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TO WAIT OR TO ACT?:

TROILUS II, 954

by Gregory M. Sadlek

Pandarus's command to his young friend in *Troilus* II, 954, "And don thyn hood," has been given several conflicting interpretations by the various editors and translators of Chaucer.¹ James J. Donohue and Nevill Coghill translate the line "put on your hat," while John Fisher glosses it similarly as "keep your hat on." J. S. P. Tatlock, Percy MacKaye, and Robert M. Lumiansky suggest the line should be rendered "put on your nightcap." George P. Krapp and Margaret Stanley-Wrench seem to agree with this interpretation, though they do not translate the line directly. Krapp renders lines 953 and 954 as "'O Hush!' said Pandar, 'let me go to sleep! / And you do, too! You have no need to worry.'" Similarly, Stanley-Wrench has it: "Said Pandarus, 'Lie still and let me sleep! / Be quiet! I've done your errand speedily.'" Albert Baugh glosses the line as follows: "Be at ease (said to a person who has doffed his hat out of courtesy)." Finally, there is a long line of editors, including Robert K. Root, F. N. Robinson, Daniel Cook, James Dean, and Donald Howard, who believe that the line means "put on your hat (and go away)."²

This passage has no parallel in *Il Filostrato*, so one must look elsewhere for help in solving the problem.³ The *MED* affirms that a *hood* may indeed be detached from an outer garment, but to read it as "cap," "hat," or "nightcap" seems to go beyond the evidence, especially since the *MED* says that a *hood* was "often worn under a hat."⁴ The *MED* gives no support to Fisher's reading; in fact, it cites this very line as an example of *don* meaning "To put on (an article of clothing)."⁵ There is evidence enough in other of Chaucer's writings to suggest that "doffing the hood" was indeed a sign of respect.⁶ Thus Baugh's reading is possible. But it seems awkward because the social ritual to which Pandarus would be referring is a bit too public in nature for this private encounter. The last group of editors is refuted convincingly by Frederic G. Cassidy in "Don Thyn Hood' in Chaucer's *Troilus*" (1958). Basically, Cassidy argues that "there is no warrant for Pandarus to imply (for he does not in fact *say*) 'and go' since he and Troilus are already settled in for the night."⁷

Cassidy suggests that the word *hood* should be understood to mean “hawk’s hood”; thus Pandarus is figuratively ordering Troilus to control his emotions and keep silent. The *MED* dates this meaning of *hood* as early as 1450, so Chaucer may have had a hawk’s hood in mind.⁸ Further, in some ways the context supports Cassidy’s argument since it is clear that Pandarus wants to restrain Troilus’s immoderate and uncontrolled desires. “Al esily, now, for the love of Marte,” he says, “for every thing hath tyme” (II, 988-89). There is a problem, however, with this interpretation if one considers the larger context. The image of a “hooded hawk” implies passivity, and though Pandarus wishes Troilus to remain in the room for the night, he nevertheless wants Troilus to begin taking steps immediately on his own behalf: 1) Troilus must compose a love letter, and 2) the next day he must parade in full battle gear in front of Criseyde’s home. In line 960 Pandarus refers to the courtship as “*thi werk*” (emphasis added), and on two occasions he warns Troilus against *slouthe* (II, 959, 1008). Clearly an interpretation of this line as a call to action would be much more satisfactory.

Theodore Morrison’s translation, “Put on your hat and gird yourself for action. / Your needs are served,” seems to combine two interpretations of the line.⁹ “Put on your hat” has already been discussed and found problematical. “Gird yourself for action,” however, is a totally new reading of the line and deserves some attention. The *MED* offers an alternative definition of *hood* as a piece of armor, “A mail covering for the head and neck, coif of mail,” a meaning which is found as early as 1225.¹⁰ Further, by 1330 the expression “ball in the hood” meant “a warrior’s helmeted head.”¹¹ Thus Pandarus could be saying figuratively that “the campaign for Criseyde has begun, so put on your helmet and get ready for action.”

Not only does this reading of *hood* accord more closely with Pandarus’s scheme for Troilus, but also its military flavor is better suited to the passage. It calls to mind Troilus’s “scarmuch” earlier in the day, of which Pandarus had recently remarked: “Who hath ben wel ibete / To-day with swerdes and with slynge-stones, / But Troilus, that hath caught hym an hete?” (II, 940-42). Later, Pandarus, who links the pains of love and those of battle in 940-42, swears by “the love of Marte” (II, 988), not Venus, just before he tells Troilus the two steps he must take to begin the campaign for Criseyde. Finally, a reading of *hood* as “battle helmet” nicely foreshadows Troilus’s triumphant ride in his “beste gere” (II, 1012) before Criseyde’s window, a battle manoeuvre which quite overwhelms Criseyde’s de-

fenses and one which is first plotted soon after Pandarus orders “don thyn hood.”

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1. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 412. Subsequent quotations from the *Troilus* are taken from Robinson's edition and are cited in the text by book and line numbers.

2. James J. Donohue, trans., *Chaucer's Troilus and Cressida: Five Books in Present-day English* (Dubuque, Iowa: Loras College Press, 1975), p. 51; Nevill Coghill, trans., *Troilus and Criseyde* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 79; John H. Fisher, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p. 438; J. S. P. Tatlock and Percy MacKaye, trans., *The Complete Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1912; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 412; Robert M. Lumiansky, trans., *Geoffrey Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, Rendered into Modern English Prose* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1952), p. 53; George P. Krapp, trans., *Troilus and Criseyde, Englished Anew* (New York: Random House, 1932), p. 79; Margaret Stanley-Wrench, trans., *Troilus and Criseyde* (Arundel, Sussex: Centaur, 1965), p. 83; Albert C. Baugh, ed., *Chaucer's Major Poetry* (New York: Appleton, 1963), p. 113; Robert K. Root, ed., *The Book of Troilus and Criseyde by Geoffrey Chaucer* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1926), p. 450; Robinson, p. 820; Daniel Cook, ed., *Troilus and Criseyde*, Anchor Books (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1966), p. 121; Donald Howard and James Dean, eds., *Troilus and Criseyde* (New York: Signet, 1976), p. 77.

3. See William Michael Rossetti, ed., *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde Compared with Boccaccio's Filostrato* (London: N. Trubner & Co., 1873), p. 75.

4. *MED*, “hōd,” n., 1. (a).

5. *MED*, “don,” v. (2).

6. For example, Chaucer says of the Miller: “He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat, / Ne abyde no man for his curteisie” (A 3122-23). See also *BD*, 516.

7. Frederic G. Cassidy, “‘Don Thyn Hood’ in Chaucer's *Troilus*,” *JEGP*, 57 (1958), 740.

8. *MED*, “hōd,” n., 3. (c).

9. Theodore Morrison, trans., *The Portable Chaucer: Selected and Translated*, rev. ed. (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 405.

10. *MED*, “hōd,” n., 3. (a).

11. *MED*, “bal,” n., 4.