde's love for Troilus. He dictates the terms of the courtship and controls how the participants see each other. Relegated to the status of a malleable pawn, Troilus is all too happy to let the more “experienced” players engage in the intellectual work and reap whatever benefits Pandarus can secure for him when he wins. What he does not seem to realize, and will only learn to his own dismay, is that with Pandarus' preferred method of chess strategy, the stakes Troilus has on the board are damagingly high. He puts not only his heart in Pandarus' hands but also his life.

Pandarus then, gifted with Troilus' autonomy and with his blessing, engages with Criseyde as her primary opponent throughout most of the poem. In the same way that chess strategy illuminates Criseyde's motivations and highlights her primary goal, chess strategy—particularly its more malicious reputation and practices—clarifies Pandarus'

complicated role in the courtship and his overall intentions. While it is common in medieval romances to have an intermediary of some sort,¹¹ that character typically acts only as a go-between for the two lovers; they do not overtly force the courtship to commence or proceed forward, and they usually do not force the consummation. Pandarus, however, shows intense interest in Troilus's and Criseyde's courtship, and he is perfectly capable of and willing to manipulate them both to achieve the relationship. His intensity is, of course, necessary because of Troilus' complete inability to participate in the courtship. Unable to play the game himself, Troilus depends on Pandarus' skills as a player. Indeed, the narrator assures the audience that Pandarus has experience with this sort of engagement:

That Pandarus, for al his wise speche,
Felt ek his part of loves shotes keene,
That, koude he nevere so wel of lovyng preche,
It made his hewe a-day ful ofte greene.
So shop it that hym fil that day a teene

In love, for which in wo to bedde he wente,
And made, er it was day, ful many a wente.
(II. 57-63)

Pandarus is not just love's ally and defender—as evidenced by his earlier chastising and teasing of Troilus' behavior towards love and lovers (I. 904-935)—he is more importantly love's victim. The nature of his courtship with a nameless lady is never explicitly outlined but the result is clear enough from the description of his emotional state. Pandarus lost that match, and in losing, he (at least temporarily) lost his happiness. Unlike Troilus, Pandarus is

¹¹ Intermediaries include Guinevere in Chretien de Troyes's *Cliges* (composed circa 1176), Melior's cousin in *William of Palerne* (composed in the fourteenth century), and even Galahot to an extent in *Lancelot* (composed in the thirteenth century). Intermediaries, then, can be of either gender, occupy a range of upper social status (from knights to ladies in waiting to queens) and act with varying levels of intensity and intimacy for the sake of the love-struck.

more than aware of what is at risk when love is at play, and while Pandarus may have more experience than Troilus, that does not necessarily mean that he has more success.

Recognizing this only makes Pandarus' enthusiasm for Troilus' courtship more curious, until chess strategy, particularly gambling chess strategy, is applied. From the moment he understands Troilus' plight, Pandarus shows unusual enthusiasm: " 'A hal', quod Pandare; 'Here bygyneth game' " (I. 868). While the "game" Pandarus refers to could be his upcoming teasing at Troilus' expense, it is far more likely that Pandarus is indicating the economical and gaming nature of romance. Women's love, and by extension women's bodies, are things to be won by good players. Being a good player, though, does not necessarily demand being an honest player. Pandarus has already played the game with a woman and lost. He already knows, and has suffered loss because of, that risk, but now Troilus presents him with a unique opportunity. By giving Pandarus control, he offers Pandarus a chance to play the game without any direct benefit but also without any risk. Like a gambler with another man's money, Pandarus has nothing at stake when he engages with Criseyde: no love to earn but also no consequences to expect. He does not risk either his heart or his reputation. Freed from those constraints, Pandarus is then able to engage with Criseyde in an aggressive playing style that he is sure will be successful without worrying about any social or physical consequences. This is why he is so willing, with escalating fervor and maliciousness, to manipulate Criseyde into the position he wants. He wants to win Criseyde's love for Troilus. He does not have a reputation at stake in their match, nor does he know or care how her reputation might be damaged throughout their engagement. Indeed, Pandarus routinely threatens her reputation, both within her household and in the city at large, as a strategic tactic to best her.

Pandarus' manipulations and exploitations of Criseyde's broader, tenuous relationship with Troy serve a larger purpose. His consistent allusions to her social situation, especially to the implications of what could happen to her and to the rumors circulating about her, prevents the earlier hostile interactions between Criseyde and the Trojan citizenry from ever fully receding. The presence and influence of Trojan society, even as Criseyde engages with Pandarus and Troilus in a more intimate gaming engagement, never actually stop influencing her. Pandarus and his constant refrain—honest or dishonest—regarding the citizenry's opinions operates as a way to keep the poem from becoming completely disengaged from larger social and cultural concerns. The social sphere of the opening engagement is focused through Pandarus, with him operating as a figurehead for society during the more intimate engagement. By doing so, Criseyde is freed from the solitary role of the “romantic heroine” and is allowed broader social movement. She is not just a player in a love match; she is also a social operator, consistently, though sometimes implicitly, active on the broader cultural playing field of Trojan society which is affected by war. Her broader social movement, then, breaks the stereotype of women as only romantic creatures and reveals that they too have stakes in society that they must protect, both in times of peace and in times of conflict.

From the moment Troilus relinquishes his autonomy to him, Pandarus engages with Criseyde, “the swete fo” (I. 874). The movement of their interactions—the back and forth of Pandarus' body as he comes and goes from Criseyde's estate as well as the back and forth of their conversations—mimics the move and countermove actions of chess play. In his opening gambits, Pandarus' preferred playing style of manipulation, aggression, and outright deceit surface, but they are met and in many ways countered by Criseyde's inclination

towards effective chess strategy. Pandarus initially engages with Criseyde on her terms. He finds her at her estate, still in perfect mourning garb, listening to a young woman read with two other ladies (II. 78-84). While there may be some concern regarding whether her choice of reading material—a romance set during the siege of Thebes—matches her presentation as a grieving widow (Hayward 236), those concerns do not entirely undermine her long-term strategy of personal representation. Criseyde continues to perform the role of the modest widow. She has withdrawn from society and in both the public sphere and in the privacy of her own home, she maintains her widow's habit. It is precisely this physical image that Pandarus first seeks to unravel: "Be lat of this, and telle me how ye fare./Do wey youre barb, and shew youre face bare;/Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce,/And lat us don to May som observaunce" (II. 109-112). Pandarus starts out carefully, weaving only subtle manipulations in to his call for Criseyde to drop her widow's habit. His suggestion that she remove her garb could be read as a way of relaxing near him, a suggestion of intimacy and safety. The widow's clothing could also hinder their conversation, if it were to cover her ears or mouth. As he progresses, however, to May Day revels, it becomes clearer that he is seeking a longer term, social shift, but again he couches it in familial intimacy. They will dance, perhaps in the privacy of her own home, but they will still dance, and proper revels require she abandon the widow's habit. Mourning clothes are not appropriate for May Day. Of course, with the ladies from Criseyde's earlier reading still there, and any number of household servants about, the removal of her habit near Pandarus could signal that social shift he desires. Criseyde, recognizing this, refuses:

"I! God forbade!" quod she. "Be ye mad?
Is that a widewes lif, so God yow save?"

By God, ye maken me right soore adrad!
 Ye ben so wylde, it semeth as ye rave.
 It satte me wel bet ay in a cave
 To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves;
 Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves.”
 (II. 113-119)

Criseyde is careful to assert, first and foremost, her status as a widow, the very representation of status that Pandarus seeks to undermine. She separates herself, both physically and syntactically, from maidens and young wives, who are by far more appropriate May Day revelers, and even suggests a more respectable location for herself to spend the celebrations. Cloistering herself and contemplating saint lives is an acceptable activity for her as a widow in May—not a *required* activity, of course, but more respectable for her social, and carefully cultivated, position. Criseyde has already separated herself from her former social sphere, making no efforts to reclaim or indulge in society; maintaining that separation and that image of the modest, dutiful widow is part of her long-term chess strategy. Engaging again with the greater society, she realizes, would not only unravel her strategy but it would also threaten her still tenuous position in Troy. The very idea of her undermining her widowhood, as Pandarus suggests, understandably terrifies her. So she suggests, perhaps playfully but seriously, a better, even more secluded place for herself. Refusing to be baited then, Criseyde returns Pandarus less than benevolent request back on him. She meets chess move for chess move, blocking his attempt to push into her side of the board.

Pandarus is by no means deterred, however, only momentarily “distracted.” He allows Criseyde to steer the conversation towards Hector, but then he takes control of it to bolster Criseyde’s image of Troilus with moral fiber and martial prowess. Soon enough though, Pandarus returns to the earlier topic of Criseyde dancing: “But yet, I say, ariseth, lat

us daunce,/And cast youre widewes habit to mischaunce!/What list yow thus youreself to disfigure,/Sith yow is tid thus fair an aventure” (II. 221-224). Perhaps hoping to startle Criseyde into a different response, Pandarus waits until she is thoroughly satisfied with other stories before broaching breaking her widow’s habit again. This time, though, Pandarus adds more subversive suggestions to the command. In particular, his gesture towards her physical beauty and potential vanity—that the widow’s habit has robbed her of some of her former beauty, even permanently altered here—is a manipulative tactic. Pandarus expects Criseyde to find the suggestion that, young as she is, she has lost her allure and physical charm appalling. Physical beauty, he assumes, is a woman’s primary concern and he assumes that by questioning it, he will be able to convince Criseyde to throw off her widow’s habit, even just for a moment with him. With her having already gambled with the lack of habit in privacy, it will then be easier for him to convince her to set it aside entirely for Troilus. Criseyde, however, does not respond as he anticipates. In fact, she hardly responds at all. Criseyde asks only what he means by the thought. Pandarus already knows that the claim is untrue; Troilus’ attraction was first drawn by Criseyde’s garb in Pallas’ temple. From this moment, Pandarus begins to realize that he needs to engage Criseyde more carefully:

Than thought he thus: “If I my tale endite
 Aught harde, or make a process any whyle,
 She shal no savour have therein but lite,
 And trowe I wolde hire in my wil bigyle;
 For tender wittes wenen al be wyle
 Theras thei kan nought pleyntyly understonde;
 Forthi hire wit to serven wol I fonde”—
 (II. 267-273)

Criseyde will not fall for Pandarus' wiles without a little more cleverness on Pandarus' part. Thus far, he has been expecting her to be compliant and demure; he has found her instead to be resistant, playfully perhaps but still unwilling to bend. Here Pandarus suggests that the reason behind his need for more creative tactics, and soon more aggression, is because of Criseyde's "feeble" female mind. He needs to "match" his words and arguments to her intellectual level. In actuality, however, Criseyde is the far more efficient player. Having already established how well Criseyde reads the situation set before her, how invested she is in her own safety within Troy, and how well she can match Pandarus' initial arguments, it stands to reason that Criseyde will be able to match Pandarus move for move, if he does not change his strategy to "suit" her level. Thus far, Criseyde has led Pandarus just as much as Pandarus has tried to lead her. She has maintained a level board for herself, responding to Pandarus' suggestions and wiles with such appropriateness that she gives up very little room to him. An efficient chess player, she stands her ground through her insistence on the propriety of her status and her calm questioning.

