Università
Ca'Foscari
Venezia

Corso di Laurea magistrale
in Scienze del Linguaggio

Tesi di Laurea

Courtly Love in the Matter of Troy

A study in the tradition of the story of Troilus and Criseyde

—
Ca' Foscari
Dorsoduro 3246
30123 Venezia

Relatore
Prof. Massimiliano Bampi

Correlatore
Prof. Marina Buzzoni

Laureando
Giacomo Carnovalini
Matricola 826866

Anno Accademico
2013 / 2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS …... p.3

2. THE *FILOSTRATO*, or the first independent instance of the story of Troilus.

2.1. Boccaccio and the Court of Naples …... p.4

2.2. A literary debut …... p.6

2.3. Courtly Love and loves at Court …... p.8

2.4. Original traits in Boccaccio's Love Poetry …...................................... p.14

2.5. Boccaccio as a forerunner of the Renaissance …................................. p.15

3. BETWEEN TROIOLO AND TROILUS: the medieval notion of Courtly Love.

3.1. The medieval notion of Courtly Love …... p.18

3.2. Dante's Francesca in *Troilus and Criseyde* p.20

4. TRANSLATION PRACTICES IN THE MIDDLE AGES, or the death of the Author.

4.1. Translation as preservation …... p.25

4.2. The medieval concept of Authorship …... p.27

4.3. Chaucer the 'Grant Translateur' ….. p.29

4.4. Translation as reinterpretation: an example …..................................... p.32

5. CHAUCER'S *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*, or what's gained in translation.

5.1. Comparing texts …... p.34

5.1.1. Troilus's infatuation …... p.36

5.1.2. From love-talk to love-making …... p.45

5.1.3. The Parliament and the "chaungynge of Criseyde" …........................... p.50

5.1.4. Criseyde's betrayal ….. p.58

5.1.5. The Epilogue …... p.71

5.2. So, what is gained in translation? …... p.79

5.3. Chaucer's heritage and his cultural context ….. p.82

6. BEYOND CHAUCER'S LEGACY: Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*.

6.1. Henryson! Who is he? ….. p.90

6.2. Henryson, a Scottish Chaucerian? …... p.93

6.3. "Fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troylus" ….. p.99

6.4. The High Concise Style ….. p.107

7. CONCLUSIONS ….. p.109

8. BIBLIOGRAPHY …... p.113

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The present work is about one particular story, and it want to analyse how it varies when narrated by three different authors, at three different times and in three different languages and three different cultures. The story in question follows the tragic and unfortunate love between Troilus and Criseyde, two minor characters within the greater picture of the Trojan War.

The starting point of my analysis is the *Filostrato*, a poem in *ottava rima* written by the Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375). Boccaccio's account will then be re-written in Middle English as *Troilus and Criseyde* by Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400), which in turn will originate the Middle Scots poem *Testament of Cresseid*, written by the 15th century *makar* Robert Henryson. The relationships between these texts, and the divergences that each author will produce improving upon his source, along with their purposes, will be the main focus of my work.

All in-text quotations from the *Filostrato* are taken from “Il Filostrato,” in *Boccaccio. Caccia di Diana, Filostrato*, ed. Vittore Branca (Milano: Mondadori, 1990), all quotations from *Troilus and Criseyde* are taken from “Troilus and Criseyde,” in *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Stephen A. Barney, Norton Critical Editions (London: W.W. Norton, 2006), while all quotations from the *Testament of Cresseid* are taken from “The Testament of Cresseid,” in *Troilus and Criseyde*, by Stephen A. Barney, ed. Robert Kindrick, Norton Critical Editions (London: W.W. Norton, 2006).

For all excerpts in Middle English or Middle Scots I provided in note Modern English translations of my own.

2. THE *FILOSTRATO*, or THE FIRST INDEPENDENT INSTANCE OF THE STORY OF TROILUS[1].

The praise for being the first author to take the love-story of Troilus and Criseyde out of the more complex, convoluted and conspicuous accounts of the Matter of Troy, and to gift it with its first independent form[2] goes to the Italian poet and storyteller Giovanni Boccaccio. This chapter will discuss the influences of the Neapolitan courtly environment on Boccaccio's early works. Particular attention will be drawn to the relationship between the poet's personal love-life and the events narrated in the *Filostrato*. The main discussion will focus on its period of production and on the conjectures about a different dedication for the poem. A brief account of Boccaccio's peculiar treatment of the notion of courtly love will then be provided. The final section will address the relevance of the innovative traits Boccaccio introduced in the overall picture of European literature.

2.1. Boccaccio and the Court of Naples

Boccaccio was born in 1313, the illegitimate child of the rich Florentine merchant Boccaccino di Chellino, notorious businessman highly involved with the banking and trading affairs of the powerful Compagnia dei Bardi. Much was fantasised about Boccaccino's premarital relationship, but it is now accepted that the identity of Boccaccio natural mother is to remain hidden behind the veil of history (Asor Rosa 1990,298). The place of his birth is

1 Throughout the chapter, quotation from Italian criticism are reported in the text in English translations, while the original Italian is given in the notes. Conversely, quotations from the *Filostrato* are given in Italian in the text and an English translation is provided in the notes. All translations from Italian are of my own.

2 cf. Lumiansky (1954,1)

also not certainly acknowledged, though the majority of scholars[3] finds it at least reasonable to assume that the soon-to-be poet was born in Florence, and not in his father's native village of Certaldo. However, it was not in the bourgeois and mercantile city of Florence that Boccaccio decided to get involved with the events of the Trojan War.

When he was a child, his father had him study arithmetics and put Boccaccio in the cares of a prominent Florentine merchant, in the hope that his young boy would master the skills needed in order to assist him in his trades (Muscetta 1987,325). Very soon, Boccaccino realised that his son was not very gifted or keen to learn the tools of merchants[4], and consequently he directed his studies towards Canon Law, hoping that he would make a carrier in that field. This was one of the reasons why Boccaccino brought his son along when, in 1327, he moved to Naples to pursue the Bardi's businesses with the Angevin Court (Asor Rosa 1990,298). Boccaccino was a personal friend of Robert the Wise, King of Naples, and as an emissary of the powerful Compagnia dei Bardi, he was welcomed with full honours (Muscetta 1987,326). Boccaccio's life in Naples was therefore extremely pleasant, protected by his father's fame and wealth. It was during his stay at the Neapolitan Court that Boccaccio met Cino da Pistoia, who in 1330/31 was a professor of Civil Law at the University of Naples (Muscetta 1987,328). Besides his academic carrier, Cino was a poet of the *stil novo*, a personal friend of Dante and Petrarch, and the “heir and promulgator of the great poetry of Tuscany.”[5] From Cino, Boccaccio certainly learnt some useful notions about forensic matters, but it was Cino's expertise in Love-poetry that really interested the young son of the merchant.

Naples was at that time the most important cultural centre in the italic peninsula, well

3 See, e.g. Muscetta (1987) or Asor Rosa (1990)

4 Later, in the *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, Boccaccio stated that in the years spent as an apprentice merchant he had “no other profit than wasting time” (Muscetta 1987,325).

5 “erede e diffusore della grande poesia toscana” (Asor Rosa 1990,298).

connected with both the Byzantine scholars and the French intellectuals of Avignon (Muscetta 1987,328). King Robert was an erudite man himself[6], and very generous with his patronages. During his reign, many intellectuals flocked to the court of Naples, giving Boccaccio the opportunity to meet some of the most learned men of his time. Among these, it is worthy to reckon the Calabrian monk Barlaam, from whom Boccaccio learned his first elementary notions of Greek, and the famous erudite Paolo da Perugia, who at the time of Boccaccio's sojourn in Naples was the director of the extensive and wide-ranging Royal Library[7]. Driven by his juvenile curiosity, Boccaccio spent much of his time in the king's library, thus getting acquainted with the most diverse literary traditions. From Greek to Latin literature, from Dante and the *Stilnovisti* to the popular tradition of the *cantari*, everything he read left a mark in his imagination, and was later recalled during his following early attempts as a poet and storyteller. Crucially, Muscetta argued that "what would had given unity to this extreme variety of inclinations … would have been precisely his bourgeois attitude."[8]

Conversely, in the following sections it will be argued that the courtly environment (as opposed to his bourgeois background) was functional to Boccaccio's first poetical efforts, which would not have been produced, had the poet not been sent to Naples.

2.2. A literary debut

Boccaccio's first works developed from the many fruitful encounters he had with the thriving group of intellectuals that gathered around the King of Naples. He began to write

6 In the *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, a much older Boccaccio compared Robert to the biblical king Solomon (Kelly 2003,258)

7 A more extensive catalogue of the most prominent intellectuals at King Robert's court can be found in Asor Rosa (1990,298)

8 "quel che avrebbe dato unità di confluenza a questa estrema varietà di gusti … sarebbe stato proprio un abito mentale borghese" (Muscetta 1987,328).

poetry for a secular audience, principally made of damsels and ladies orbiting around the court (Muscetta 1987,329), and indeed his amateur poem *La Caccia di Diana*, probably composed around 1334, is actually "a deferential tribute … to the beautiful and noble women of the court."[9] According to Muscetta (1987,329), still a *dilettante*, Boccaccio had quite enough success, and at court he was already styled as "poeta". Nevertheless, his actual literary debut is nowadays associated with the *Filostrato*, written around 1335 (the long-standing quarrel about the exact date of production will be addressed in § 2.3).

