CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

Troilus and Criseyde

Geoffrey Chaucer · *c. 1380s · original English text*

The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen, that was the king Priamus sone of Troye: Chaucer's long narrative poem of a prince's love, a lady's leaving, and a friendship that becomes a go-between. The hosted text is Middle English, complete in five books, ending Explicit Liber Troili et Criseydis.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What is the double sorrow of Troilus, and can a love so carefully made survive a city's war and a woman's changed estate?

"The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,"

Book I, the opening line

The hosted text is Chaucer's Middle English, PG #257, complete. The opening line stands alone as a continuous stretch (a stanza number follows it on the same line in the Gutenberg file; do not include the number). Spellings are this text's: sorwe, tellen, sone, Troye, wo, wele, Criseyde. This is not Shakespeare's play Troilus and Cressida (a different work). It is a long, grave, sometimes comic courtly narrative, Christian in its last look back from the spheres. For older students willing to read Middle English with help. Do not modernize quotes.

KEY CHARACTERS

Troilus
Priam's son, whose double sorrow in love is the announced subject.

Criseyde
The widow whose love and whose leaving are the second center; this text's spelling is Criseyde.

Pandarus
The friend and uncle, whose help is comedy and a moral problem.

Diomede, and the city at war
The Greek who receives her, and the siege that forces the exchange.

THE DOUBLE SORWE

> *"The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,"*
>
> Book I, the opening line

Grades 11–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

A Double Sorrow

BOOK I, THE PROPOSITION

The poet will tell Troilus's double sorrow, son of Priam, in loving, how his adventures fell from woe to weal and after out of joy.

- The first line is exact: 'The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,'
- Do not append the following line in the same quotation if a line-number sits between them in this file.
- The book is Middle English; quote it as printed.

> *"The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,"*
>
> Book I

02

A Prince, and a Lady

BOOK I INTO II

Troilus, who had mocked love, is taken by the sight of Criseyde. Pandarus, her uncle, becomes the friend who will make a way.

- The comedy of Pandarus is real, and it has a moral cost.
- Criseyde is a widow in a city under siege, not a simple prize.
- Book-divisions (Incipit Liber...) are this edition's way to cite.

03

From Woe to Weal

BOOKS II AND III

Letters, a meeting, a joy that the poet has already told us will not stay. The center of the poem is a happiness with a shadow over it.

- The joy is genuine; the 'double sorrow' requires that.
- Teach the night of Book III with restraint, for older students.
- Fortune is already named as a turning thing.

04

An Exchange, and a Leaving

BOOK IV

The war makes a bargain: Criseyde must go to the Greek camp. Promises are made that the poem will test.

- The political bargain is the hinge, not a mere accident.
- Troilus's helplessness is part of the sorrow.
- Antenor's exchange should be kept clear.

05

A Changed Heart, and a Last Look

BOOK V AND THE CLOSE

Days pass in the camp; a new protector; a letter too late. The poem ends, in this file, with a prayer and Explicit Liber Troili et Criseydis.

- Do not tidy Criseyde's change into a simple sermon or a simple excuse; the poem is more exact than that.
- The last look from the spheres is a Christian close; read it.
- Middle English, complete in five books, for older students; not Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida.

A Double Sorrow · Fortune · Friendship and Making · A City at War · A Last Look

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 11–12

1. The hosted text is Chaucer's Middle English (Project Gutenberg #257), complete in five books, ending "Explicit Liber Troili et Criseydis." The opening line is exact: "The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen," (a stanza number may follow on the same line in the Gutenberg file; do not include the number in the quotation). Spellings include sorwe, tellen, Criseyde. Quote this page, not a modernization.
2. This is not Shakespeare's play Troilus and Cressida (a different work on the site). A long courtly narrative, sometimes comic, with a Christian close, for older students willing to read Middle English with help.
3. Teach Book III and the later change of heart with restraint and exactness, not as a simple moral or a simple excuse.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #257, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/troilus-and-criseyde/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.