So far blocked on the board, Pandarus initiates the first of several, increasingly aggressive and manipulative moves to try and force Criseyde into giving up her defense. To start, he capitalizes on the ultimate symptom of traditional lovesickness: a wasting death that can only be alleviated by the affection and body of the woman in question. Pandarus, however, adds a crucial consequence to the outcome of Criseyde's unwillingness to return Troilus' love: "But if ye late hym deyen, I wol sterve—/Have here my trouthe, nece, I nyl nat lyen—/Al sholde I with this knyf my throte kerve" (II. 323-326). Not only will Criseyde be responsible for Troilus' death but she will also be responsible for Pandarus' suicide if she does not grant Troilus her "friendly cheere" (II. 332). Troilus is such a wonderful, noble

gentleman, and a “dear” friend of Pandarus, that he claims to be compelled to join Troilus in death because he could not bear seeing Troilus die of lover’s misery. Moreover, Pandarus warns her that her physical appearance may not be enough to save her a second time; with the blood of two “innocents” on her hands, neither Criseyde’s beauty nor her carefully crafted and maintained widowhood will protect her. Pandarus may not be able to convince her to remove her widow’s garb, but he knows that the death of an uncle and a beloved son of Troy will be more than enough to undermine the protections that the widow’s habit has thus far afforded her. Criseyde recognizes this, and more, as well: “And if this man sle here hymself—allas!—/In my presence, it wol be no solas./What men wolde of hit deme I kan nat seye:/It nedeth me ful sleighly for to pleie” (II. 459-462). This time, Criseyde cannot accurately predict the Trojan citizenry’s response if Troilus and Pandarus both die as a result of her refusing Troilus’ love. Having removed herself from society to better represent the faithful widow, Criseyde has put herself at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding the city’s current attitude towards her. However, since the Trojan citizenry previously threatened her due to her connection to her disloyal father, she can safely assume that such a situation would only further infuriate the city against her, which in turn could lead to threats against her life. As Pandarus has already suggested, the visage of a dutiful widow might not protect her then. Criseyde, however, is not about to be backed into that corner.

Recognizing the dangerous position Pandarus is attempting to position her into, Criseyde changes tactics, engaging with him in “sleighly pleie.” She responds to his threats of death and suicide with open grief; however, just, as before, she does not capitulate. Rather, Criseyde engages him with questions, asking about Troilus as a lover and proof of the severity of his disease. She allows Pandarus to lead her once again through a fabulous story

of Troilus' love and Pandarus' discovery of it. Just at the moment of Pandarus' assurance of her submission, however, Criseyde blocks him again:

“And be ye wis as ye be fair to see,
 Wel in the ryng than is the ruby set.
 Ther were nevere two so wel ymet,
 Whan ye ben his al hool as he is youre;
 Ther myghty God graunte us see that houre!”

“Nay, therof spake I nought, ha ha!” quod she;
 “As helpe me God, ye shenden every deel!”
 (II. 584-590)

Criseyde never agreed to love; Pandarus, in all of his explanation and tale-telling of Troilus' affection, never used the word “love.” In fact, he says that all that Troilus needs from Criseyde is her good cheer, her attention and acknowledgement of his existence in relation to her. That Criseyde is willing to give. She can, and is willing to, open up her personal seclusion just enough to admit Troilus for friendly affection but nothing more. Nothing more was asked of her, so when Pandarus makes the deeper suggestion of a romantic and sexual match—Troilus and Criseyde so perfect for one another they settle together, and into each other, like a perfectly cut gem set in a ring—Criseyde is quick to correct him. She never agreed to romance because it was never asked of her, and she is not going to allow Pandarus to leave with that impression. Once again, Criseyde turns Pandarus' move against him, blocking him on the board with subtle, sometimes playful, moves. She engages with him only as much as is necessary for her to continue to protect herself, and never anymore. Criseyde is still refusing to play the kind of game he wants her to play. Instead she maintains her own strategy and does not allow herself to be baited by Pandarus' more malignant strategy.

She is, however, now more aware of the game he wants her to play. After this initial engagement, Criseyde launches into a long, private self-reflection of her situation, where she weighs the possibilities of both love and rejection all the while getting her first physical impression of Troilus as he returns from the battlefield. Here is where Criseyde uses the one overt chess reference in the entire poem:

“I am myn owene woman, wel at ese—
 I thank it God—as after myn estat,
 Right yong, and stonde unteyd in lusty leese,
 Withouten jalousie or swich debat:
 Shal noon housbonde seyn to me ‘Chek mat!’
 For either they ben ful of jalousie,
 Or maisterfull, or loven novelrie...

...Allas! Syn I am free,
 Sholde I now love, and put in jupartie
 My sikernesse, and thrallen libertie?
 Allas, how dorst I thenken that folie?”
 (II. 750-774)

Scholars generally consider Criseyde’s use of chess language here as a brief, isolated metaphor for the marriage situation; were she to remarry, Criseyde would lose the limited freedoms she currently has. Expanded further, however, Criseyde’s vocal gesture towards a hypothetical husband’s victory on the chess board highlights aspects of economic exchange in both marriage and society. Women, including Criseyde, are tokens: pieces to be moved, traded, won and lost by more experienced, masculine players (Adams, “Anxieties” 95-96). They are objects mainly to be played for, and players only until a man conquers them. Engaging in romance and marriage, then, would mean personally handing over her body and autonomy to another, in this case Troilus. After establishing Criseyde as a successful chess player in her own right, however, her overt use of chess language reveals not only her

recognition of the game but also the tactics pitted against her and the risks she runs if she loses. Pandarus wants to establish the relationship between Troilus and Criseyde and plays aggressively on his behalf. Criseyde clearly understands the many ways a relationship with a man can affect her: her familial relationship with Calkas led to the Trojan citizenry calling for her execution while her sought-out protection from Hector has, thus far, prevented that execution from happening. Criseyde, however, pressed no further in that relationship with Hector. Withdrawing as is appropriate for a widow, Criseyde makes no further imposition on either Hector nor Troy. She is safe because she has his word, but she does not impose herself into society in any meaningful way any longer. Were she to engage in a romance with Troilus, however, that would change.

If Criseyde allows the romance to proceed, especially as Pandarus would have to it played out, Criseyde would risk not only her estate and her autonomy but also her life. She has maintained her life thus far by careful consideration and maintenance of her widowed status; she has survived because she is a constant, reclusive widow. Love would mean not only abandoning her widowed status but also reentering society as the paramour of one of the most beloved men of Troy. Love as Pandarus has presented it to her, with promises of death and social vitriol if she does not submit, would undermine the image Criseyde has needed to survive. It would mean abandoning the chess strategy that has been thus far successful, keeping Criseyde alive in a city that earlier moved to see her captured and executed. When Criseyde worries, then, that she risks health and freedom in love, she does not just worry for her heart and her independence. Criseyde worries for her survival. If she plays the game Pandarus has set before her wrong, the price will be more than her sexual body or personal reputation. It will also be her life.

These considerations, though, come only after Criseyde has already been pulled into the game by Pandarus and his more aggressive strategy. Troilus' love is revealed to her, as are the consequences of her continued ignorance to his affection. More importantly, though, when left alone Criseyde can see the potential positive outcomes of a romance with Troilus. Chess is a dynamic rather than a stagnant game, and as the situation on the board changes with moves, so to do new opportunities present themselves that may parallel or compete with established strategies. Troilus' love has become such an opportunity on the chess board. As she observes him, and sees for herself the good qualities he seems to possess, she vacillates between her need for survival and her now blossoming desire for honest affection. Criseyde could love Troilus, and a king's noble son could protect her in ways more powerful than even Hector's word—but only if she plays this intimate game even more carefully.

Criseyde attempts to play the game her way, balancing her ultimate desire to survive against her potential affection for Troilus. Pandarus' strategy, however, does not make that easy. Bested in his initial encounter, Pandarus' aggression and manipulation escalate in his next engagement with Criseyde. Armed with Troilus' letter, Pandarus returns the following day to Criseyde's estate. From the beginning of this engagement, he uses deceit to manipulate Criseyde into a moment of weakness. He tantalizes her with news about a Greek spy visiting Troy, convincing her to go into the garden alone with him. Once they are alone, Pandarus launches not into scandalous gossip about potential treason but into fresh declaration of love on behalf of Troilus. Criseyde, while shocked, refuses to be baited so easily:

Ful dredfully tho gan she stonden style,
 And took it naught, but al hire humble chere
 Gan for to chaunge, and seyde, “Scrit ne
 bille,
 For love of God, that toucheth swich matere,
 Ne bryng me noon; and also, uncle deere,
 To myn estat have more reward, I preye,
 Than to his lust! What should I more seye?”
 (II. 1128-1134)

For a moment, Criseyde drops the demure and occasionally playful attitude she typically maintains when with Pandarus. In its place, she confronts him with the seriousness of her situation and her decision not to participate in this kind of conversation. Criseyde has already expressed her willingness to give Troilus platonic affection. Not knowing yet how safe romance is for her to encourage, Criseyde has been careful not only to not ask for declarations of love in word or letter but she has outright refused to accept them. She scolded Pandarus the last time he suggested romantic entanglement; now she is quick to interrupt his new attempt to convince her to romantically involve herself with Troilus. Criseyde’s shift in attitude, however, serves an additional purpose. In confronting Pandarus with firmness and citing specifically his disrespect of coming to her estate only to pursue another man’s romance, Criseyde reveals to him that she is, to some extent, aware of his play style. She expects him to honor her responses from yesterday and she is both shocked and upset that he would bring talk of love back to her estate. Moreover, by asking him to have more “reward” for her “estat” she is asking him not to respect her home but to respect her status and social situation: not just her decision to remain a widow but also her precarious relationship with the Trojan citizenry. Not respecting that is a devious, manipulate method of ensuring her acquiescence. By reminding him that he should have more care to

remember her situation, Criseyde then is acknowledging that he is using disreputable means to get his way.