In the Royal Library in Naples, Boccaccio found and read the story of the troubled love between Diomedes and Briseyde, weaved into Benoît de Saint-Maure's account of the Trojan War in the *Roman de Troie*. He probably did not have at his disposal the original Old French version. Instead he consulted the Latin translation of the *Roman* given by Guido delle Colonne in his *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, and some other vernacular versions, most probably including the one adapted from Guido's account by the Sienese Binduccio dello Scelto (cf. Asor Rosa 1999,475). However, Boccaccio decided to rule out the frame in which the episode developed in the *Roman*, i.e. the events of the Trojan War, and chose to focus on the mere love story, adding psychological insights on the characters and unfolding all the details that were just hinted in Benoît. He followed the general outlines of the story put forth by the two earlier writers, but allowed himself a very high degree of freedom in bending the events. Thus, he forged a different and more suitable frame in which to move his characters. His direct borrowings from the previous versions (generally brief descriptions or extracts from speeches, often transferred from one character to another) are variously scattered throughout the poem, but Griffin (1998,29) reckoned that "the total indebtedness of Boccaccio to both authors runs to no more than one verse every thirty-eight." Nevertheless, he also pointed out that in Books II and III—i.e. those in which we are told of he development of

9 "un ossequioso omaggio … alle nobili e belle donne della corte" (Moutier 1832,5).

the love of Troiolo for Criseida, and of the following courtship—Boccaccio could not possibly have borrowed anything from his sources, since these scenes are entirely lacking in both originals.

That the process of adaptation in the Middle Ages always involved a certain high degree of manipulation is little to be wondered at. However, in the case in object it is possible to explain quite easily this *mouvance* by taking into consideration the context of production and the purposes that led Boccaccio to write his *Filostrato.* But to fully understand the underlying reasons for the composition of the poem, it is necessary to dig a little more into the poet's love life.

2.3. Courtly Love and loves at Court

The city of Naples had a great deal to offer to a young student thirsty of culture, and King Robert's court had even more to offer to a young lover eager of passion. Although Boccaccio was not of noble descendants, he seldom felt uneasy in the lavish and flamboyant environment of the court (Muscetta 1987,326), which was indeed firmly in the hands of its creditors and money-lenders. Moreover, as Muscetta (1987,326) pointed out, in his native Florence the leading class had made it a necessity to engage in constant wars over regional hegemony, whilst the capital city of the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily was still a peaceful and wealthy haven for a privileged young man. At court, the relative security Boccaccio obtained by the prominent position of his father, together with his own youthful and sincere passion for the fair sex, made it possible for him to court and gain the favours of the lady Maria d'Aquino. She was probably an illegitimate daughter of King Robert himself (Griffin 1998,12), officially recognised as the daughter of Tommaso IV Count of Aquino, and therefore member of one of

the most ancient and notable families in the whole kingdom[10]. Records of his courtship of Maria are found in many of his juvenile works[11], but the lady is always concealed under a *nom de plume,* most of the times that of Fiammetta. Due to the lack of other biographical evidence, scholarly tradition has often heavily relied on the reconstruction of the various stages of Boccaccio's relationship with Maria in order to establish a chronology of his first works.

The problem that have concerned many scholars[12] is that in the *Filostrato* the author never employs the usual name of Fiammetta to disguise his loved one. Rather, he dedicates the poem to a generic *Filomena,* a name that can be related to a participial form of the greek verb *fileò*, meaning "she who is loved." In additon, Branca (1990,48-9) believes that there are other inconsistencies in the representation of the character of Criseida as a mirror of Maria, and therefore he puts forth the hypothesis that Boccaccio might have dedicated the poem to another woman, hidden under the sentence "il vostro nome di grazia pieno"[13] (*Proemio,* 4). As a matter of fact, medieval lexicography assigned the meaning "divine grace" to the name Giovanna, as Isidore of Seville wrote in his famous encyclopedic treatise *Etymologiae*[14]: "*Iohanna autem interpretatur Domini gratia.*" (Liber VII.9 *De Apostolis*). Such evidence (the absence of any reference to Fiammetta, the hint of a woman named Giovanna and the discrepancies between the character of Criseida and later representations of the poet's lover) led Branca (1990,49) to conclude that the *Filostrato* must have been written before Boccaccio's creation of the literary myth of Fiammetta, and therefore the poem had to be

10 The house of D'Aquino is reckoned among the "Serenissime Sette Grandi Case del Regno" in the *Enciclopedia storico-nobliare italiana* (8 voll., 1928-35)

11 Besides the *Filostrato*, the most notable are *Filocolo, Teseide, Fiammetta, Ameto* and *Amorosa Visione.*

12 see e.g. Branca (1990,47)

13 "your name full of grace"

14 *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum Sive Originum Libri*

composed earlier than the *Filocolo* (where the presence of Fiammetta is transparent), sometime around 1335.

However, Branca's proposal has not been straightforwardly accepted, and indeed there are some further elements who need to be discussed, while it might be worth reconsidering some others. It is difficult not to acknowledge the fact that the story in the Filostrato is intimately and directly connected with a—probably early—stage of one of Boccaccio's courtships. However, since the identity of the lady to whom the poem is dedicated is probably impossible to ascertain beyond any reasonable doubt, I think that the most practical way to deal with the matter is to turn to the logic of the principle of Ockham's Razor, which states that in explaining a certain thing, no more assumptions should be made than are necessary[15]. Following this principle, it will be argued that in analysing the composition of the *Filostrato* there is no need to assume a different object of Boccaccio's love when the one we already inferred could do just as well.

It is true that in the poem there is no reference to Fiammetta, but this should not lead us to conclude that the Filomena to whom the *Filostrato* is dedicated is not the same Maria d'Aquino that was later disguised under the name of Fiammetta. It shall however be assumed that, due to this incongruity, the poem must have been written when the relationship was in an early or at least still not fully developed stage, i.e. when the use of the *senhal* of Fiammetta was not yet consistent in Boccaccio's works (Asor Rosa 1999,474). The suggestion that the author might have hidden the name Giovanna under the previously mentioned periphrasis is not to be disregarded, but it loses plausibility if we consider the fact that every other etymology implied or even directly discussed in the *Proemio,* is actually mistaken. In the first place, the classical interpretation of the name *Filomena* is not the participial form of the greek

15 *"Entia non sunt multplicanda preater necesitatem",* attributed to William of Ockham, c.1287-1347

verb "to love", but rather one of the names for the nightingale, meaning "she who sings sweetly."[16] In the second place, the interpretation that the author himself gives about the title of the poem: "Filostrato tanto viene a dire quanto uomo vinto e abbattuto d'amore"[17] (*Proemio,* 1) is notoriously approximative (Asor Rosa 1990,298), since the correct etymology of the author's *alias* would rather be "he who loves war". The point here is not to prove Boccaccio an ignorant, but to take into account the fact that he probably had only a superficial knowledge of lexicography, and therefore to consider the possibility that the phrase "di grazia pieno" may not be a knowing wink to the poet's secret lover, but indeed just a form of courtesy. If one would like to push the argument further, it might be maintained that the phrase may as well be a reference to the Virgin Mary, therefore supporting the assumed dedication to Maria d'Aquino, but the claim will drift towards the field of speculation, and here this path will not be trailed further.

As a conclusion on the issue, there is some other evidence that should lead us to assume that it was indeed Maria d'Aquino the lady whose absence plunged the poet into the deepest distress and compelled him to write the *Filostrato*. The most relevant is that Boccaccio explicitly tells us that his Filomena withdrew from Naples to Sannio (*Proemio,* 3), where there happened to be located one of the estates of Maria's "adoptive" father, the Count of Aquino (cf. Crescini 1887,186). This consideration, together with Griffin's observations that "there is every reason to believe that the poem was written rapidly and finished within a few months, quite clearly before her return to Naples." (1998,17) is once again no definitive proof, but at least it seems to legitimate the possibility to subsume Filomena under the widespread *senhal* of Fiammetta. It is therefore possible to argue that the "physical" embodiment of

16 cf. the entry *"Filomena"* in Johannes Balbus' *Catholicon seu universale vocabularium ac summa grammatices, Pars IV, De Littera F ante I*

17 "Filostrato's meaning is that of a man who is overwhelmed and destroyed by love"

Criseida in Boccaccio's poem is indeed the lady Maria d'Aquino, and that the *Filostrato* was written during an early stage of their relationship.

Actually, it may be tempting to consider the poem as written even at a much later stage of the *liaison*, i.e. after 1338, when Maria deserted Boccaccio, apparently for another lover[18]. From this standpoint, the final part of the poem, where Criseida betrays Troiolo for Diomede, could be considered a *memento* of the desertion, as well as the harsh remarks on women in the final stanzas of Book VIII could be explained as a resentful expression of the poet's hurt feelings. However this supposition is not consistent neither with the general tone of the *Proemio* nor with the brief postface to the poem that is Book IX:

> Poi tu, posata alquanto, te n'andrai
>
> alla donna gentil della mia mente:
>
> oh, te felice che la vedrai,
>
> quel ch'io non posso far, lasso dolente!
>
> E come tu nelle sue man sarai
>
> con festa ricevuta, umilmente
>
> mi raccomanda all'alta sua virtute,
>
> la qual sola mi può render salute[19].

Moreover, the fact that the poem must have been written before Boccaccio obtained the final favours from his lady, i.e. about two years prior to her desertion, is suggested by strong internal evidence, the most relevant of which is the description of the first nocturnal private *rendezvous* between the two lovers. In all later accounts the lady is surprised in bed by an unexpected visitor, at first she is hesitant but then she concedes herself. In the *Filostrato* instead the meeting is carefully planned beforehand, and the lady surrenders to her lover promptly and willingly. Crucially, this leads Griffin (1998,19,n.1) to state that "these later

18 See e.g. the famous episode of Idalogos in the *Filocolo* Book V, Ch. 8.

19 *Filostrato*, Book IX, St. 5

accounts … are autobiographical and that the account given in the Filostrato is not." It is therefore evident that to claim the poem to have been composed after the desertion of Maria is inconsistent with the textual evidence, and therefore such an hypothesis has to be disregarded.

