

# Literature Review of Chaucer's Work Troilus and Criseyde

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## Abstract

Based on CNKI China Academic Journal paper database, this article makes a survey of the previous researches on Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde or other materials that are closely related to the topic. After collecting, sorting out and analyzing the research results of this medieval poem, the conclusion appears that the main trend of analyzing the story is mostly from the perspective of feminism and courtly love. However, there are also some problems, such as the insufficient domestic studies and repeated research perspectives in the general academic literature research field. These deficiencies pose new challenges to domestic medieval literature research, but also point out a new direction.

## Keywords

Chaucer; Troilus and Criseyde; studies; abroad; home.

## 1. Introduction

When it comes to one of Chaucer's greatest works, for a long time, many studies have focused their attention on the female character Criseyde to explore the author's attitude and thinking towards feminism, or the courtly love between Troilus and Criseyde in terms of the natural sexual behavior; while the study which put emphasis on the hero Troilus appears much less frequently. Despite of that, although there are numerous researches about Chaucer and his work abroad, only few academic studies of this poet can be found in Chinese medieval literature research field. What's worse, the broadness of this kind of research still need to be enlarged.

## 2. Different Versions of the Love Story of "Troilus and Criseyde"

"Troilus and Criseyde" is a traditional courtly love story set in the Trojan War. Although the names of the characters are basically from Homer's Iliad, the story itself was created in the middle ages. Since then the love story between Troilus and Criseyde has been recreated successively in various forms by great writers of different times, and thus, it has gradually become one of the classic prototypes in English literature. The most famous ones are Troilus and Criseyde by Geoffrey Chaucer, The Testament of Cresseid by Robert Henryson, and Troilus and Cressida by William Shakespeare. Before that, Benoît de Sainte-More, a French poet, wrote the old French poem Roman de Troie; in the late 1930s, Boccaccio, a great Italian writer, wrote "Filostrato". According to these two books, Chaucer had the main basis of creating his long poem Troilus and Criseyde.

## 3. Relative Research on the Chaucer's Work Troilus and Criseyde

### 3.1. Foreign Research Status

Studies on Chaucer and his work abroad are extremely sufficient with a historical context. There are two core journals about Chaucer, The Chaucer Review and Studies in the Age of Chaucer, providing the thesis and dissertation mainly of Chaucer or about other works at that period of time. After collecting, exploring and analyzing, their research results can be sorted

into three different aspects. As to the poem *Troilus and Criseyde*, scholars point of views vary with each other.

The first perspective of analyzing this poem is from historical point of view. For example, in Gayle Margherita's study "Historicity, Femininity, and Chaucer's *Troilus*", he argues that "history has long been an epistemological problem within the field of medieval literary studies." And Sarah B. Rude writes "Eye Beams and Boethian Sufficiency in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*" in order to figure out the potential influence from pervious great writers.

Secondly, feminism is another main discussion topic when talking about Chaucer's work. He is regarded as the first feminist in the English language literature history, especially reflecting in another female character -- the wife of Bath in one of his masterpieces *The Canterbury Tales*. Similarly, the character *Criseyde* to some degree is "an intelligent, gracious and superior" woman, according to Claes Schaar. And because of the rising status of women, Myra Stokes in his paper "Wordes white: Disingenuity in *Troilus and Criseyde*" furthermore discusses the concept of love, loyalty, and disingenuity.

Additionally, there are researches focus on the aesthetic effect of this poem. For instance, Kathryn McKinley's study "Condren, Edward I., Chaucer from Prentice to Poet: The Metaphor of Love in Dream Visions and *Troilus and Criseyde*", or Patricia Clare Ingham's "Chaucer's Haunted Aesthetics: Mimesis and Trauma in *Troilus and Criseyde*".

All in all, studies aboard on Chaucer's poem provide Chaucer leaners an abundant source of materials. However, there is also a problem that comparatively speaking, the research theories and methods are left behind, compared with those analysis of 19th century or 20th century's work. There is no article using psychoanalysis to reread the old poem with regard to the recent achievements of psychology.

### 3.2. Domestic Research Status

Not so many research results are presented in CNKI written by Chinese researchers. The most distinguished study situation in China is that there are sufficient researches on Chaucer's other works, namely *The Canterbury Tales*, or abundant studies of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, but not sufficient academic papers discussing Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. For example, Chen Cai Yi and Wen Jian write "The development and evolution of *Troilus and Cressida*", which discusses Boccaccio, Chaucer and Shakespeare's similar work and its development. Another good illustration is the master thesis written by Du Shu from school of foreign languages in Southwest University. The name of her thesis is "Reshaping of *Troilus-Cressida* Story -- Based on Chaucer, Henryson and Shakespeare", which compares and contrasts the difference between them to explore the reasons of these adaptations and to appreciate the resulting artistic effects.

Apart from that, researches on Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in China is scattered and unsystematic. Surely, we do have some valuable researches nowadays, like Wu Juntao's "The Introduction of *Troilus and Criseyde*" published in 1987; Wang Jiankai's "Poetry and Art: a Structural Analysis of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*" in 1989; Wu Fen's "Criseyde and Courtly Love literature" in 1993; Zhang Zhenjiu's "After Blowing away the Crazy Sand, We can Reach the Golden Age -- a Review of the English Monograph Paradox of Love in Chaucer's '*Troilus*' by the Young Scholar Shuai Xianjun" in 1995; Zhang Yonghui's "Why did *Criseyde* Choose *Diomedes* -- on the Emotional Exploitation in *Troilus and Criseyde*" in 2012; Li An's "On the Ethics of Love in *Troilus and Criseyde*" in 2015; and Xiao Minghan's "Intertextuality and Achievements of Chaucer's Early Works" in 2016 which contains analysis of this poem.

The papers listing above are almost all the research results in domestic English literature field. Although they vary greatly with each other but that is not enough. There are still other aspects that our researchers have not covered yet. And the quantity of studies in this field is still lower than those abroad. The potential cause of this situation may be the difficulty of reading the

original versions of Chaucer's works which are written in middle English. However, it is also the reason why we need to carry on and push the domestic research of his work forward into a brighter stage, for it is the origin of English literature.

#### 4. Conclusion

Because of the importance of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the insufficient domestic studies, the urge for us to explore a broader field of research is pressing. As a result, the potential new perspective of a research paper can analyze *Troilus'* internal psychological causes from the perspective of Jungian psychology, illustrating the dynamic process of the birth, development and disillusionment of *Troilus'* love toward *Criseyde* and the inevitability of its love tragedy according to its internal emotions, so as to further explore the proposition: "whether love necessarily involves suffering". This point of view has never been used to elaborate Chaucer's poem in the Middle Age, thus worthy discussing with new value and creativity.

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