Pandarus responds to Criseyde's change in demeanor with one of his most aggressive moves in their game and in the entire poem. Not only does he deny doing anything that would harm her, Pandarus also literally forces the letter on Criseyde: "But for al that that ever I may deserve,/Refuse it naught,' quod he, and hente hire/faste,/And in hire bosom the letter down he thraste" (II. 1153-1155). In nothing short of a blitz on her king piece, Pandarus violates not only Criseyde's widow visage but her own personal autonomy to further the courtship. In order to thrust the letter down her bodice, and quite possibly between her breasts, Pandarus would have had to lift the wimple that would have been common in fourteenth-century mourning and widow clothing (Hodges 45). The sexual implications of a declaration of love in her bosom, as well as the forceful violation of her widow's presentation is an aggressive, dominating move. It forces Criseyde to, for at least a moment, relinquish her absolute hold on her widow status and acknowledge herself as a young, sexually-available woman being sought by a young, sexually-available man. The move also prevents Criseyde's widow status from returning with its original strength. Although the wimple may cover the letter, Criseyde can no longer consider herself just a widow. She is now a courted woman, whether she likes it or not. Pandarus further emphasis this: "And seyde hire, 'Now cast it away anon,/That folk may seen and gauren on us tweye" (II. 1156-1157). The comment is obviously rhetorical bait; Criseyde cannot simply throw the letter away or even make that much of a scene about the inappropriateness of Pandarus' actions. She would draw attention to herself, and then the people of her estate would start to wonder: wonder why she is upset, wonder why there is a letter on the ground if she dares to

throw it aside, wonder why there is even a letter at all and what its contents are. For a woman whose life was previously threatened because of her connection with a Trojan traitor, a mysterious letter found in her clothes would not do much to keep suspicions of treason away from her.

Criseyde is cornered. In a series of calculated, underhanded moves designed to cheat his way past her defenses, Pandarus has manipulated her into a position where she must fully engage with him. There is no way for her to lead him around or block him on the board with words and carefully changed expressions. Criseyde must engage with him directly, sacrificing a piece to his blitz—namely her pride—in order to protect everything she has worked so hard to maintain. If she does not acknowledge the letter, or worse if she tries to dispose of it, Criseyde runs the risk of unraveling her own defense mechanism and incurring the suspicions of her household and the fury of the Trojan citizenry. Pandarus has cornered her. The letter in her bodice is his check, an underhanded but effective assault against her king and personal goal, survival. If she does not engage with him now, Pandarus' checkmate is assured.

An efficient strategist in her own right, Criseyde knows that she cannot avoid engaging with Pandarus this time; she cannot ignore his check. However, in her response, Criseyde is careful not to fully capitulate to Pandarus' desires: “Quod she, ‘I kan abyde til they be gon’:/And gan smyle, and seyde hym, ‘Em, I preye,/ Swich answeere as yow list, yourself purveye,/For trewely I nyl no lettre write” (II. 1158-1161). Criseyde responds to Pandarus in such a way that she is ultimately able to get time alone with the letter. By allowing the letter to remain in her dress, Criseyde forestalls any outside suspicions or drawing of attention to herself and Pandarus. More importantly, however, by returning to

her usual playful demeanor, Criseyde puts Pandarus at ease. She smiles and jokes with him, giving him permission to do exactly what she knows he would have done anyway: write a letter himself. By returning to that earlier emotional atmosphere, Criseyde puts Pandarus off guard enough that, when they go into dine, she can slip away:

“Now, em,” quod she, “we wol go dyne anon.”
 And gan some of hire wommen to hire calle,
 And streght into hire chambre gan she gon;
 But of hair besynesses this was on—
 Amonges othere thynges, out of dredge—
 Ful pryvely this lettre for to rede;

Avysed word by word in every lyne,
 And fond no lak, she thoughte he koude good,
 And up it putte, and wente hire in to dyne.

(II. 1171-1179)

Reading the letter in private is of the utmost importance to Criseyde. Unlike Troilus, who wrote the letter under Pandarus’ advisement and direction, Criseyde wants no external influences on her reception of the letter. If she is going to respond to the changes in her situation in the safest and the most beneficial way for her, she cannot have anyone (particularly Pandarus) trying to influence her reading and interpretation of Troilus’ letter. Her reading is not a cursory reading either. Criseyde devours the letter slowly, understanding every word and sentence before delving into the potential meanings and outcomes of the letter’s contents. Criseyde determines on her own that Troilus can speak well and appropriately in love and courtship, which tilts her ever closer to accepting the romance. Her situation is still unclear though, and until she can see the potential end game, and not one that will lead to her death, Criseyde does not respond to the letter. When she does finally sit down to write the letter—after some sly prodding and assurance from

Pandarus—Criseyde takes the same care to prevent any outside interference from tainting her correspondence with Troilus. Criseyde rejects Pandarus' offer to write the letter for her, "Ye, for I kan so writen," (II. 1205) and secludes herself once again:

And into a closet, for t'avise hire bettre,
 She wente allone, and gan hire herte unfettre
 Out of desdaynes prisoun but a lite,
 And sette hire down, and gan a letter write,...

...She thanked hym of al that he wel mente
 Towardes hire, but holden hym in honed
 She nolde nought, ne make hireselven bonde
 In love; but as his suster, hym to plese,
 She wolde fayn to doon his herte an ese.
 (II. 1215-1225)

Here, in the privacy of her closet, Criseyde fully engages with, and rebukes, Pandarus' check. By refusing both Pandarus' assistance and company, Criseyde is able to respond to Troilus' letter directly and without any outside influence. Moreover, she expresses her true feelings without fear of judgment or manipulation. Alone, Criseyde directly engages with Troilus' feelings, finally acknowledging them while still expressing her needs. Criseyde's response is entirely genuine; she offers Troilus no false hope but tells him matter-of-factly that she will not bind herself to him through romantic love. She frees him from whatever apparent attraction she has caused in him, allowing him to go and seek other more suitable ladies, and she assures him that she will ease his suffering, but as a sister. Allowing a familial affection to grow between them is already a risk for Criseyde, considering her history, but it is still safer than allowing Troilus to continue to think that a romance with her is possible. Although she may be attracted to him and may entertain the idea of a relationship with him, Criseyde still does not see a romance with one of the most powerful men of Troy as being

enough to risk her tenuous position. She believes that she needs to remain as separated from the citizenry as possible. Romance will draw her back to the center of attention, whereas a close, platonic friendship may be safer since it could still allow her some privacy. It is both more and less than Criseyde would prefer; by now her desire for safety and her budding affection for Troilus are competing more heavily, which makes writing the letter difficult. It is, however, necessary: “As wisely help me God the grete,/I nevere dide a thing with more peyne/Than written this, to which ye me constreyne” (II. 1230-1232). Criseyde has no choice but to answer the letter because the check cannot be ignored. However, by both acknowledging and rejecting Troilus’ feelings, and then setting up a familial relationship in its place, Criseyde is still able to keep her safety and survival as her primary goal. She continues to play the game for her own reasons and somewhat on her own terms.

Although Pandarus leaves with her letter, he is still not assured of Criseyde’s submission. Thus far, she has been able to meet him move for move, defending herself despite his best efforts. Knowing this, Pandarus does not let up on his aggressive and manipulative tactics. His subtlest, and his most effective, move occurs just before he is finally able to orchestrate the consummation between Troilus and Criseyde. After giving Troilus Criseyde’s letter, and after witnessing Troilus’ deeper descent into lovesickness, Pandarus asks Troilus a curious question: “Which is thi brother that thow lovest best,/As in thi verray hertes privetee” (II. 1396-1397). It is an unusual question, considering the source of Troilus’ ailment, until Troilus gives him his answer. When Troilus says “Deiphebus,” Pandarus begins his move, “ ‘Now,’ quod Pandare, ‘er houres twyes twelve,/He shal the ese, unwist it of hymselfe” (II. 1399-1400). Pandarus entangles Troilus’ family, the same family that Criseyde earlier sought out for protection, in his strategy. Deiphebus knows about

Troilus' deteriorating state, but he does not know its source. He does, however, know about Criseyde's situation and the protection that Hector earlier extended to her. Pandarus exploits that. He goes to Deiphebus and pleads on Criseyde's behalf, suggesting that she is being threatened by Trojan citizens once again, the people going so far as to take her property. When Deiphebus asks Pandarus what he can do to help her, Pandarus gives him the following instructions:

“...To preyen hire to-morwe, lo, that she
Come unto yow, hire pleyntes to devise,
Hire adversaries wolde of it agrise.
And yif I more dorste preye as now,

And chargen yow to han so gret travaille,
To han some of your bretheren here with yow,
That myghten to hire cause bet availle,
Than wot I wel she myghte nevere faille
For to ben holpen, what at youre instaunce,
What with hire other frendes governaunce.”

(II. 1433-1442)

The full extent of Pandarus' cleverness does not reveal itself until Pandarus goes to Criseyde but here Pandarus sets up a situation that is at once the most beneficial and the most dangerous for Criseyde. Knowing as he does the tenuousness of her position in Troy, Pandarus arranges to have some of the most powerful people in Troy gather together on her behalf—people who are all, through blood, marriage, or alliance, connected to Hector. Their support and influence could have a profound effect on not only Criseyde's position but also Hector's protection of her. On the one hand, with the combined force of all of Hector's relations and alliances, Criseyde's safety is more permanently assured. Regardless of their ire, the Trojan citizenry would not harm her knowing that she had the personal

protection of most of Hector's household. On the other hand, should some or all of those same individuals turn against Criseyde, her protection and support system could be utterly destroyed. In the face of the united force of his family and alliances' distaste and distrust of Criseyde, Hector may not be willing to, or capable of, maintaining his protection over her. Everything Criseyde has worked towards could suddenly and thoroughly unravel. Pandarus has managed to undermine her long-term chess strategy by adapting it to his own, using the exact same connections that had earlier protected her to weaken that same protection. He has figured out how to use her moves to his advantage, all without letting her know that her strategy has been compromised.

That Pandarus manipulates not only Criseyde but also Deiphebus and others into this position makes this move his most clever. Pandarus is careful, especially when he finally goes to Criseyde, to make no mention of Troilus' love. Instead, he goes to her as the concerned uncle: "I not wheither ye the more thank me konne./Be ye naught war how false Poliphete/Is now aboute eftstones for to plete,/And brygne on yow advocacies newe" (II. 1466-1469). While the actuality of Poliphete's threat against Criseyde is never fully revealed, it is likely enough to get a visceral response. She bemoans that "he is more about, me to drecche,/And don me wrong" (II. 1471-1472) and asks Pandarus for advice on how she should proceed. Considering that she has already shown her preference for planning and enacting her own strategies independently, it speaks to her fear and desperation over Pandarus' news that she would so quickly and willingly seek out his assistance. However, this is precisely the response that Pandarus needs since he is then able to assuage her fears. Criseyde is so thankful for Deiphebus' and the other prominent lords' support that, when Deiphebus visits her, she does not debate or reflect on whether she should accept his

invitation. She agrees wholeheartedly to dine with him, without any of her usual careful consideration. This is wholly outside of her usual strategy for her self-preservationist, and the change will cost her. When she arrives at Deiphebus's home, and is confronted with the benevolent but powerful presence of other prominent citizens and Hector's family, she can do nothing but accept Troilus' love openly and offer him solace.