To summarise, I have claimed that the production of the *Filostrato* is deeply intertwined with Boccaccio's love-life at the court of Naples, and especially with his affair with the lady Maria d'Aquino. The poem is representative of an early stage of the courtship, especially prior to the construction of the recurrent *senhal* of Fiammetta and certainly not subsequent to her desertion. Hence, seconding Crescini (qtd. in Asor Rosa 1999,474), I believe that a fairly accurate guess would be that of placing the composition of the *Filostrato* sometime around 1336. This hypothesis would yoke its production with that of another romance, namely the *Filocolo*, but this should not be regarded as a deterrent. It is true that in the *Filocolo* we have clear references to Maria's betrayal, but it is also true that some of the themes of the *Filostrato* are closely modelled upon the story of *Floris and Blancheflour*[20], which is the indisputable source of the *Filocolo.* Moreover, the production of the epic prose text took Boccaccio many years to be completed, as stated in the *Filocolo*: "O piccolo mio libretto a me più anni stato graziosa fatica"[21] (Book V, Ch. 97). It is therefore reasonable to believe that the first part of the *Filocolo*—composed at the direct request of Maria, according to the story told in the first chapter of the first book[22]—was already in production when the sudden departure of the Lady pushed the poet to the versification of the *Filostrato*.

In the *Filostrato,* the personal events of the poet's life are the driving force, but it is the

---

20 cf. especially the story of the separation between Floris and Blancheflour for details regarding the activities of Pandarus (Griffin 1998,47)

21 "Oh little book of mine, graceful labour of many years"

22 "Ond'io … ti priego che per quella virtù che fu negli occhi miei il primo giorno che tu mi vedesti e a me per amorosa forza t'obligasti, che tu affanni in comporre un piccolo libretto" *Filocolo*, Book I, Ch. 1

cultural environment of the court that provides him with the adequate terms to convey his distress. In other words, it is the context of reception that imposes its patterns of thought on the young poet, who can seldom express himself in a different way if he wants to be understood by his audience. Even the choice of the subject is directly dictated by the cultural establishment to whom the poem is addressed, since in order to signify*,* a text needed to be recognised as part in a broader tradition and met the horizon of expectation of its audience. In Jauss (1982,79) phrasing: "for each work a preconstituted horizon of expectations must be ready at hand … to orient the reader's understanding and to enable a qualifying reception"

Thus, the *Filostrato* might not have been written had Boccaccio never been to Naples, in the same way in which the *Decameron* may never have been produced had the poet not come back to his native Florence.

2.4. Original traits in Boccaccio's Love Poetry

Although the *Filostrato* is highly conventional in tone and style (Branca 1990,49), some original traits can be at times perceived in its treatment of courtly values. First of all, although the Latin and French literary traditions represented beyond doubt the favourite sources for medieval narrative, Boccaccio, as mentioned before, was also fascinated by the original narrative form represented by the Italian tradition of the *cantari* (Branca 1990,52). His major and most evident borrowing from the poems of the *canterini* is that of the metre—the octave —which was typical of this lesser and more popular form of poetry, and that Boccaccio, probably for the first time, employed for more aureate verses. Moreover, he also "spontaneously adopted some expressive manners … and some narrative rhythms and some simple psychology, together with the formulas for introducing, retaking or concluding the narration."[23] Despite the fact that the influence of the *cantari* is felt in the very structure of the

23 "assunse spontaneamente certi atteggiamenti espressivi … e certi ritmi narrativi e certa facile psicologia,

verse and strophic measure (Perella 1961,11), Boccaccio freed himself from the need to design his octave in order for it to be functional to the music. This made it possible for him to make his syntax flow beyond the boundaries of verses and stanzas, thus foreshadowing his natural tension to a more prosaic use of the language (Branca 1990,55).

Also noteworthy is the fact that despite his widespread use of conventional imagery related to the "Religion of Love", Boccaccio seems to take the courtly tradition much less seriously than it would be expected of a poet of the *stil novo*[24]. It is therefore arguable that in the *Filostrato* he purportedly pays lip service to the convention and wields its formulas just as a means to an end: physical union with his beloved (Hanly 1990,145). From this perspective, it is clear that in Benoît's episode Boccaccio saw a story of separation between two lovers which was easy to bend to his purposes, and that in the vocabulary of courtly love he saw a vehicle suitable to convey to his lady his sense of grief. As Hanly (1990,149) puts it: "Boccaccio appropriates the courtly system as an amatory language to be exploited in whatever manner necessary."

2.5. Boccaccio as a forerunner of the Renaissance

The vast majority of Boccaccio's vernacular works deals with the subject of love. Long before Provençal lyrics reached the Kingdom of Naples, the principles of Courtly Love (probably driven by the emerging conflicts with the Church) were restrained in such way that for the poets of the Tuscan school—e.g. Cino da Pistoia, Boccaccio's mentor—the object of the poet's love was exalted in songs that clothed the ladies in such glory to resemble religious poetry (Clubb 1960,189). Thus, the superstructure of Boccaccio's juvenile poems, and

fino alle formule per introdurre o riprendere o concludere il racconto" (Branca 1990,52)

24 "Love that denies the urging of the flesh exceeds the limits of nature, to Boccaccio's way of thinking" (Clubb 1960,192)

especially those written during the Neapolitan period, is a “vision of a world of courtliness, of gentilezza and leggiadria, of valor and cortesia” (Perella 1961,9).

However, although he necessarily had in mind both the doctrine and the vocabulary of the *stil novo*, Boccaccio's poem presents us with a swift incursion of the poet's earthly vision into the scenery of love poetry. What is perceived as immediately humanistic and modern in Boccaccio is his recurrent attention to the practical details of love relationships and the notion, that reaches its peak of awareness in the *Decameron*, that judgement proceeds from men rather than from God (Beekman Taylor 1982,123). In spite of what Dante regarded as most valuable for a poet, i.e. the search for hidden anagogical truths, what is most striking in reading Boccaccio is precisely this concern with the superficial and the human world. The greatest innovation of Boccaccio is therefore to be found in the individual perception that he was able to endow his characters with. This perspective on the characters was at the time a pioneering idea in European literature, but in a few centuries this germinal idea will develop into one of the most widespread literary genres, that of the Novel.

3. BETWEEN BOCCACCIO'S *TROIOLO* AND CHAUCER'S *TROILUS*: THE MEDIEVAL NOTION OF COURTLY LOVE[25]

If Boccaccio is a fore-runner, Chaucer is a master in medieval tradition. His Italian source is in many respects a Renaissance poem, but Chaucer's *Troilus* has to be regarded as “wholly medieval” (Lewis 1977,176). Chaucer borrows from Boccaccio the theme, but then he coats it with medieval rhetoric and puts the whole story in line with his own conceptions of love and chivalry. According to Lewis (1977,176), only what is already medieval in the source is preserved in Chaucer's poem. What can be *medievalised* is changed, and if anything cannot be brought into line, it is omitted. In order to highlight the respective peculiarity of the two texts, and thus to bring evidence for the previous statements, it is necessary to take a step back and discuss the medieval notion of courtly love, since it is in this respect that the two poems differ the most.

The following chapter will therefore briefly discuss the characteristics of courtly love, and in particular the ideology behind the wide notion of the Religion of Love. The main focus will be on Dante's phenomenology of Love, which reunites Courtly Love with the doctrine of the Church. A detailed presentation of the episode of Paolo and Francesca (*Commedia*, Inferno, Canto V) as the link between Boccaccio's and Chaucer's accounts of the story of Troilus and Criseyde will close the chapter.

25 As in the previous chapter, Italian criticism is reported in translation while Italian sources are provided in the original, with translations in the notes.

3.1. The Medieval notion of Courtly Love

We are all fairly familiar with the term “Courtly Love” and with the lengthy love-poems of the 11th and 12th century. Troubadour Poetry has indeed far better advocates than myself[26], and it will suffice to the present work to remember their lyrical from, and their sophisticate and aureate style, which was often deliberately conceived to be enigmatic, in order to let the reader/listener ponder the depths of love's passion.

The characteristics of this love are not homogeneously described among the different traditions[27], but in *The Allegory of Love* Lewis pinpoints the main pillars around which the Provençal system revolves as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery and Sacrality (1977,2). Lewis' discourse is fundamentally based on an analysis of the medieval reception of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* in Romance-speaking Europe. His argumentation follows the principles set in the treatise *De Amore* by Andreas Capellanus, where only the courteous lover was capable of such a feeling as “love”, and yet it was this feeling that made the gallant knight courteous (Lewis, 1977,2). In this tradition, the love of the courteous knight for his lady was typified as relentless, and would make him obey to the dame's every wish, however whimsical they might have been. In this respect, it is often noticed how closely this courteous service is modelled upon that of the feudal vassal to his lord, in a process that has been sometimes referred to as the *feudalisation of love*[28].

According to feudal practice, marriage was a match of interest. And since interests continually changed, marriages were dissolved as soon as a new alliance was considered more useful than the former one. Love as we understand it was seldom present in high-born married

26 See e.g. Chaytor (1912), Chambers (1985) or Gaunt and Kay, eds. (1999)

27 The works of the German *minnesänger* (e.g. Walther von der Vogelweide) differ in tone and motive from the French *troubadours*, although they both wrote love poetry in the courtly love tradition.

28 Wechssler, *Das Kulturproblem des Minnesangs*, 1909, Bnd. I, p. 177, qtd. in Lewis (1977,2)

couples, so it had to be sought in other circumstances. Therefore, adultery is considered as a fundamental characteristic of Courtly Love, since it sets this kind of love apart from the dutiful, unhappy version of it which was marriage: “Causa coniugii ab amore non est excusatio recta.[29]” Yet, this consideration shall not lead the trained reader to compare courtly love to the modern conception of “dishonourable” love. True it is that the love of the Knights (the courteous lovers *par excellence*) was “ethically careless” (Lewis 1977,3), nonetheless it was essentially a tragical emotion, which could only be quenched by complete submission to the God of Love. Indeed, Courtly Love didn't match the ethical or religious requirements, thus another system of beliefs had to be created in order to justify, or at least to lighten the burden of guilt of the adulterous lovers. This new system is the Religion of Love, a devotional cult parallel to the canonical one, in which, metaphorically speaking, the centre was not Christ but the Magdalene.

From what we have seen so far, it is not hard to perceive why the concept of Sacrality is to be held as fundamental to the whole conception of Courtly Love. Notably, what is implied with the term “sacrality” is the aforementioned Religion of Love, and not the Sacred Mysteries of Christianity. And indeed “the whole world of courtesy exists only by leaving the religious side of it 'out for a moment'.” (Lewis 1977,41). There was in medieval doctrine some room for innocent sexuality, but passion was by all means considered wicked, and had to be ruled out from any god-blessed union (Lewis 1977,8). Courtly Love was another matter, it relied on different values, and so the Religion of Love was something more than one of its marks, since it encompassed all the other virtues of the courteous lover. It was the frame in which all his actions took place, and at the same time the concept that gave valour to each of them. Christianity moderated and softened the more extreme tendencies of the ancient world, but still in medieval times Andreas Capellanus cannot offer any real reconciliation (Lewis

29 “Love cannot be restrained by marriage” in *De Amore*, *Liber secundus, Capitulum VIII: De regulis amoris*

1977, 40). It was necessary to wait for Dante in order to have a phenomenology of Love that can reconcile the Church and the Court, a noble fusion of sexual and religious experience. In the *Commedia*, this unity is restored, and Love can be treated with pure solemnity. Thus, it is Dante that provided Chaucer with the right set of instruments to handle Boccaccio's *Filostrato.* With the *Commedia* at his side, Chaucer was able to reconcile his idea of love-poetry with the medieval one, without leaving anything of what happened in the meantime aside (Boitani 1999,93).

3.2. Dante's Francesca in Troilus and Criseyde

The inceptor of the Italian tradition of the s*til novo* is almost unanimously considered to be Guido Guinizzelli (1235 – 1276) with his poem *Al cor gentile rempaira sempre amore*[30]. In his poem, Guinizzelli draws an organic Metaphysics of Love, in which Love and Noble Heart (*cor gentile*) are generated twins by Nature herself. Chaucer was certainly aware of the Italian poetical trends of the 13th and 14th centuries, and in the very first stanza of the third book of his *Troilus,* both Tatlock (1920,443) and Boitani (1999,69) underlined not just an echo, but a proper quotation, a tribute Chaucer paid to Guinizzelli: "In gentil hertes ay redy to repaire!" (*Troilus and Criseyde*, Book III, line 5). It seems therefore just a logical assumption to believe that Chaucer wanted to place himself in the line of Italian love-poets, or at least, as St. Bernard may have said, that they were the giants on whose shoulders the English poet stood.

One of these giants, and probably the foremost, was Dante with his *Commedia*, which together with Petrarch's *Canzoniere* set the poetical canon for centuries to come. As modern scholars, Dante believed Guinizzelli's poem to be the *manifesto* of the new poetical trend (not a mere *new style*, but a whole set of ideas, orderly organised in what can be considered an ontology of Love). He used the poem in various ways, but already in the *Vita Nuova* he

30 cf. Boitani (1999,70)

altered the principles set by his predecessor and took them to a further step. What in Guinizzelli were two separate entities, in Dante (*Vita Nuova*, XX, 3) became two sides of the same being:

> Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa[31],
>
> sì come il saggio in suo dittare pone,
>
> e così esser l'un sanza l'altro osa
>
> com'alma razional sanza ragione.

In the *Commedia* we have a more drastic turn in the way Dante approaches the theme of Courtly Love, a change in the whole *ethos*, which has to be traced back to his poetical crisis expressed in the *Convivio* (Boitani 1999,77). In the second *canzone,* the language and style are the same that Dante used when he praised Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*

> Cose appariscon ne lo suo aspetto
>
> che mostran de' piacer di Paradiso,
>
> dico ne li occhi e nel suo dolce riso,
>
> che le vi reca Amor com'a suo loco.
>
> ...
>
> Questa è colei ch'umilia ogni perverso:
>
> costei pensò chi mosse l'universo.[32]

However, in the following explicative chapters, we are told that the woman of whom Dante sings the praises is not Beatrice, but Philosophy instead[33], thus bringing the *Convivio* in the footsteps of Boethius's *De consolatione Philosophiae* (Boitani 1999,77). Burt in the fire of the *Convivio*, the love-poetry of the V*ita Nuova* can arise once again in the *Commedia*, this time

---

31 The revealing first line translates as "love and noble heart are one thing"

32 *Convivio*, Book III, lines 55-58 and 71-72

33 "Sì come l'ordine vuole ancora dal principio ritornando, dico che questa donna è quella donna de lo 'ntelletto che Filosofia si chiama" *Convivio*, Book III, Ch. XI

polished by the hands of philosophy with "the new, harsh and subtle verses of rectitude[34]." What Dante was able to do in his masterpiece is indeed a remarkable achievement, as he reunited in the same framework two worlds previously considered as mutually exclusive, i.e. that of Christianity and that of Courtly Love. Even Guinizzelli at the end of his much celebrated poem, maybe in fleeting surrender to the fear of God, had God himself scold the soul of the poet, in what seems to be an act of condemn of Courtly Love and all its literature

> Donna, Deo mi dirà: "Che presomisti?",
> sïando l'alma mia a lui davanti.
> "Lo ciel passasti e 'nfin a Me venisti
> e desti in vano amor Me per semblanti:
> ch'a Me conven le laude
> e a la reina del regname degno,
> per cui cessa onne fraude[35]"

Dante succeeded in saving chivalric literature by manipulating its contents and considering Courtly Love as one *modality* of the universal language of Love (toward men, as well as toward knowledge or God)[36]. It goes without saying that men are frail creatures, and the chances to misinterpret this Metaphysics of Love are more than several. In the famous tercets of *Canto V* we hear the voice of Francesca, whom Dante elected as the *exemplum* of carnal sin, at the same time champion and victim of Courtly Love. And once again, Francesca begins her passionate and dramatic defence of love with a clear reference to Guinizzelli: "Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende"[37] (*Commedia*, Inferno, Canto V, line 100). The idea is there, and words and tone are those Dante was accustomed to in the *Convivio*, but Francesca stretches the whole conception to an extreme. Love is no more the twin brother of

34 "versi nuovi, aspri e sottili della *rectitudo*" Boitani (1999,78)

35 *Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore,* lines 51-57

36 cf. Boitani (1999,79)

37 "Love, that swiftly sets the noble heart on fire"

the Noble Heart, nor is it another side of the same being. In Francesca's phrasing it is a violent fire that burns fast (*ratto s'apprende*). And if the image Francesca uses is a corrupt interpretation by his own right, the consequences she draws in the following tercet are simply unacceptable for Dante (both the character and the poet[38]): “Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona”[39] (*Commedia*, Inferno, Canto V, line 103). What is immediately burned away by this conception of Love is Free Will, and it is this inevitability that Dante cannot by any means accept[40]. Incidentally, Boitani (1999,82) noticed that Guinizzelli's is not the only text that Francesca misread: even her reaction to *Lancelot du Lac* (the very book the caused all the sentimental turmoil) is mistaken. In the original story it is Guinevere, convinced by Galehault, that kisses Lancelot for the first time, while in the story Francesca tells Dante, it was Paolo that kissed her first.

As was mentioned above, Chaucer was more than acquainted with the early Italian love-poets, Guinizzelli in the first place, and surely knew Dante as a great poet and as the most prominent of the *Stilnovisti*[41]. He understood both the re-elaborations that Dante made to Guinizzelli's poetry and the complex Metaphysics of Love that was implied in the *Commedia.* His *Troilus* follows Dante perspective (Boitani, 1999,84) and aims to fix the hermeneutical errors that condemned Paolo e Francesca to the second infernal ring. Francesca is eternally bound to Paolo by her lustful love and is therefore eternally beaten by a storm that never rests, according to Dante's theory of *contrapasso*[42]. The same holds in Chaucer's Troilus, who cannot restrain himself from loving Criseyde (*Troilus and Criseyde,* Book I, lines 603-604)

---

38 It needs remembering that, despite the seemingly apologetic tone of the episode, the scene unfolds in *Inferno*

39 “Love, that forbids not to love to whoever is loved”

40 cf. Boitani (1999,81)

41 Dante actually coined the term *stil novo*, see *Commedia*, Purgatorio, Canto XXIV, line 57

42 For an insight into the Theory of Contrapasso see Armour (2000) *Dante's Contrapasso: Context and Text*

> "Love, ayeins the which whoso defendeth
>
> Hymselven most, hym alderlest avaylleth..."