The secondary purpose of Pandarus' role as Criseyde romantic opponent reveals itself here with surprising power. Through his manipulative strategy, Pandarus returns the primary focus of the game—however briefly—to the larger social situation that Criseyde engaged with in Book 1. Criseyde's suffering under those social, patriarchal tensions is constant, only veiled through Pandarus' and Troilus' insistence on courtship. In her strategy, Criseyde consistently defers to it but here, where Pandarus has eliminated talk of love from his tactics, her social reality returns to the forefront with force. While he may be aware of the romantic consequences that Deiphebus' intervention will allow, Pandarus is careful not to mention them at all. In doing so, he highlights the fact that the earlier social engagement never actually ended. Criseyde is still constantly in danger, her social status still tenuous enough to support or shake with the right patriarchal threats and interventions.

Additionally, by using her social status as another gambit in their romantic chess match, Pandarus reveals that Criseyde's primary focus has not shifted at all. While she may entertain and even hope for love, Criseyde consistently thinks about her primary goal: survival. Only when she is assured of her safety will she entertain love, and only when she is relatively stable—in her reputation, in her finances, in her physical safety—will she fully engage in her usual careful considerations of all possible moves. Like her opening move, against a named adversary and a potential threat, Criseyde must act. As soon as possible, she

must respond in a way that will stabilize her position. In this case, that means that she must encourage Deiphebus and the other lords and prominent citizens to continue seeing her favorably, opening herself up to the sequence of events that finally lead to the consummation of her and Troilus' romance.

In a more traditional application of chess, Troilus and Criseyde's consummation would mark the end of the romance, or at the very least the penultimate event in the narrative. Having secured both her heart and access to her bed, Troilus, through Pandarus, has effectively checked her in their match; by occupying the physical space of her bed, Troilus mimics the conquest that is found on the chess board during a match. The occupation and then physical domination of one piece over another, particularly the king piece, mirrors the apparent sexual conquest of Troilus over Criseyde.¹² He takes Criseyde's love and her body for himself. However, while that romantic conclusion has been reached, the full conclusion has not been achieved since Criseyde is not actually check mated yet. The larger social engagement between her and the patriarchal citizenry of Troy continues, allowing Criseyde to move and act as an independent player in her own survival. More importantly, here in the bedroom, Criseyde's knowledge of and acquiescence to passion and intimacy prevent her from being fully check mated in the traditional manner of chess in romance. She is not dominated. Instead, Criseyde sacrifices her body of her own accord.

This self-awareness and personal sacrifice fully manifests itself in the intimate dialogue that occurs just prior to Troilus and Criseyde's physical union. Despite his inertia

¹² Of course, it should be noted, as Daniel O'Sullivan demonstrates in "Changing the Rules in and of Medieval Chess Allegories," that physical occupation of the same space is meant to be temporary. Prolonged existence of two pieces in the same space, like that found in *Les Eschez d'Amours*, provokes severe sexual anxiety in medieval readers (209). Such anxieties do not occur in *Troilus and Criseyde's* consummation.

during most of their courtship—including needing to be undressed and tossed into bed by Pandarus—Troilus insists that he has conquered Criseyde, both heart and body. Her response to that assertion, while affectionate, is firm:

This Troilus in armes gan hire streyne,
 And seyde, “O swete, evere mote I gon,
 Now be ye kaught; now is ther but we tweyne!
 Now yeldeth yow, for other bote is non!”
 To that Criseyde answerde this anon,

“Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere,
 Ben yolde, ywis, I were now nought here!”
 (III. 1205-1211)

While Criseyde does admit to yielding to Troilus and his affections, she denies the total domination that Troilus’ captive language suggests. He has not “kaught” Criseyde because she fled him and thus needed the traditional pursuit, capture, and physical convincing to yield to his amorous advances. Criseyde has long been aware of his intentions and has spent the better part of several days considering not only his love but also what the consequences of acknowledging, accepting, and reciprocating that love would have on her situation. Criseyde is only here, in this bed with him, because she has considered love from all its angles and found it, if not entirely safe, not a total threat to her safety and stability in Troy. Criseyde has already yielded, in her own mind, and agreed to pursue love. She has not been conquered; rather Criseyde gives Troilus access to her body and her heart, thereby sacrificing part of her initial strategy for self-preservation of her own accord. While she may continue to present herself as a widow to the public, in private Criseyde has given up her hold on widowhood. She willingly makes that sacrifice of status and personal strategy.

Troilus, then, has not bested her in any sense. He has taken nothing away from her that Criseyde had not already decided to give away herself.

With the consummation and romantic match achieved, *Troilus and Criseyde* shifts its primary focus fully back to the social situation that opened Book 1, and the game continues. Throughout the poem, Troy has been a city at war, the importance of this status always lurking just beneath Troilus' affection, Pandarus' manipulation, and Criseyde's strategizing. Now, however, with intimacy and a physical relationship at last embraced, that fact comes surging back to the forefront, as does Criseyde's tenuous relationship with the Trojan citizenry and patriarchy. Criseyde, however, no matter how much she may see herself as a player, is now denied the right to play for herself against the citizenry. Instead, she is relegated to the common role of women in patriarchal society: a playing piece and a commodity. Chess has been used many times before to describe the objective reality of medieval women in both literature and society (Adams, "Anxieties"). In this specific economy, women are commodities: goods that men win, lose, or exchange among themselves in various markets and situations (Hagedorn 153). Criseyde is included in this economy of women. In Troy's chess match against the Greeks, she is a bartering token. The Trojan citizenry trade her quite literally for Antenor, despite Hector's protest that "We usen no wommen forto selle" (IV 182). Hector's use of "sell" is crucial here as it highlights the fact that the Trojans gain not only Antenor but physical goods and/or money, part of "the surplus yeven sommes grete" (IV. 60). Criseyde has become the ultimate human commodity, traded for as Hagedorn puts it "cold hard cash" (153). The Trojan citizenry remove her ability to act independently and shuffle her around as they please, sacrificing and trading her to regain what they consider a more valuable piece. Criseyde, widow that she is,

system, however, he must inevitably accept that Criseyde is as exchangeable as any other women in the city—more so because she is unattached and their love remains clandestine. His realization of her obligatory participation in Troy's economic market of women prevents him from even fully considering rescuing her. Instead he must accept that she is first and foremost a thing to be exchanged; she is his lady second. In this game, Troilus has no power and no mobility. He can only observe and accept the consequences. This larger social game, where Criseyde has been rendered a piece to be exchanged, not only supplants the game Troilus and Criseyde has been playing but now has thrown new challenges at it. Criseyde's livelihood is once again in danger, and her livelihood is what she has always wanted to protect with her long-term strategy.

Of course, Criseyde does not want to participate in the economic exchange of her body. Throughout the poem, she has been careful to maintain her autonomy and remain in charge of her own survival, creating an outward persona and weighing all potential entanglements to ensure she loses as little as possible. Sacrificing her autonomy and self-preservation strategies is the last thing that Criseyde wants to do. Her options, however, are limited. Unmarried and in a secret relationship, she cannot refuse to leave Troy. Doing so could result in ire of the citizenry and possibly her death. Criseyde's primary goal has always been survival; she wants to live, and she will do what she can, whatever she can, to survive. This explains why she is so distraught at finding Troilus considering suicide when she faints at the news of her departure. Had she not recovered in time, Troilus would have taken his own life and she, in both grief and tradition, would have to follow him, tossing away the very thing she has so desperately protected. To survive, then, Criseyde willingly allows herself to be exchanged. She will use the economic exchange of women to her advantage as she can,

first to safely leave Troy and then ultimately to ensure she escapes the war between the Trojans and the Greeks alive. Criseyde alters her long-term strategy in the face of new challenges in order to protect her king piece and reach the end game that she has always desired: life. Successful chess player that she is, Criseyde does not lose sight of her original goal and, in the face of unchangeable circumstances, changes her play strategy however she can to remain constant to her ultimate desire to live.

Throughout *Troilus and Criseyde*, Criseyde has shown great consistency in her desires¹³ and that consistency has largely received negative responses from the scholarly community. As a courtly lover, Criseyde should have elected to die, remaining forever true to Troilus. In choosing her own life over Troilus' heart, Criseyde betrays the traditions of courtly love and is forever doomed to the title of the pinnacle of bad women. However, when viewed as an experienced chess player, Criseyde's actions, reactions, and motivations take on deeper meaning. Like any effective chess player, Criseyde played her games—all of her games, regardless of social or romantic overtones—with a clear and consistent end game in mind: survival. Criseyde never prioritized love. She never played for love, as traditional women in romances with chess motifs tend to. Love was a secondary concern for Criseyde, only acceptable and achievable if it did not interfere with her self-preservation. This is not to say that Criseyde's decisions were either bad or good, nor is it to argue that Criseyde is not a courtly lover and not bound to courtly love's rules. Recognizing Criseyde as a chess player, however, and seeing how she plays against both society and potential lovers, reveals the

¹³ In a larger version of this paper, I would explore how Criseyde's consistency continues even into the Greek camp and ultimately informs her decision to betray Troilus and her role as a courtly lover. Considering the scope and purpose of the current project, however, that last discussion will not be included here.

consistency of her end game and her motivations while playing. Having prioritized survival rather than love, Criseyde made the best possible choice for herself. She knew what it would mean but life has always been more important to her than love. Criseyde is a survivor in addition to be a lover. Understanding how she uses chess strategy to achieve survival frees her from the singular identity of lover.

Applying chess strategy to Criseyde also furthers scholarly understanding of the reality of women's agency in medieval society and literature. Women did not occupy singular roles such as wife, widow, or lover. Women, despite the limitations of their movement and the little political or economic power they usually had, were social creatures. They were affected by their surrounding communities and society at large just as much as men were. Knowing this, they had to move and negotiate for their own desires as much as they could. Chess strategy, with its emphasis on skills such as foresight and managing personal risk, is one way that women's agency can be more deeply explored. Women had to negotiate for themselves and maintain their own self-interest and self-preservation, often in subtle ways. Chess strategy offers a new avenue for examining how women interacted and reacted to the world around them. With her own end game in mind, every woman engages with the people and the society immediately around them. Their success, of course, is entirely up to their ability to play.

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SHE WILL SUFFER NO GRATES: SPATIAL TENSIONS IN CAVENDISH'S
THE CONVENT OF PLEASURE

Modern readers occasionally find it difficult to accept that the ending of Margaret Cavendish's drama, *The Convent of Pleasure*, is indeed a "happy" one. After the successful creation a female-only space and a budding lesbian romance, the foreign Princess is revealed to be a Prince. Lady Happy, previously unapologetically critical of marriage, marries the Prince with nary a quibble. The convent she created is then given to a nearby fool, and the fates of the convent's other lady residents are left entirely unknown. Most disturbing, however, is the fact that Lady Happy, vocal and passionate throughout the play, turns suddenly quiet and stilted upon marrying the Prince. This sudden return to patriarchy and the heteronormative status-quo can seem understandably shocking or upsetting to modern readers. What seems to have not been noted, however, is that Cavendish leaves numerous hints to this exact return to patriarchal ideals in both the creation and operation of the Convent of Pleasure itself. Lady Happy's convent exists as both a private convent and a domestic household; sixteenth and seventeenth century English societies had specific expectations about both types of social spaces, and resistance to those expectations could lead to intense personal and communal anxieties. As the play's excluded patriarchal society frets over the convent's "impenetrable" privacy, Lady Happy's insistence on a domestic lifestyle results in personal turmoil as she recreates social norms she also longs to reject. Such tensions threaten personal livelihood and social stability and therefore must be resolved by the end of the play to prevent upheaval and ultimately chaos. Cavendish can only restore

order by returning all of the spaces involved to the status-quo. To do so, I argue that she must convert the Convent into an acceptable domestic household, subject to patriarchal norms, by revealing the one factor that could permanently balance out the gender and power hierarchies at play: the Prince.