In this respect, Troilus is therefore connected with Francesca in what Boitani (1999,85) calls a process of *feminization* that seems to lead to the same pit in which she endlessly twirls. It is therefore Criseyde who metaphorically carries the burden of fixing Francesca's misinterpretation, revealing her error and not falling for it herself. In a crucial moment of his character's presentation, i.e. when Pandarus goes to his niece to woo her in Troilus's stead, Chaucer makes her deny with all her strength the ineluctability of steady reciprocity in the matters of Love, thus exorcising Francesca's hovering ghost on the whole scene (*Troilus and Criseyde*, Book II, lines 587-590):

> 'Whan ye ben his al hool, as he is youre;
>
> Ther myghty God graunte us see that houre!'
>
> 'Nay, therof spak I nought, ha, ha!' quod she;
>
> 'As helpe me God, ye shenden every deel!'

This is a fundamental and original change that Chaucer applied to Boccaccio's story, since in the Italian source, Criseida behaves exactly like Francesca, and err when she believes that from being loved compulsorily proceeds the need for loving back. It is impossible to overlook how the source of Chaucer's aforementioned "improvement" of Boccaccio is to be found in Dante's doctrine. Chaucer has wholly understood the majestic metaphor finely crafted in the lines of the *Commedia*, meaning that love for another human being makes us perceive the Higher Love that rules the Cosmos, "l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle"[43] (*Commedia*, Paradiso, Canto XXXIII, line 145).

---

43 "The love that moves the sun and all the stars"

4. TRANSLATION PRACTICES IN THE MIDDLE AGE, or THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

Chaucer's *Troilus* has often been described as a translation, or at best as an adaptation of Boccaccio's *Filostrato*. Because of this, the modern reader might be tempted to assign a lesser value to Chaucer's poem, due to the seemingly derivative and unoriginal nature of translated literary works. These, lacking the originality of their sources, generally concern the academic audience only insofar as they are able to manipulate the previous works up to the point of being considered as 'autonomous' expressions (Warren 2007,51)

To superpose this modern perspective to the medieval practise, however, would mean to overlook the fact that "translation is ubiquitous in medieval writing practices, literary and non-literary alike" (Warren, 2007,51). Moreover, researchers in the field of translation studies made us aware of the fact that "[f]rom the point of view of translated literature, all translation implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose.[44]"

4.1. Translation as preservation

As Warren (2007,66) points out, "the encounter with the medieval text is a multilingual encounter." Translations were fundamental to the circulation of culture, and improved the repertoire of a given language. They were not (and are not, for that matter) neutral processes, since each translation assumes "a vision of the world and a hierarchy of values which vary according to translator and the specific context" (Saibene 2007,16). Nevertheless, although European culture in the Middle Ages was anything but a communal experience, "the inheritance of the Roman Empire, and the unificatory interests of both rulers and the Church, did not encourage the emergence of local entities" (Even-Zohar 2010,118).

44 Hermans (1985,11) qtd. in Nergaard (2007,34)

The process of altering the canon[45] is extremely relevant when we take into consideration literatures in the vernacular, especially in a period when vernacular languages were bridled by the *auctoritas* of Latin texts. In 9th century England, the Alfredian Reform signalled the beginning of the falling apart of Latin's hegemony. King Alfred the Great's (849 - 899) decision is exceptional in its innovative value, but at the same time a massive project of translation had become increasingly necessary in order to preserve the canon. Paradoxically, King Alfred's operation was innovative and conservative at the same time: translating the texts he gave them a new shape, but at the same time he made it possible for them to retain their centrality in the English literary system, highlighting the paramount importance of the vernacular in the preservation and the circulation of texts to a wider audience[46]. King Alfred managed to preserve the vitality of the English repertoire, which otherwise would have very likely stagnated, by guaranteeing its evolution. Moreover, altering the canon and allowing the vernacular to enter it, his extensive project of conservation opened up a possibility for the emergence of a national written language and a national literature. Even-Zohar (2010,45) reminds us that often "certain components of a cultural repertoire tend, in any given time, to cluster around certain social statuses." By employing the vernacular for his own cultural project, King Alfred enhanced the status of the English vernacular, thus creating the possibility for a vernacular literature to enter the canon.

Besides the immediate accomplishments that Alfred's linguistic policy managed to achieve, some other long-term benefits sprung out of his modification of the canon. Even if just in an embryonic stage, this was probably the first step towards a widespread acceptation

45 A process whose aim is to "alter the repertoire of canonized properties in order to maintain control" Even-Zohar (2010,47).subd

46 "senso vivissimo dell'utilità del volgare al fine di guadagnare nuovo e più ampio pubblico al consumo dei testi" De Vivo (2007,284)

of the vernacular as a dignified literary language. In the long run, it was the Alfredian Reform that allowed Chaucer to write his poem in an English vernacular. The story of the English language had yet to face the Norman invasion of 1066, but its subsequent contamination with French elements simply helped maintain vital its language and literature, since "in order to operate and remain vital, a system has to be always enhanced wit a growing inventory of alternative options" (Even-Zohar 2010,49).

4.2. The medieval concept of Authorship

When it comes to medieval literary production, 'authorship' is to be regarded as a problematic issue. Many medieval authors left their works anonymous, since the dominant Latin scholarly culture assumed that "authority did not reside within the person who gave a work its textual form, but in some factor external to him" (Griffiths 2009,123). Generally speaking, these external factors were of two kinds. The first source of authority for a text was divine inspiration, as with the Bible, where the figure of the writer was obscured by the presence in the text of the supreme authority of God. The scribe was therefore nothing more than the hand that held the *calamus*, a channel God used to convey his message to his acolytes. Complementarily to the words of the Lord, the source of authority for lay texts was represented by the so called *auctoritates*, a wide corpus of established texts, mainly deriving from classical or patristic traditions. From this standpoint, the person who actually produced the physical text was only of subsidiary importance in the process of the creation of such piece of writing. For the same reason, "the readers and the copyists of a text were often less interested in who had written it than in the message that he contained or the function that it served" (Griffiths 2009,125). If indeed the authors sometimes wrote their names and the titles of their works on the front page of their manuscripts, such first pages were influenced by

consumption either by excessive handling, time or other natural and atmospheric factors such as dampness, fire, mould, etc.

This widespread lack of recognized authorship caused a general instability of texts, a phenomenon that Paul Zumthor (1972) called 'mouvance.' Such changeableness within texts' tradition is reflected in the prevalent attitude shared by copyists, translator and re-writers, who did not restrain themselves from editing the texts they were working on, intervening on every aspect (language, narration, tone, vocabulary…) that seemed fit for revision. Thus, if in the Middle Ages the point of view of an author towards his work was different form the modern one, even more so was the attitude of translators. Both authors and translators relied on the principle of *auctoritas*, whose function was "to validate [their] work in front of the audience" (Saibene 2007,26). In medieval times, the modern hiatus between author and translator, between original and derivative work, was much less prominent. The focus of both processes was the audience, and both products involved a high degree of "rewriting and reshaping of the material drawn from other texts and literary currents so as to present the addressee with a new message" (Saibene 2007,27). For the sake of our discussion, however, it has to be noted that by Chaucer's time the importance of paradigmatic authorities in European vernacular cultures was beginning to decrease, especially in Italy where the authors of the Trecento (mainly Dante, Boccaccio and particularly Petrarch) were becoming increasingly famous personalities[47].

If intertextuality lays at the foundations of medieval textual productions, it has to be said that still all "vernacular cultures were held together by one cultural and linguistic tradition: that of Medieval Latin" (Molinari 2007,79). With the Norman Conquest, the status of literature in the English vernacular was severely compromised, and the most part of the literary tradition that pre-dated the Conquest was disrupted (Scase 2009,15). However, since

47 For the implications of this change of perspective in Chaucer's own writings, see Grriffiths (2009,129)

only the new Norman aristocracy spoke the local variety of French which came to be known as Anglo-Norman, and the knowledge of Latin was restricted to few portions of the male clergy, translations had to be carried out almost on an everyday basis in order for the lower, English-speaking strata of the population to understand both their lords and their Lord. Hence, the process of translation in post-Conquest England “was always ‘downwards’ through the linguistic hierarchy” (Cooper 2009,166). The early Middle English of the 11th century was a language lacking any kind of social prestige, a language primarily oral and not recognised at any level of the administrative system. Nonetheless, it was the language of the vast majority of the population, rooted in the history and in the culture of its speakers. Therefore, to translate a text in the vernacular was not only a literary activity, but also – and maybe primarily – a cultural one. Nergaard (2007,35) reminds us that, by regarding it as a cultural practice, “translation is no longer considered simply a process of faithful reproduction but invariably it involves deliberate acts of *selection*, *construction* and *omission*.” Therefore, we cannot consider translation only as having to do with language, “but with languages and texts in culture” (Nergaard 2007,35). We need to be aware that the difference between a text in e.g. Latin or French and his Middle English translation “is not situated only in the linguistic code, but in culture” (Nergaard 2007,35).

4.3. Chaucer the ‘Grant Translateur’

Over the years, vernacular translation meant to empower the language of the common people, and to raise it to the status of a literary language by its own right. As Coleman (1983,38) points out, “One major way in which English became the status language at the end of the 14th century was by means of developing itself as a medium of translation from other languages that already possessed extensive literary traditions.” Translations from Latin or

French (or Italian) into Middle English were therefore the initial steps towards a process of emancipation of the language.

Chaucer, who can be considered as the epitome of an author/translator, had a paramount role in its development as an acknowledged means for independent literary expression. What he did was to look "to the verse of the continental French and Italian courts as models and sources for enriching the versification of English" (Scase 2009,19). Probably one of his earliest works was the translation of the French *Roman de la Rose*, an extremely famous allegorical dream vision, whose narrative revolved around the theme of courtly love in all its possible ramifications. His *Romaunt of the Rose* is actually only a partial translation of the French poem, but it follows its original closely. Chaucer tried to replicate the structure of the *Roman* as well as its contents, and therefore his "tetrameter couplets generally reproduce the octosyllabics of the thirteenth-century French source as faithfully as the constraints of form and language will allow" (Cooper 2009,178). This might have proven a very difficult task even for a poet as skilful as Chaucer, as it surfaces in the *envoy* of his poem *The Complaint of Venus*, where he laments "the shortage of rhyming words in English compared with the Romance languages" (Cooper 2009,179).

> And eke to me it ys a gret penaunce,
>
> Syth rym in Englissh hath such skarsete,
>
> To folowe word by word the curiosite
>
> Of Graunson, flour of hem that make in Fraunce[48].

Later in his carrier, Chaucer decided to translate Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, thus following the footprints of many others before and after him[49]. This time, however,

48 "And it is also a great penance to me, / since rhymes are so scarce in English, / to match word by word the skill / of Graunson, the flower of poets in France."

49 Boethius's work was one of the most influential in the Christian Middle Ages, and Dante puts the author among the twelve wise men in the Fourth Heaven (*Paradiso*, Canto X, ll. 121-9). Before Chaucer, King

Chaucer selected another approach, and his *Boece* is concerned with "explication over formal equivalence" (Cooper 2009,179), which is evident in the poet's decision to incorporate his translation of the text a number of glosses taken from various previous commentaries, and especially form the French translation by the Jean de Meun (c. 1240-1305), best known for his continuation of the *Roman de la Rose*. In the following chapter, it will be shown how both of these experiences are reflected in the way Chaucer built his adaptation of Boccaccio in the production of his *Troilus.*

It needs to be pointed out that the English language is indebted to Chaucer's works not only because they helped to free the Germanic vernacular from the Romance yoke, but also, and maybe especially, because their great literary value and the extremely positive reception started to shape as a monolingual entity the different varieties of "Middle Englishes" which, in a way, made even monolingual communication a translation process (Warren 2007,59). It is known that languages evolve as a *continuum* rather than following fictitious national or regional boundaries, and Chaucer himself was aware of the fact that "what characterizes Middle English above all is diversity in the writing of the language.[50]"

> And for ther is so gret diversite
> In Englissh and in writyng of oure tonge,
> So prey I God that non myswrite the,
> Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge;
> And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,
> That thow be understonde, God I biseche![51]

Alfred himself produced an Old English translation of Boethius, and after Chaucer's times Queen Elizabeth I put herself to the same task.

50 Scase (2009,14)

51 "And, since there is such a great diversity / in the English language and in the writings of our tongue, / I pray to God that no one will copy you erroneously / or ruin your meter because of deficiency of language / and,

Very poignantly, Scase (2009,18) summarises the key aspects of Middle English as: "its diversity of written expression, and its lack of prestige as a medium for literature." Middle English scribal practices had no definite set of conventions, and each individual writer, be it author, translator or copyist, followed his own judgment when he had to decide which particular variant was the 'correct' one.

4.4. Translation as reinterpretation: an example

What was said before shows that the very notion of translation in medieval times is at best subject to interpretation, and has very little to do with the modern perception of translated works. An illuminating example of the degree of liberty translators allowed themselves is provided by Sir Thomas Wyatt's translation of some of Petrarch's poems, e.g. *Una candida cerva sopra l'erba* (Rime 190).

> Una candida cerva sopra l'erba
> verde m'apparve, con duo corna d'oro,
> fra due riviere, all'ombra d'un alloro,
> levando 'l sole, a la stagione acerba.
> Era sua vista sì dolce superba,
> ch'io lasciai per seguirla ogni lavoro,
> come l'avaro, ch'n cercar tesoro,
> con diletto l'affanno disacerba.
> 'Nessun mi tocchi – al bel collo d'intorno
> scritto avea di diamanti e di topazi –
> libera farmi al mio cesare parve'.
> Et era 'l sol gia volto al mezzo giorno;
> gli occhi miei stanchi di mirar non sazi,
> quand'io caddi ne l'acqua, et ella sparve.

wherever you will be read or sung, / I beseech God that you will be understood!"

Wyatt was a Renaissance man, and when he translated some of the great Italian poet's sonnets into English he "frees the signs into circulation for completely different readership, in another language and another age" (Bassnett 1998,67). When approaching Petrarch's Una candida cerva sopra l'erba, Wyatt clings to the form of the sonnet but alters the metrical structure, and alters the tone retaining the imagery[52].

> Who so list to hounte I know where is an hynde;
>
> But as for me, helas, I may no more:
>
> The vayne travaill hath weried me so sore,
>
> I am of them the farthest cometh behinde;
>
> Yet may I by no meanes my weried mynde
>
> Drawe from the Diere: but as she fleeth afore
>
> Faynting I followe; I leve of therefore,
>
> Sithens in a nett I seke to hold the wynde.
>
> Who list her hount I put him out of dowte,
>
> As well as I may spend his tyme in vain:
>
> And graven with Diamonds in letters plain
>
> There is written her faier neck rounde abowte:
>
> 'Noli me tangere for Caesar's I ame,
>
> And wylde for to hold though I seme tame'.

Wyatt keeps intact much of Petrarch's *signifiants*, but craftily alters their *signifiee*, the most evident of such manipulations being the association of the eponymous female deer with a different woman, that in Wyatt's translation becomes Queen Anne Boleyn, for whom he was secretly pining (Bassnett 1998,69).

52 See Bassnett (1998,66-9) for a detailed comparison of the two poems.

5. CHAUCER'S *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE,*
or WHAT'S GAINED IN TRANSLATION[53]

Following the discussion on medieval practices of translation, the aim of this chapter is to search the actual texts for evidence that may allow us to analyse the extent of Chaucer's manipulation over its source.

5.1. Comparing the texts

Wyatt's method (see § 4.4) is by no means peculiar to himself alone, and his way of operating on Petrarch is indeed very similar to the approach Chaucer selected to deal with Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, i.e. borrowing the form and the themes, but then moulding them in order to fit the set of values and the specific needs the poet wanted to address. The most evident of the borrowings that Chaucer owes to his source is the metrical form of the *ottava rima*[54], which Boccaccio owed in turn to the Italian popular tradition of the *cantari*[55]. However, Chaucer did not only took what he reckoned to be useful to his purposes, but also bent the Italian rhyming stanza to his needs, losing the last line in order to have a stanza with seven lines, (usually in iambic pentameter) rhyming *ababbcc*. This innovative rhyming scheme, later called *Rhyme Royal*, was much more flexible and adaptable to the needs of long narrative poems, since it could be divided either into a quatrain and a tercet, or into a tercet and two couplets. In this way, by the artful hands of Chaucer, the English language gained a

53 In the present chapter, all Modern English translations of the Middle English excerpts provided in the notes are of my own.

54 A stanza composed by eight 11-syllable lines, rhyming *abababcc.*

55 The *cantari* were poetical works in *ottava rima*. Of a strictly performative nature, they were developed in Italy during the 14th century.

new, vital instrument for poetry-making which, crucially, could have come into existence only through translation. Therefore, I feel justified in saying, along with Bassnett (1998,74), that poetry is not "what gets lost in translation,[56]" but that poetry is indeed greatly indebted to translators, who have been able to manipulate their sources in such a way to preserve their vitality, and to gain new tools for generations of poets to come.

The metrical form is not the only feature that Chaucer borrowed for the *Filostrato*, but indeed the whole narrative material is derived directly from Boccaccio's account. However, derived does not mean witlessly reproduced, but once again it means that the English poet subdued his source material to his own will and poetical skills. In the previous chapters, I briefly explained how the general perspective on the whole story of *Troilus* is biased towards the ideas of the *stilnovo* and tending to a process of medievalisation (cf. Lewis 2006,451). In the following sections it will be shown how, in Chaucer's adaptation, this standpoint translates into a rigorous application of the rules of courtly love, which restores the adherence to the chivalric code, to which, as highlighted before, Boccaccio paid only lip-service. Drawing from the previous observations, this chapter proposes to plunge more deeply into the "rough material" that are the texts themselves, in order to see what the story of *Troilus* gained from being translated. A *caveat* is, however, in order before proceeding any further, since we still do not know which of the many manuscripts reproducing the *Filostrato* Chaucer was actually reading when he produced his own *Troilus and Criseyde*. Some critics seem even inclined to believe the existence of a Latin source for Boccaccio's *Filostrato* – i.e. Chaucer's Lollius, "of whom it seems absurd to dispute the existence" (Godwin 1974,437) – and the fact that "Chaucer in his Troilus went to Boccaccio's original, and not to Boccaccio, for the materials upon which he worked" (Godwin, 1974,437).

56 "I could define poetry this way: it is that which is lost out of both prose and verse in translation." Robert Frost, *Conversations on the Craft of Poetry* (1959).

Though it is true that "[i]f Chaucer knew that the author of the *Filostrato* was Boccaccio, he would have been one of the few people in England who did" (Hanly 1990,31)[57], disputing with Godwin, Windeatt (1983,164) believes that "it soon becomes clear that for long stretches Troilus follows Filostrato so closely that Chaucer must have worked with a copy of the Italian in front of him," and Hanly (1990,29) is sure that "Chaucer must have owned a *Filostrato*, a *Teseida*, and at least fragments of the *Filocolo* and of Dante's *Divine Comedy.*" He also justifies the ascription of the *Troilus* to a fictitious Lollius as a choice made by Chaucer to enhance the *auctoritas* of his work by adopting a Latin source of historical information over a vernacular one, a choice made possible by the fact that "[b]y the time Chaucer wrote *Troilus and Criseyde*, the reputation of Boccaccio … still had not spread throughout northern Europe" (Hanly 1990,30). On my part, though I feel safe in agreeing with Hanly (1990,27) and stating that "[i]t is obvious that Chaucer had a manuscript of the *Filostrato* before him," I also believe it must be borne in mind that "its nature [of the manuscript] has not yet been determined" (Hanly 1990,27). Therefore, in the course of our analysis, we must not have the presumption to affirm that all the differences between the two texts are innovative readings by Chaucer, whereas they might derive from a different reading of Boccaccio's poem.