Scholarly discussions about *The Convent of Pleasure* generally ignore the convent as a specific space; those that do not tend to focus on how the convent adheres to, or rejects, utopian tropes. Allison Findlay sees *The Convent of Pleasure* as one of several of Cavendish's literary attempts at the utopian ideal. She argues Cavendish is ultimately suspicious of secluded, single-sex communities, and that while there is a keen sense of loss when the female community is dismantled at the play's conclusion (177), Cavendish's use of the sexual suspicions surrounding sororities and the displays of elitism among the convent's members leaves the convent as an ultimately socially-threatening place (174-5). Erin Lang Bonin, on the other hand, argues that Cavendish's convent critiques utopian literature as a whole. While her utopia ultimately collapses, Cavendish reveals through its creation and dissolution societal pressures on women and how adherence to "nature" leads to female disempowerment (351). Brandie Siegfried may be one of the few scholars who comes close to arguing that Cavendish creates a successful utopia; she sees Lady Happy's convent as ultimately reconciling the antagonism of masculinity and femininity: first in the physical and rhetorical blending of sense and reason (71), then in the interchange of masculine and feminine garb and habits (78), and then at last in the actual marriage of Lady Happy and the Prince (81). While the convent does dissolve, its status as a space of potentiality and a utopia remains and the effects of its (even momentary) successful gender equality linger (82-3). Even in Siegfried's estimation, however, the utopia is temporary. It must, by apparent

status. In early modern England, women fell under two categories as citizens: *feme sole* and *feme covert*. The latter category was made up married women and unwedded-but-still-fathered daughters. The women identified as *feme covert* had their political and legal identities subsumed beneath their husbands or fathers. They had highly restricted legal rights and recourses for addressing legal injuries, and they could not purchase or own property for themselves. Widows, however, and single marriageable women without fathers or other male relatives were classified as *feme sole*. Under this category, women had (at least theoretically) the same legal rights as men. They were, for instance, able to inherit, purchase and maintain property as well as enjoy exclusive ownership of said property (Flather 41). Daughters were also able to inherit land and property from their fathers and own it jointly if they had no brothers or other near male relatives; a single daughter, of course, would inherit all the land herself (Erickson 27). Were they to marry, or remarry in the case of widows, their new husbands would then subsume their wives' legal rights over the property. With the death of her father, her unmarried status, and the noticeable lack of any male relatives, Lady Happy is suddenly a member of this rather powerful and unusual category of women. As the sole inheritor of her father's wealth, Lady Happy is free to use it as she chooses, including to purchase and maintain personal property. She occupies a literary space in historical terms. Understanding the nature of this social position and how that position is perceived by and affects the society around her helps articulate what the Covent is and does.

Lady Happy's ability to manage her own wealth, and purchase and maintain property augments her status in another crucial way. Under the category of *feme sole*, Lady Happy is able to cultivate an identity for herself that is, mostly, free from masculine influence. *Feme*

covert women, through family or marriage, have little ability to choose where or how they live. Their personal identities and ways of life are largely dependent on the men in their lives. They are the wives and daughters, managing their husbands or fathers' homes. They do not exist outside of an identity that is essentially a man's property. In many ways, the ability to purchase and maintain property is linked to identity creation (Pratt 48-49). Lady Happy then is able to create and maintain her own identity through her new-found wealth. Without a father or a husband over her, she can begin to forge an identity of her choosing, physically manifesting it in the Convent of Pleasure she will soon found.

Although Lady Happy will be able to create an identity outside of male influence, her identity and new social status have direct effects on the patriarchal community. In this opening exchange, dread, and not joy, is one of the underlying emotions of the dialogue. Tom enters looking "so sadly of it," and while this could mean simple seriousness, it is also possible that Tom is concerned about the sudden change in Lady Happy's fortune. Without a father to make the ultimate decision for her, wooing her could be more trouble than they bargained for. Moreover, the three gentlemen reveal the economic demands of courtship and marriage. While their concerns about the cost of successfully wooing Lady Happy are meant to be playful and amusing—exactly how much do clothes, coaches, and lackeys cost—there is real concern underlying the comment that they will spend all their wealth to earn her; if only one can have her in marriage, that will leave the others possible destitute or at the very least with more limited inheritances. Perhaps it is only Tom who truly realizes the extent of it, but there is a definitive shift in the power balance in the marriage market and one that works in Lady Happy's favor. Lady Happy now has control over her own affairs,

her own wealth and therefore her own marriage prospects. It is control that she will extend quickly for her own advantage, and it is control that the gentlemen cannot wrestle away from her in the traditional social system that they have always enjoyed.

Lady Happy exercises her new legal rights of property ownership/management almost immediately. In less than two scenes, her Convent is imagined, defended, finalized, and physically established. In addition to establishing her dominance over the space and thrusting marital choice—even the lack of one—front and center (Bennett 93), Lady Happy's logic behind the Convent further articulates not only early modern expectations but also anxieties regarding both female religious practice and privacy. Lady Happy engages with Madame Mediator to defend her proposed convent:

MEDIAT. But being done for the gods sake, it makes that which in Nature seems to be bad, in Divinity to be good.
 L. HAPPY. It cannot be good, if it be neither pleasure, nor profit to the gods; Neither do Men any thing for the gods but their own sake.
 MEDIAT. But when the Mind is not employed with Vanities, nor the Senses with Luxuries; the Mind is more free, to offer its Adorations, Prayers, and Praises to the gods.
 L. HAPPY. I believe, the gods are better pleased with Praises than Fasting;... And if the gods should take pleasure in nothing but in the torments of their Creatures, and would not prefer those prayers offer'd with ease and delight, I should believe the gods were cruel...but the gods are bountiful, and give all, that's good, and bid us freely please our selves in that which is best for us.
 (1.2 p 219-220)

Rather than being a moment of masculine intellectualism usurped by a woman (Sierra 650), Lady Happy willingly engages in the socially-acceptable and socially-mandated exercise of theological interpretation. While no religious leanings can be determined with absolute authority, her give-and-take with Madame Mediator strongly resembles the Protestant

interpretation expected in early modern England. Protestantism encouraged an individual's personal and interior relationship with God that could be then expressed through communal service. There was an expectation of the individual, both men and women, to make independent religious decisions and understand religious doctrine themselves and then apply that knowledge towards social good (Longfellow 321). Women may not have been allowed to preach, but they were expected to read and understand the Bible independently. Lady Happy engages here with this idea; it is her private understanding of the nature of God(s) and the problems of abstaining rather than indulging that leads her to make a social, communal change. It is precisely because she believes that pleasure is more expressive of true religious devotion that she moves to create a space of (exclusive female) pleasure. At the same time, however, Lady Happy's interpretation borders on the Catholic and heretical, particularly in her near declaration of the gods' cruelty. While she manages to back away from outright blasphemy, there is something troublingly Catholic in her insist on gods, reminiscent of the cult of saints that Protestantism had already dismissed. Lady Happy's Convent of Pleasure is positioned, then, as a space of religious tensions; while it is largely Protestant, the location and operations skirt just outside of Catholicism in its aesthetics and the "gods" that provide part of the foundation of her personal beliefs. Those tensions led to the unease of the larger social sphere. The Protestant patriarchal society of the play, that values personal introspection aiming for communal service and marriage, is suddenly confronted with a space distinctly Catholic, sensual, and divorced from service that enhances or betters the larger society.

Even more troubling, however, is Lady Happy's insistence on the need for sensual pleasure that is completely divorced from the play's greater society. While her comments do

dismiss the aestheticism of Catholic isolation as antithetical to true faith, she embraces the idea of a retreat that is beyond temporary:

L. HAPPY. ...Wherefore, in order thereto, I will take so many Noble Persons of my own Sex, as my Estate will plentifully maintain, such whose Births are are greater than their Fortunes...with these I mean to live incloister'd with all the delights and pleasures that are allowable and lawful. My Cloister shall not be a Cloister of Restraint, but a place for freedom, not to vex the Senses but to please them.

(1.2 p 220)

Privacy, as modern readers understand the concept, was understood very differently by early modern societies. The private was not totally isolated from the public, and much of what modern readers would consider private matters—such as religious thought or sexual practice—was considered matters of public concern since it could directly affect the community and an individual's public service to it (Longfellow 318). Although by the time of the Reformation, the spheres of work and home had become further gendered and separated, there was still a communal sense that total privacy deprived the community of information and protection (Orlin 192). The historical realities of early modern homes, packed with the mistress of the house but also husbands, children, other family members, servants, apprentices, maids, cooks and numerous others make it difficult for total isolation to be possible. Women were always surrounded, even at home (Mazzola 7). In some instances, however, privacy, as defined by enclosure from the working sphere of the social community, was acceptable. Places like the sick room or the birthing chamber—female dominated spaces—were often private or at the very least unvisited (and therefore suspicious) by men (2). Moments of retreat for personal moments of devotion or meditation were also encouraged by the community. Protestant society understood that

individual, private reflection was a necessary aspect of spiritual growth. That separation, however, was meant to be temporary. Personal devotion was supposed to inform community engagement and activity, designed to enhance one's service to society and God (Longfellow 322). Lady Happy does not intend to end her separation. Like the nuns that had been exiled from early modern England, Lady Happy plans to live fully separated from society at large, taking as many acceptable women as she can. Their retreat is not designed for personal or spiritual "betterment" but personal and sensual enjoyment. In the confines of her Convent, she will find total freedom for herself from the masculine society that would try to define her as well as an opportunity to experience the world and its pleasures to her fullest enjoyment. However, as much as Lady Happy might wish to separate from society, she cannot escape it. Rather than being an entirely separate space, Lady Happy's Convent of Pleasure will become an enmeshed space, existing within the patriarchal Protestant society, intriguing it, and effecting it. It disrupts society's normal functioning, and in order to do that, it must remain connected to it. That connection creates intense unease, as the Convent of Pleasure, operating in Catholic isolation and sensual experience, is antithetical to the Protestantism of the play's larger society. That connection also subjects the Convent of Pleasure to society's opinions, influences, and needs.

Lady Happy does, however, make it as difficult as physically possible for society to directly affect her Convent. At the beginning of Act 2, through another moment of idle gossip between gentlemen, Lady Happy's convent is further solidified. As they confront Madame Mediator with their distress, the structure of the convent is revealed:

COURT. If she be a Votress to Nature, you are the only Person fit to be Lady Prioress; and so by your power and authority you may give us leave to visit

your Nuns sometimes.

MEDIAT. Not but at a Grate, unless in time of Building, or when they are sick;
but howsoever, the Lady *Happy* is Lady-Prioress her self, and will admit
none of the Masculine Sex, not so much as to a Grate, for she will suffer no
grates about the Cloister;

(2.1 p 223)

Several things are revealed in this short exchange. The gentlemen clearly have more traditional, familiar assumptions about Lady Happy's Convent of Pleasure. They assume her convent is Catholic, materialistic, and most importantly penetrable. Historically, tours of Catholic continental nunneries were common. On these tours, nuns were known to entertain visitors with quaint conversations at the ever famous grate (Dolan 510).

Underneath that suggestion of a charming and innocent diversion, however, lingers more licentious concerns. In early modern Protestant society, the Catholic convent was a site of ridicule, titillation, and suspicion. That same grate that allowed conversation with the chaste, virginal nun also aroused suspicions of sexual openness and misconduct (517-518). Stories of fictitious convents with promiscuous nuns abounded, and the gentlemen, desperate to win Lady Happy as a wife, seize on those stories and tropes now. Their assurance that Madame Mediator must be the prioress plays into those same assumptions. If she is not passive or naïve about their intentions, then she is complicit in them; another common trope was that the older, authoritative nuns took sexual advantage of their novices (526). Her authority, therefore, would give them almost a moral sanction for invading and "visiting" the single ladies of the convent.

Madame Mediator gives some credence to their sexual ideas; she would allow them "at the grate" which is suggestive of either conversation or sexual intercourse. However, Madame Mediator is not the lady prioress. She wields very little power in the Convent of

Pleasure and has no say in who may or may not interact with the ladies. More importantly, she reveals a curious physical feature of the convent: there are no grates. This is highly unusual, both for a Catholic convent and an early modern English building in general. Convents needed grates in the exterior walls. Regardless of the fact that nuns withdrew physically from society, they still relayed on the convent's connection to it. Conversations and entertainment at the grate with visitors may have actually been one way that continental nuns maintained financial stability for the convent (513). A convent without a grate would have destabilized the institution and endanger the nuns' survival. While it cannot be explicitly proven that Lady Happy founded her Convent of Pleasure in the walls of an actual Catholic convent, it is likely that she did so. Madame Mediator claims that it is "her House, where she hath made her Convent" (2.1 p 223) and Catholic buildings—including monasteries, abbeys, and convents—were routinely appropriated and repurposed into early modern homes for the elite (Orlin 70-71). A repurposed convent would most certainly have a grate intact. Even if Lady Happy's estate is not an actual convent, early modern English buildings simply did not exist without some kind of "grate," not excluding doors and windows. Early modern buildings were highly permeable; city buildings often shared entire walls. The building materials themselves often allowed for any number of holes or chinks as well, which could then be exploited for the passing of communication, information, or gossip.

Lady Happy's Convent of Pleasure, however, somehow escapes all of these realities. Her convent is utterly, entirely impenetrable, and it is this fact that, more than anything else, upsets the gentlemen specifically and patriarchal society in general. Her convent is sealed, impossible to penetrate by force or word. Men cannot get in, information (theoretically)

cannot get out. The reality of the convent and the lives of its inhabitants, then, are completely removed from society's gaze. The ridicule and the sexual opportunities the convent presents suddenly turn into a more profound threat. The gentlemen's interest in the convent begins to morph into a kind of hysteria. They must find a way in the convent, if only so that they can define it by their physical experience of the space. The potentiality of the Convent of Pleasure's activities and reality cannot be allowed to exist free from the communal, masculine gaze. Already it has begun to destabilize the society it sought to escape, highlighting its continued connection to the outside world.

Inside the Convent of Pleasure, however, Lady Happy and her selected ladies assume they are safe from the destabilizing effects of the new space. This however proves not to be true, albeit only later in the play. While Lady Happy built her convent on religious rhetoric, citing the gods' need for human pleasure, in actuality she has created a domestic space. To be fair, Catholic convents were often considered religious and domestic spaces (Jankowski 93-94), but without the religious element, Lady Happy's convent operates almost entirely as a domestic household. In Act 2 scene 2, Lady Happy articulates the Convent's material pleasures for herself and her ladies:

L. HAPPY. Now give me leave to inform you, how I have order'd this our
Convent of Pleasure; first I have such things as are for our Ease and
 Conveniency; next for Pleasure and Delight; as I have change of furniture
 for my house; according to the four Seasons of the year, especially our
 Chambers...As for our Galleries, Stair-cases and Passages, they shall be
 Hung with various pictures;...and my Gardens to be kept curiously, and
 Flourish, in every Season of all sorts of Flowers, sweet Herbs and Fruits
 and kept so as not to have a Weed in it, and all the Groves, Wildernesses,
 Bowers and Arbours pruned...Also we shall have the choisest Meats every
 Season doth afford...and all our Drinks fresh and pleasing; Change of
 Garments are also provided, of the newest fashions for every Season, and

rich Trimming; so as we may be accoutred properly, and according to our several pastimes;

(2.2 p 224-225)

Even from this not-entirely-brief excerpt, the material care and concern that Lady Happy has put into her convent is apparent. While she may be the “votress of nature” and “Lady Prioress” who demands “confession” of her ladies, Lady Happy actually conducts herself like an early modern mistress of the house. While the husband was, ultimately, the true governor of the house, day-to-day management of the house and its inhabitants, typically fell to the wife (Flather 44). The mistress of the house was often in charge of provisioning, often buying and selling good from within the home and keeping records of, and the keys to the storage spaces for, both common and precious goods (46). These responsibilities were not exclusive to middling women either; upper-class women, including Lady Happy, also needed to provide, record, and dictate the needs of their estates. Margaret Cavendish herself kept immaculate records of both material expenses and losses after the civil war (Crawford 187-191). Lady Happy shows that she is familiar and capable of running an intricate if not lavish household. Her attention to detail regarding the physical layout of the convent, the detailing of bedding and furnishing, and her expectations of seasonal rotations to maximize personal comfort and sensual pleasure, suggest that Lady Happy can manage and maintain the detailed daily life of her convent. More importantly, she seems fairly able to balance out her desires for the convent as a refuge of sensual freedom and material realities. Indeed, Lady Happy’s primary concern is actually the physical comfort of the women. She has everything “ordered” first for physical easement and convenience, and then for sensual pleasure. Nothing exists in the convent, then, unless it prioritizes first comfort and then

pleasure, emphasizing Lady Happy's ability to keep her convent running as efficiently as possible. Her earlier caveat when she established her convent—"as my Estate will plentifully maintain" (1.2)—shows that Lady Happy, however lavish her household is, exercises restraint. That restraint comes in the form of denying access to others, but she shows that she is aware of the financial resources her convent demands.

To be fair, *The Convent of Pleasure* focuses less on Lady Happy's activities as a domestic mistress and more on her budding relationship with the Princess (when she arrives). The lack of day-to-day domestic activities in any particular scenes, however, does not undermine the reality of the convent as a domestic space and Lady Happy as its mistress. Upper-class women maintained both an active and a supervisory role when it came to the domestic workings of their house. On the one hand, they could easily be found dressing meat for meals or preparing medicinal recipes; on the other hand, their financial and social position meant that they could delegate those same activities to others and supervise or otherwise manage the completion of the activities (Wall 21). As a wealthy, single woman, Lady Happy has the means to both participate in the daily workings of her household as well as hire others to do see to its efficiency. Madame Mediator confirms this reality: "she also has Women-Physicians, Surgeons and Apothecaries, and she is the chief Confessor herself...and hath Women for every Office and Employment; for though she hath not about twenty Ladies with her, yet she hath a numerous Company of Female Servants" (2.1 p 223). Lady Happy has in her employ enough servants and professional women that she does not need to actively participate in the domestic chores. Instead, she can delegate the tasks, monitoring the work to be sure that it suits her standards. She has, after all, demands for everything and therefore she will be attentive to her supervision to make sure that the

servants attend to each of the convent's luxurious demands, whether it be rotations in the bedchambers or the particular dressing of their meat for a particular meal.

As the mistress of her domestic household, Lady Happy is also able to manage and regulate access to her Convent of Pleasure. The mistress of the house in early modern England was able to control who could physically enter the house. In addition to being, on occasion, able to deny entry to political figures, the mistress of the house was able to refuse entry to neighbors or community members, as well as deny services or goods to customers if they happened to operate a commercial venture out of their home. They were also allowed to establish and protect the boundaries of their home (Flather 44-45). Lady Happy, unmarried but in charge of her convent, is able to exact the same level of control over access to her space. This control exerts itself first in Lady Happy's rhetorical debate with Madame Mediator and then again in Madame Mediator's conversation with the distraught gentlemen. It continues, however, throughout the rest of the play, in particular when other women engage with the Convent of Pleasure. In act 2 scene 3, Madame Mediator discusses recent news with two ladies: a princess has come to see the Convent of Pleasure. Very quickly, though, the conversation turns from the princess to the convent itself:

L. VERTUE. But, Madame *Mediator*, Do they live in such Pleasure as you say? for they'l admit you, a Widow, although not us, by reason we are wives.

M. MEDIAT. In so much Pleasure, as Nature never knew, before this *Convent* was: and for my part, I had rather be one in the *Convent of Pleasure*, then Empress of the Whole World;...

L. VERTUE. Well, I wish I might see and know, what Pleasures they enjoy.

M. MEDIAT. If you were there, you could not know all their Pleasure in a Short time, for their Varieites will require a long time to know their several Changes...

L. VERTUE. But I could judge of their Changes by their single Principles.

M. MEDIAT. But they have Variety of one and the same kind.

L. VERTUE. But I should see the way or manner of them.

M. MEDIAT. That you might.

(2.3 p 226)

Once again, Lady Happy exerts her ability to control access to her convent. While she has denied access to any and all men, she has also banned married women, even those of her own social status. Although the ladies Vertue and Amorous are upper class women like Lady Happy, their decision to marry and position themselves as wives in the larger social sphere denies them access to the convent. Madame Mediator, as a widow and the go-between between the convent and the larger social world, is their only opportunity to access the convent, and even then that access is extremely limited. Madame Mediator is not at all interested in imparting information to the women; she provides vague assertions of the convent's pleasures and luxuries, going only so far as to reveal that the pleasures are impossible to know or see in a single visit since they change with the seasons. She teases them with knowledge and experiences they can never have. By the end of the conversation, there is a touch of cold humor in her acquiescence "That you might." Lady Vertue will mostly likely never be able to enter the Convent of Pleasure; even if she did suddenly become a widow, there is no guarantee that Lady Happy will allow any other widow besides Madame Mediator, whom she already knew. More importantly, however, Madame Mediator clearly doubts that Lady Vertue, should she ever enter the convent, would fully understand the space's joys and virtues. Lady Vertue fails to understand that the convent is incomprehensible in words. It is something to be experienced. Lady Vertue insists, however, she would be able to understand the convent just by understanding the manner and way of the pleasures and sensations, that through a single ocular experience she could

understand the entire appeal. Madame Mediator knows, however, that this is not the case. Lady Vertue might be able to see the sensual pleasures, but she will never be able to understand their importance. She does not possess the right mindset. Lady Vertue cannot have the right mindset; in choosing to marry and incorporate herself in the patriarchal social circle outside the convent, she has shown herself incapable of ever truly understanding the convent. She is only ever going to be able to see the surface “manner” of things, not their greater importance.