5.1.1. Troilus's infatuation

The scene commented upon here unfolds in the very first part of Troilus's story, and narrates how the Trojans are gathered together in Athena's temple, how Troilus first set eyes upon Criseyde, and how the sight of her severely affects the knight's view on love.

The events leading to Troilus's infatuation of Criseyde are presented in the same way in

57 For an extremely interesting overview on the possible ways through which Chaucer might have acquired Italian manuscripts, see Childs (1983,65-87). One fascinating hypothesis will be discussed below (§ 5.3).

the *Filostrato* (Book I, st. 16-39) and in *Troilus and Criseyde* (Book I, ll. 134-434). However, the point of view of the two poets over their matter is substantially different in various key aspects. First and foremost, we need to point out that, whereas Boccaccio's Troiolo is a device shadowing the author himself, "Chaucer has reversed the character of the poet's persona, with implications for the character of the hero and the interpretation of his story" (Muscatine 1957,164). Troilus's features are in no way those of Chaucer, who enters his story only in the role of the Narrator.

Different is also their treatment of History. Boccaccio's interest in the Matter of Troy lasts only as long as the accounts of the Trojan War are useful to him in order to provide a frame in which to move his characters. He needed to describe the war raging outside the walls of Troy because he needed an excuse to group a large amount of the city nobility inside the Temple of Pallas, thus providing the right environment for the two lovers to meet.

> li Troian padri al Palladio fatale
>
> fer preparare li consueti onori;
>
> alla qual festa donne e cavalieri
>
> fur parimente, e tutti volentieri. (st. 18)

Once the battle has exhausted its functionality, that is to have a ritual "con maggiore onore e più solenne" (st. 17), it is dismissed without any further notice. Chaucer is not interested either in the proceedings of the war, but he still cannot allow himself to neglect such an important historical event, and to let it escape the net of his narrative. To fill the gap left by Boccaccio, Chaucer is compelled to add a stanza to excuse himself in front of his audience, and to provide them with a sort of bibliographical reference:

> But the Troian gestes, as they felle,
>
> In Omer, or in Dares, or in Dite,

> Whoso that kan may rede hem as they write.[58] (ll. 145-7)

According to Lewis (2006,453), Chaucer's concern with History is rooted in "an audience who still looked at poetry in the medieval fashion – a fashion for which the real literary units were 'matters', 'stories' and the like, rather than individual authors." They considered the *Troilus* as another instance of the Matter of Troy, and they wanted to know Chaucer's authorities. Thus, in order to abide by his audience's inclinations, Chaucer trails a different path from his Italian source, and has to expand on the issues Boccaccio allowed himself not to discuss at length.

Another major set of modifications, already mentioned in previous chapters, refers to Chaucer's different treatment of courtly love. Various examples can be seen in the unfolding of this scene, the first of which can be highlighted in Troilus's mocking speech against the raptures of love. Troilus, as befits a Prince, enters the temple with his companions who, as befits young men, start to court many of the ladies attending the ceremony. In the *Filostrato*, Troiolo is shown as the leader of his group of friends, and when any of them would stop to sigh at the sight of a woman, he would point at him, joking with the others:

> … "Quel dolente ha dato bando
>
> alla sua libertà, sì gli gravava,
>
> ed a colei l'ha messa tra le mani:
>
> vedete ben se' suoi pensier son vani." (st. 21)

He would then go on telling his friends that the love of women is as mutable as a leaf in the wind, that they do not care if they hurt their lovers, and that they never know what they want:

> "... come al vento si volge la foglia,
>
> così 'n un dì ben mille volte il core
>
> di lor si volge, né curan di doglia

58 "But the stories of Troy, as they happened, / in Homer, in Dares or in Dictys, / whoever can, may read about them in their accounts."

> che per lor senta alcun amadore,
>
> né sa alcuna quel ch'ella si voglia." (st. 22)

Boccaccio's Troiolo can offer counsels based on his own experience as a lover: "io provai già per la mia gran follia / qual fosse questo maledetto foco" (st. 23), but now he boasts to be completely out of reach, and laughs to his friends' folly: "e rido volentier degl'impacciati, / non so s'i' dica amanti o smemorati" (st. 24).

Chaucer is far more cautious when it comes to Troilus's tirade against the love of women. On the one hand, his Troilus cannot boast his counterpart's experience with women, and all he knows is because he has been told:

> "I have herd told, pardieux, of youre lyvynge,
>
> Ye loveres, and youre lewed observaunces,
>
> And which a labour folk han in wynnynge
>
> Of love, and in the kepyng which doutaunces;
>
> And whan youre prey is lost, woo and penaunces."[59] (ll. 197-201)

On the other hand, Chaucer's hero shows "a knowing reverence for the feminine" (Windeatt 1983,181) and cannot bring himself to directly defile their pureness as the Italian poet does. Nonetheless, Troilus characterises those who wish to suffer for the love of women as "veray fooles, nyce and blynde" (l. 202), thus summarising *in nuce* Boccaccio's four stanzas.

The problem that arose before the eyes of Chaucer when he was reading for the first time this passage of the *Filostrato*, is that the Italian poem allows his hero to get away with these impudent offences to the chivalric code (cf. § 3.1). Boccaccio's following stanza simply remarks on the extremely unpredictable shiftings of Fortune. Chaucer craftily weaves Boccaccio's remark on in his narration by means of a metaphor:

59 "I heard tell, by God, of your behaviour, / you lovers, and your ignorant devotions, / and what sort of labour people have in winning / their love, and the perplexities in maintaining it; / and the woe and suffering when you lose your prey."

> This Troilus is clomben on the staire,
>
> And litel weneth that he moot descenden;
>
> But alday faileth things that fooles wenden.[60] (ll. 215-7)

However, as "the great living interpreter in English of *l'amour courtois*" (Lewis 2006,452), he could not allow such an outrage to be perpetrated and not to get punished by the same God of Love that took the offence. Therefore, once again, Chaucer adds a stanza to his original in order to make things straight. The added stanza encapsulates the different perspectives the two authors had on their matter, and if in the *Filostrato* Troiolo's infatuation is just an happenstance, in Chaucer' view it is a direct consequence of Troilus's impiety and disrespect towards the Laws of Nature, embodied in the Religion of Love.

> At which the God of Love gan loken rowe
>
> Right for despit, and shop for to ben wroken.
>
> He kidde anon his bowe nas naught broken;
>
> For sodeynly he hitte hym atte fulle –
>
> And yet as proud a pekok kan he pulle.[61] (ll. 206-210)

Thus, with an arrow, as in the best of traditions, the scorned God of Love punishes Troilus and, through Chaucer's hand, makes an *exemplum* out of him. Chaucer's next addition, in fact, does protract for over fifty verses (ll. 218-266), in which he strives to admonish his audience not to provoke the God of Love, since it is engraved in human nature to be subdued to his laws.

---

60 "Troilus has climbed on a stair, / and he does not think that he must descend; / but the things that fools suppose always fail."

61 "Hearing that, the God of Love began to look angry, / with insulted scorn indeed, and plotted to be avenged. / He made immediately known that his bow was not broken / and suddenly he hit him at the full - / and even now he can pluck such a proud peacock."

To scornen Love, which that so soone kan

The fredom of youre hertes to him thralle;

For evere it was, and evere it shal byfalle,

That Love is he that alle thing may bynde,

For may no man fordon the lawe of kynde.[62] (ll. 234-8)

After this long digression[63], Chaucer returns within the boundaries of the story told in Boccaccio's stanzas. However, as mentioned above, his perspective on the events to come is now completely changed. Both authors describe the moment in which Troilus glances upon Criseyde for the first time, but while the Italian is subject to the revolving whims of the Wheel of Fortune, the English is struck because Love's dart "hitte hym atte fulle," and therefore he who was defiant before has now been subdued to the laws of nature, and transmuted into a perfect champion of courtly love.

The first rule to which the lovestruck prince abides, in reverence of the chivalric code, is that regarding the paramount importance of keeping his love secret, and not let it be discovered by anyone. Chaucer's Troilus, as it is expected of him, goes to a greater length in this respect than the Italian source text. There is only one instance in the whole scene in which Boccaccio's Troiolo tries to hide his feeling, i.e. when the ceremony ends and he exits the temple with his companions:

Né se n'usci qual dentro v'era entrato

libero e lieto, ma n'usci pensoso

ed oltre al credere suo innamorato,

62 "With regards to scorning love, which can so soon / enslave to him the freedom of your hearts; / because it has always been so, and forever it will be, / since Love is what can bind everything, / because no man can destroy the law of nature."