Of course, Lady Happy does permit access to “appropriate and acceptable” female devotees, including the great foreign princess who will eventually bring about the Convent of Pleasure’s destruction. Madame Mediator first describes the Princess to Lady Amorous and Lady Vertue as “a Princely brave Woman truly, of a Masculine Presence” (2.3 p 226). Her choice of words immediately strikes the reader as odd; since Lady Happy has denounced not only marriage but even physical association or nearness with men, someone with a “masculine” presence should be immediately barred from her convent. This, however, is not the case since Lady Happy apparently takes issues with men and not necessarily masculine behaviors. Once she arrives at the Convent of Pleasure, the Princess makes note of a curious phenomenon: “Why then, I observing in your several Recreations, some of your Ladies do accouter Themselves in Masculine-Habits, and act Lovers-parts” (3.1 p 229). By masculine habit, the Princess means clothing rather than behavior, but she includes traditionally male behaviors in her use of “lovers-parts.” The courtly lover was a role taken on by noble or otherwise upper-class men. Women, then, do act the roles of men inside the Convent of Pleasure, but it is only at certain sanctioned times. The Princess notices this behavior during “several Recreations,” revealed in later scenes to be plays, masques, and

dances befitting a noble household. Masculine behavior, then, is sanctioned but only during certain times and spaces. Lady Happy allows her ladies to dress and behave like men in almost ritualistic play. When they have activities that require men in some way, shape, or form, the women take on that role. Wrought as this gender performance may be with homoerotic overtones, the role-taking is only temporary. Outside of the recreation or otherwise sanctioned activities, the ladies behave as ladies.

The Princess, however, breaks that rule of temporary masculine-gender performance. When the Princess first arrives, she asks that Lady Happy allows her be the servant to Lady Happy's mistress and then makes the following request: "I desire you will give me leave to be sometimes so accoutred [in male clothes] and act the part of your loving servant." (3.1 p 229) Importantly, the Princess does not stipulate that these moments of masculine dress will only be during recreation; instead she simply says "sometimes," indicating that it could occur during the space of acceptable play but also outside of it, introducing a facet of masculinity to the daily operations of the convent. Coupled as this is with the Princess' natural "Masculine Presence", the Convent of Pleasure suddenly becomes host to a more complex domestic experience, all the while without allowing "actual" men within its walls. The domestic household is, after all, a social norm of *The Convent of Pleasure's* patriarchal society. In both creating her convent as a domestic space, and then in allowing a masculine presence to exist within it, Lady Happy then creates not an inversion but a reflection of the society she first rejected within her convent.

The consequences of this more masculine domestic experience inside the convent reveal themselves through the Princess and Lady Happy's interactions, both prior to and during the convent's recreations. The brevity of the drama itself makes the shifts in Lady

Happy's character and her social position all the more striking as she continuously allows and interacts with the Princess. Their first interaction after a convent recreation is the subtlest. Almost immediately after Lady Happy grants the Princess permission to both act as her court lover and to adorn herself in masculine clothing, the two participate in the convent's first of three plays or masques—albeit as observers only. After the first play's presentation of all the horrors of marriage for women, Lady Happy asks the Princess the following:

L. HAPPY *to the PRIN*. Pray Servant, how do you like this Play?
 PRIN. My sweet Mistress, I cannot in conscious approve of it; for though some few be unhappy in Marriage, yet there are many more that are so happy as they would not change their condition.
 L. HAPPY. O Servant, I fear you will become an Apostate.
 PRIN. Not to you, sweet Mistress.

(3.10 p 233)

Lady Happy's prediction of the Princess' transformation into an apostate can be read in one of two ways: either she will abandon her positive impression of marriage with time spent in the convent, or she will reveal herself to be unsuitable for life in the Convent of Pleasure. Considering the Princess' response—that she will never become an apostate to Lady Happy—the latter is more likely. Regardless, however, in this brief exchange the Princess reveals her current unsuitableness for the Convent of Pleasure. Lady Happy established her convent on the firm personal belief of both the rejection of marriage specifically and the rejection of men more broadly. Moreover, she accepts into her convent only those noble or gently-born ladies that agree to reject those very same things. While the Princess does not say that she wishes to marry, she does openly support marriage and firmly rejects the parade of marital horrors in this first play-within-the-play. The Princess insists that misery in

marriage is the exception rather than the norm, and that more people find joy in it rather than despair. Oddly enough, in light of this open defense of marriage, Lady Happy does not reject or remove the Princess. Perhaps she meant her “fear” as a humorous quip, or perhaps she is already so enamored with the idea of having a “Princely lover, that’s a She” (3.1 p 229) that Lady Happy cannot bring herself to reject the Princess. Either way, with that critique of the first convent recreation, and with Lady Happy’s refusal to name it as inappropriate for her convent, the domestic atmosphere and power dynamics within the convent shifts. The Princess and her support of marriage begin to usurp the total control that Lady Happy has over her domestic convent, which will ultimately lead to the convent’s demise.

The power shift in the domestic atmosphere of the Convent of Pleasure is even more noticeable at the beginning of Act 4. In scene 1, Lady Happy expresses uncharacteristic sadness, “My name is Happy, and so was my Condition, before I saw this Princess; but now I am like to be the most unhappy Maid alive: But why may I not love a Woman with the same affection I could a Man?” (4.1 p 234) Underneath heteronormative concerns about female love and sexual relationships that occur in Catholic convents, Lady Happy’s distress highlights the influence that the Princess has over not only the Convent but over Lady Happy herself. It is precisely after the Princess arrived that Lady Happy began to find dissatisfaction in her previously euphoric lifestyle. With a courtly lover giving her undivided attention, Lady Happy has been forced to confront the fact that she does, in fact, desire the relationship that usually makes a domestic household possible; she desires marriage. Just not with a man. The tension between these two desires—a life that rejects marriage and a relationship that mimics that same traditional marriage—causes her the duress that opens the scene. Of course, once the Princess enters, garbed in masculine habit

(this time a shepherd's costume), Lady Happy puts aside her private misery and engages with the Princess in loving banter. In that banter, though, are still further shifts of the power dynamic between them and between Lady Happy and her convent. As their conversation turns to their relationship, the Princess matches Lady Happy's wit and logic:

PRIN. Can lovers love too much?

L. HAPPY. Yes, if they love not well.

PRIN. Can any Love be more vertuous, innocent and harmless then ours?

L. HAPPY. I hope not.

PRIN. Then let us please ourselves, as harmless Lovers use to do.

L. HAPPY. How can harmless Lovers please themselves?

PRIN. Why very well, as, to discourse, imbrace and kiss, so mingle souls together.

L. HAPPY. But innocent Lovers do not use to kiss.

PRIN. Not any act more frequent amongst us Women-kind; nay, it were a sin in friendship, should not we kiss: then let us not prove ourselves Reprobates.

(4.1 p 234)

In an inversion of her earlier intellectual engagement with Madame Mediator, Lady Happy debates, and loses said debate, with the Princess. What should start as a lesson for a devotee, prompted by the question “can lovers love too much,” turns into a brief rhetorical discussion about what affectionate gestures are indeed appropriate for them. Lady Happy, already distressed about her desire for manlike love from a woman, reminds the Princess that not only is it possible to “love not well” but also that they too can be guilty of it; kissing, after all, is not the pastime of “innocent” lovers and certainly not the pastime of female friends. The Princess, however, denies this, asserting instead that kissing is what defines female friendship and love. To not kiss, to not embrace and mingle their souls together in the meeting of mind, bodies, and lips, would be to deny their femininity. Since Lady Happy prioritizes women and their needs in her convent, then, she cannot effectively deny the request to kiss. Nor does she. After they kiss, however, the Princess undercuts her previous

statements: “These my imbraces though of Femal kind,/May be as fervent as a Masculine Mind.” (4.1 p 234) In highlighting again the fusion of masculine and feminine that she represents, the Princess reveals that their interactions and affectionate gestures are not entirely innocent nor entirely womanly. The thoughts behind the kisses and embraces are masculine, once again insinuating that the relationship that between the Princess and Lady Happy is shifting ever closer to that which is traditional for domestic households: husband and wife. While the Princess has not usurped Lady Happy’s position, she has caused her to retreat on her principles and acquiesce to her request. The Princess is slowly taking the place of central importance within their relationship and within the convent itself. Crucially, Lady Happy does not respond to her declaration. Instead she goes with the Princess to participate in the convent’s next recreation.

This same shift can be traced in the scene’s paired recreation, a pastoral masque and May Day dance. While Lady Happy, as the shepherdess, remains the focus of the pastoral, the centrality of her character diminishes as the Princess, as a shepherd, establishes herself as the only one able to court her. Neither of the other shepherds in the scene are able to convince Lady Happy to abandon her single life—the first not through their plea, nor the second who attempts to appeal to Madame Mediator, who takes the role of Lady Happy’s mother. The Princess, however, is the shepherd able to convince her to abandon single life and accept marriage. The Princess does so through lengthy poetic comparisons of Lady Happy’s wit to nature, ascribing her nearly divine status as she is able to observe all the earth and heavens movements. Her speech is nearly twice as long as Lady Happy’s positive response, not to mention far more elaborate. The Princess, therefore, takes pride of place

within the pastoral masque as the character with the most to say of the most import.

Further, the Princess ends the dialogue with what seems to be marriage vows:

PRIN. In amorous Pastoral Verse we do not Woo
 As other Pastoral lovers use to doo.
 L. HAPPY. Which doth express, we shall more constant be,
 And in Married life better agree.
 PRIN. We shall agree, for we true Love inherit,
 Join as one Body and Soul, or Heavn'ly Spirit.
 (4.1 p 237-238)

While Lady Happy is the one who uses the phrase “married life,” the Princess’ view of agreement as a joining of their bodies and souls into one, into a heavenly spirit, is reminiscent of Christian marriage generally and Protestant married life more specifically. The married couple is, in many literary iterations of married life in early modern England, a single body: the husband, as the head of the household, is positioned as the head of the married body, while the wife, as his helpmate, is the material body he governs and protects (Speght 23-24). While the Princess is not specific in their particular arrangement in the married body, the wit and rhetoric she has already employed—in addition to her masculine adornment—easily places her as the head of the married body she and Lady Happy would create. It is not surprise, then, that in the May Day dance to follow, the Princess and Lady Happy are crowned King and Queen of the shepherds, respectively.

In the convent’s recreations, then, the Princess establishes herself as the head of a fictional state of shepherds as well as the husband to Lady Happy’s shepherdess. While the recreation space is supposed to remain separate from the day-to-day domestic life of the convent, the Princess has already shown a willingness to incorporate recreation activities, such as masculinity, outside of the recreations’ sanctioned times. As such, the Princess, in

the masques and dances both a king and husband, becomes more and more central in the convent itself. Lady Happy, in return, becomes more marginalized and silent, deferring to the Princess at crucial times. This becomes especially apparent before the masque of the Sea-God, where the Princess interrupts Lady Happy and Madame Mediator. Madame Mediator, already established as a servant/counselor to Lady Happy, expresses concern about her changes in health and demeanor:

PRINC. Come my sweet Mistress, shall we go to our Sports and Recreations?

M. MEDIAT. Beshrew me, your Highness hath sported too much I fear.

PRINC. Why, Madame *Mediator*, say you so?

M. MEDIAT. Because the Lady *Happy* looks not well, she is become pale and lean.

PRINC. Madam Mediator, your eyes are become dim with Time; for my sweet Mistress appears with greater splendor than the God of Light.

M. MEDIAT. For all you are a great Princess, give me leave to tell you,
I am not so old, nor yet so blind,
But that I see you are too kind.

PRINC. Well, Madame *Mediator*, when we return from our Recreations, I will ask your pardon, for saying your eyes are dim, conditionally you will ask my pardon for saying, my Mistress looks not well.

(4.1 p 239-240)

Despite showing no inclination to speak to one another prior to this, in this conversation there is a palpable sense of scolding as Madame Mediator and the Princess converse about Lady Happy. Not only does the Princess openly dismiss Madame Mediator's concerns about Lady Happy's changes in health and behavior, she goes so far as to demand an apology from Madame Mediator for even suggesting that Lady Happy is unwell or unhappy. What is most concerning, however, is that which is not said: anything by Lady Happy. Apart from four-line lament that opens the dialogue (where she asks for death rather than love and disgracing her single status [p 239]), Lady Happy does not participate in this exchange at all. While she

does not support the Princess in her assertions, Lady Happy also does not defend Madame Mediator, not even when the Princess denigrates her age. She seems, if not content, at least willing to allow the Princess to usurp her in this moment as “the votress of nature” and take charge not only of the upcoming recreation but also of appropriate behavior between servant and household family member. This silent deference to the person who, in recreations, is her husband and who, in day-to-day convent activities, is her princely lover further solidifies the traditional patriarchal relationship that Lady Happy and the Princess have introduced and developed in the Convent of Pleasure. Lady Happy may still be the mistress of the Convent household, but the Princess is her governor, one whom she will obey, silently if need be.

In the paired recreation, the Princess’ role of Lady Happy’s governor continues. As the Sea-God to Lady Happy’s Sea-Goddess (“a” Sea-Goddess, to be precise, giving the indication that Lady Happy is not the only such women in “the” Sea-God’s realm), the Princess has the control that Lady Happy earlier exerted for herself. The Sea-God-Princess has power and commands: she accepts tributes from her watery subjects in the form of gifts and men; she establishes and owns her castle built by Nature’s rocks, and most importantly she controls the passage and employment of all those within her realm (4.1 p 240-241). She has the power to establish and create for herself. Lady Happy, by contrast, controls only the inner details of house and private chamber. She once again perfectly details the finery of her home, the Sea-God’s palace; she owns the keys that open the locks of oyster cabinets, and she makes fine personal items out of sea material in her stores, but Lady Happy’s Sea-Goddess does not control the place that houses these things. She does not control the court or the society around it. Instead, she is waited on in the comfort of the palace. The

Princess-Sea-God, on the other hand, reaches from the palace into the greater society. She delegates responsibilities and offices to counselors, judges, generals and administrators. She alone orders the great social sphere of her water realm; all answer to her and her alone: “And thus with Method order I,/And govern all with Majesty;/I am sole Monarch of the Sea,/And all therein belongs to Me.” (p 242) The Princess-Sea-God owns and controls all, including the physical space of Sea-Goddess Lady Happy. In the recreation, the domestic relationship is therefore completely. Fully married as Sea-God and Sea-Goddess, Lady Happy relinquishes the property power and managerial power she previously enjoyed. The Princess becomes the full head and center piece of the recreation.

That prominence of place, and the power that comes with the managerial responsibility of the Convent of Please, finally extends fully to the Princess in Act 5, where the Princess is revealed to be, indeed, a prince. After the silent presentation of the convent’s last recreation—a dance where Lady Happy gives a favor and the Princess in return kisses her hand—Madame Mediator barges in with the news that there is a man among them. The Princess, not Lady Happy, immediately takes charge: “You may make the search, Madame Mediator; but you will quit me I am sure.” (5.1 p 243) Permission is given by the Princess, not Lady Happy, to seek out this hidden man; when the Princess is finally shown to be a prince, even the possibility or need for permission disappears. When the ambassador arrives, the Prince makes the following proclamation: “go from me to the Councillors of this State, and inform them of my being here, as also the reason, and that I ask their leave I may marry this Lady; otherwise tell them I will have her by force of Arms.” (5.1 p 243-244) Being orphaned and without any other male relatives, Lady Happy has no male authority figure who the Prince can ask for her hand. She is, however, a citizen of the society she

earlier rejected and still bound by its laws, despite her isolation. In his demand that the ambassadors seek out the counsellors, however, the Prince also introduces the threat of deeper invasion, this time into the larger society itself. If Lady Happy does not become his wife, he will invade the country and take her by force. As a prince, and most likely heir apparent of his own country, it would be within his right (if certainly not entirely appropriate) for him to threaten war to win a woman as his bride. Already having become his wife within the convent's recreations, the Prince wants to make the relationship official and the domestic household he has been able to enjoy a reality for himself.

Whether Lady Happy wants that reality for herself is never fully established. In fact, Lady Happy says nothing this entire scene; while in the previous Act, Lady Happy was much more withdrawn, she still expressed herself enough to make her inner turmoil and conflict known at least to the audience. Here, though, even with sudden proclamations and promises of marriage from her now male lover, and with the threat of masculine invasion of not only her convent but also of her country, Lady Happy does not say anything. She expresses no surprise, no fear, not even horror or upset at the fact that the Princess she loved is indeed a man or that her convent has been so thoroughly betrayed. This, however, is not entirely surprising. With her domestic relationship and recreational "marriage" to the Prince already complete within the convent, Lady Happy is merely continuing the established pattern of deference. The Prince has long since been the central figure of the Convent of Pleasure; it is only right that he addresses the issue at hand. More importantly, however, there is actually very little that Lady Happy can do in this situation. While Lady Happy, as a single, unmarried woman, has legal rights over her own property and person, her legal identity within the larger society is still limited. With the patriarchal society she earlier

rejected, and a second patriarchal society she had not before encountered, both invading the private domestic space of her convent, Lady Happy finds herself once again under the rule of men. The boundaries that separated her private, domestic convent and the larger society have been broken down. With the convent reintegrated into society again, Lady Happy is also reintegrated and becomes a subject to be ruled by not only the Prince but the male authority of her country. With the prospect of war looming, there is no doubt that the country would force her to marry if she were to reject the Prince now.

Lady Happy, however, does not reject the Prince. By the end of the play, she is married and her legal identity—with the property ownership and management that came with it—is now fully subsumed by the Prince's, and by extension the patriarchal society's, greater legal identity. Once again legally recognized as *feme covert*, all of Lady Happy's property and whatever may be left of her inheritance left from her father is now owned and controlled by the Prince. This is why she expresses neither surprise nor shock when the Prince disbands and presents the Convent of Pleasure to a nearby Fool, nor questions the Prince's decision to do so. As her husband, he now owns the Convent of Pleasure and can do whatever he sees fit with it. In some ways, Lady Happy may even feel at least a little bit of relief. With the Convent of Pleasure taken from her and herself no longer tugged between the independent convent owner and the traditional domestic housewife, Lady Happy's inner turmoil has finally ceased. In fact, with the Convent of Pleasure given away and disbanded, all of the turmoil—both personal and societal—has ceased, and it is precisely for this reason that the ending of Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure* is considered “happy.” What started as a locus of personal freedom and pleasure for Lady Happy, the Convent of Pleasure caused immense instability both in society and in herself. The

convent's isolation, Catholic overtones, and seeming impenetrability caused unease in the play's society, while the actual private domestic atmosphere caused Lady Happy unspeakable stress once the Princess arrived. In recreations and courtship, Lady Happy was confronted with the dual reality of her convent: a female bodied space that still incorporated and reflected the patriarchal society she had wanted to reject. As she became more entwined with the Princess, Lady Happy became more distressed as she at once enjoyed their relationship and realized precisely what that meant. The Convent of Pleasure, then, became a locus of tension that threatened to undermine not only the society it was embedded in but also Lady Happy's personal health. By attempting to create an isolated space in a patriarchal society, Lady Happy set herself up the impossible task of trying to divorce from herself and from her social spaces the social norms she is already a part of. Domestic and Protestant patriarchal norms are what she understands; they are what she grew up with and how she forms her identity, even in the inversion of them. Even in her desire to remove herself from them, Lady Happy ends up recreating the social practices that she has always known, and it precisely the tension between what she desires and what she actually enacts that causes her distress. Created spaces are never isolated or fully separated from the social spheres surrounding them. They always invert and/or reflect the social norms that originated them, even in their desire to be separated. The continued presence of that created space, then, where the social sphere is reenacted despite rejection of the social norms causes social and sometimes personal tension. When the Convent of Pleasure is dissolved, however, everything returns to "normal;" society no longer has to deal with an impermeable space that separates marriageable women from the marriage market, while Lady Happy no longer has

to endure internal tensions in her reality. Stability and the status quo are restored, which is indeed “happy” since society nor its citizens can live in instability.

However, that does not mean that the ending is “satisfying,” nor does it have to be. While the world of *The Convent of Pleasure* has stabilized, women are silenced, their voices wrangled and their futures left uncertain. Older women like Madame Mediator are left behind while the younger marriageable women of the convent are abandoned to the marriage market without any attention to their wants. Married women, now including Lady Happy, are fitted into their proper place in society as wives and domestic managers, with their personal needs and desires now quietly tucked away behind the legal identity of their husbands. The ending of *The Convent of Pleasure* is happy because social collapse and personal distress have been prevented, but the cost of that happiness is still suspect even at the play’s end. Social happiness requires personal sacrifice; happy endings do not have to be entirely fulfilling; and that dissatisfying fact lingers even after the epilogue. *The Convent of Pleasure*, then, even as it supports marriage and the return of a normalized society, even as it totes its “happy ending” questions that very happiness.

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