63 As Lewis (2006,454) points out, the reason for the addition of these exemplary lines may lie with the medieval rhetoric practice of amplification.

tenendo bene il suo disio nascosto (st. 31)

On the contrary, Chaucer further elaborates on the theme of secrecy, both when he translates the aforementioned passage of the *Filostrato*

… but what he mente,

Lest it were wist on any manere syde,

His woo he gan dissimilen and hide.[64] (ll. 320-2)

and in other passages, when he feels the urge to slightly modify Troilus's behaviour in order to make it more adherent to the principles of courtly love. Therefore, when Boccaccio's Troiolo simply manages not to tell his friends of his feelings

mirava di lontano, e mirò tanto,

senza niente ad alcuno discoprire,

quanto duraro a Pallade gli onori; (st. 30)

Troilus refrains from obsessively staring at Criseyde, and he takes care to glance away from time to time, to better conceal his true intentions:

But from afer, his manere for to holde,

On other thing his look som tyme he caste,

And eft on hire, whil that servyse laste.[65] (ll. 313-5)

A third instance of Troilus's care for concealing his emotions is found in another addition Chaucer made to the *Filostrato*. In Boccaccio's account, when he first sees the lady who is to become his obsession, Troiolo guiltily dispenses with sighing. This is another deviancy from the code Chaucer wanted to represent in his poem, so he amends it by adding both the sighs and their disguise:

64 "... but what he meant, / in order to avoid that it were known to anyone, / he began to dissimulate and hide is woe."

65 "But from afar, to keep up appearances, / he sometimes let his eyes fall on other things, / and again on her, for as long as the service lasted."

> Therwith his herte gan to sprede and rise,
>
> And softe sighed, lest man myghte hym here,
>
> And caught ayeyn his firste pleyinge chere.[66] (ll. 278-280)

In these examples it is possible to begin to understand how Chaucer intended to build his character, both as an *exemplum* for those who scanted the Religion of Love and, at the same time, as the harbinger of the values advocated in the chivalric code[67]. The last modification in this sense is an expansion in the stanza 32, where the Prince feasts with his retainers, japing once more about those who fall in love for women: "per me' celar l'amorosa ferita, / di quei ch'amavan gran pezza gabbossi." Chaucer amplifies Troilus's mocking discourse (lines 330-350), which this time is acceptable because of the functional nature of the sneering to the noble purpose of not being discovered.

When Troilus is finally alone in his chambers, he collapses at the foot of his bed, since "Lovers were expected to weep and wail, and to take to their beds in despair." (Kittredge, qtd. in Muscatine 1957,137). At this point of the narration, Troilus is fully infatuated with the woman he had seen that morning for the first time, "For love bigan his fetheres so to lyme" (l. 353) and "His first utterance as a lover, when he is not feigning an antiromantic attitude for protection, is in the form of a song" (Muscatine 1957,134). Chaucer's lines 400-420 are called *Canticus Troili*, "Troilus's song," and are attributed once again to the previously mentioned Latin pseudo-author Lollius:

> And of his song naught only the sentence,
>
> As writ myn auctour called Lollius,

66 "Immediately after, his heart began to swell and rise, / and he sighted softly, in order to avoid to be heard, / and took again his previous playful manners."

67 As Muscatine (1957,137) puts it, "It is perfectly clear that Chaucer's is a more courtly poem and that Troilus is a purer lover.

> But pleinly, save oure tonges difference[68] (ll. 393-5)

However, under the Latin pseudonym this time Chaucer hid not Boccaccio but Petrarch, since in the writing of the whole song, he “fairly closely translates Petrarch's Sonnet 132 (also numbered Sonnet 88)” (Chaucer 2006,29 note 7). Again, this is easily accounted for as a device the author of *Troilus* employs in order to increase the authority of his sources, and consequently of the poem itself.

The last issue Chaucer addresses and emends, at the very end of the scene under discussion, is that of the status. According to the code of chivalry, courtly love had to be directed towards a woman of a higher status than her suitor. The story in Chaucer's hands was faulty in this regards, since Troilus was a Prince, one of the many sons of King Priamus, while Criseyde, though a member of the city nobility, was only the daughter of a priest. This is really one of the biggest blunders of the story as a whole, and Chaucer cannot help it without changing the entire setting of Boccaccio's work. He could not change the actual status of his characters without being subject to a general frowning by his audience, who would have considered him guilty of having modified the facts narrated in the other accounts of the Matter of Troy[69]. Therefore, not being allowed to change Troilus status before men, Chaucer made him renounce his status before the God of Love:

> Wherefore, lord, if my service or I
>
> May liken yow, so beth to me benigne;
>
> For myn estat roial I here resigne[70] (ll. 430-2)

---

68 “And of his song, not only the meaning, / as it was written by my source, called Lollius, / but fully, except for out languages' difference”

69 The story of the Trojan War was well known in the Middle Ages, as Chaucer himself points out: “Yt is wel wist how that the Grekes stronge / In armes with a thousand shippes wente / To Troiewardes” (*Troilus and Criseyde*, Book I, ll. 57-9).

70 “Therefore, Lord, if me or my service / may please you, then be benign to me; / because my royal estate I

5.1.2. From love-talk to love-making

The scene under discussion here is the central point around which the whole story of Troilus and Criseyde revolves. It represents the apex of their relationship, and it is conveniently situated in the middle of Chaucer's Book III (ll. 1247-1554), while Boccaccio's corresponding episode spans from stanza 30 to stanza 55. The verses between the scene discussed above and the present one are the undisputed domain and playground of Pandarus, the lovers' go-between.

Pandarus is Troilus's close friend and either Criseida's cousin (*Filostrato* Book II, intro) or her uncle (*Troilus and Criseyde* Book I, line 975). Since the two lovers cannot meet in public, Pandarus delivers messages for them, is a confessor to both and can be perceived as coercing Criseyde[71] into loving Troilus with his "gift of being able quietly to inject into a proposition an assumption beyond what his interlocutor had admitted" (Muscatine 1957,144). Pandarus is also the one that engineers the complicated ploy that will allow the two lovers, in the scene under analysis, to consummate their passion. The exact proceedings of his stratagems are rather different in the Italian and the English account since, as Muscatine (1957,140) reminds us "Boccaccio gives hardly a hint of the complicated comings and goings, the trapdoors and secret exits" that Chaucer inserts with prodigality in his narrative. The function of Chaucer's inserted scenes is extremely simple, that is to say to highlight the characters' distress, the importance of not being discovered, and once again Chaucer's attentiveness towards the precepts of courtly love. However, since Pandarus's schemings occupy the major part of Chaucer's Book II, and they have no real counterpart in the Filostrato, such scenes will not be discussed here. The mention of Pandarus as their perpetrator will suffice to our means.

---

here resign"

71 On the coercitive discourses of Pandarus, see *The Pandering of Pandarus* (Crane 2012)

Let us consider instead the different treatment the poets offer of the love scene. We will see that Chaucer's modifications to Boccaccio's narrative are of a different type that those analysed in section 4.2.1. While the previous scene was brought in line with the medieval notion of courtly love, in the scene currently under discussion Chaucer's efforts are to reconciles his *Troilus* with medieval rhetoric (cf. Lewis 2006,454). One example of the practice of amplification can be pinpointed in the aforementioned exemplary lines 218-266 of *Troilus*'s Book I, and many more can be found in this passage.

In the *Filostrato*, when the two lovers finally get to be alone, Boccaccio only tells us that they kissed and embraced one another a thousand times, and then promptly climb into bed:

> … mille volte insieme s'abbracciaro
> con dolce festa e con ardente gioco,
> e altrettante e vie più si basciaro,
> sì come quei ch'ardevan d'egual foco,
> e che l'un l'altro molto aveva caro;
> ma come l'accoglienze si finiro,
> salir le scale e 'n camera ne giro. (st. 30)

The problem Chaucer was to face here is that neither Troilus nor Criseyde say anything about the overwhelming joy of their union, nor they praise God for allowing them to finally consummate their love. Chaucer needed to mend the scene, and therefore between Boccaccio's thousand kisses and embraces, he inserts also the amorous declarations of the two lovers. In Chaucer's account, Boccaccio's “egual foco” becomes a “hevene” (line 1251), and to further remark the distinction, a few lines below we find a clear reference to St. Bernard's Song to the Virgin Mary in Dante's Paradise, Canto XXX, ll.14-8

Che qual vuol grazia e a te non ricorre,
sua disïanza vuol volar sanz'ali.
La tua benignità non pur soccorre
a chi domanda, ma molte fïate
liberamente al dimandar precorre

In Chaucer's rendition, Dante's song becomes a praise to "Benigne Love" (line 1261), one of the many divinities to whom Troilus, for the first time in Criseyde's arms expresses his gratitude:

Whoso wol grace and list the nought honouren,
Lo, his desire wol fle withouten wynges;
For noldestow of bowte hem socouren
That serven best and most alwey labouren,
Yet were al lost, that dar I wel seyn, certes,
But if thi grace passed our desertes.[72] (ll. 1262-7)

When Chaucer felt he had done sufficient honour to "Charitie," "Citheria," "Venus" and "Imeneus," (ll. 1254-1309) he finally turns again to the *Filostrato*, only to stumble upon Boccaccio's false reticence in describing the actual love-making of the lustful couple. The Italian poet, who is now famous for is scarce regard for bedroom privacy, feigns discretion and excuses himself by saying that it would be impossible to describe their delight:

Lungo sarebbe a raccontar la festa,
ed impossibile a dire il diletto
che 'insieme preser … (st. 31)

but immediately contradicts himself and reports the lovers' playful behaviour under the sheets

72 "Whoever wishes for grace and is not pleased to honour you / indeed, his desire wants to fly without wings / for if you would not in your kindness succour them, / those who serve the best and always strive the most / were lost all the same, that I dare say for sure, / unless your grace exceeded our deserts."

(st. 31-32):

> el si spogliaro ed entraron nel letto,
>
> dove la donna nell'ultima vesta
>
> rimasa già, con piacevole detto
>
> gli disse: – Spogliommi io? Le nuove spose
>
> son la notte primiera vergognose. –
>
> A cui Troiolo disse: – Anima mia,
>
> io te ne priego, sì ch'io t'abbi in braccio
>
> ignuda sì come il mio cor disia. –
>
> Ed ella allora: – Ve' ch'io me ne spaccio. –
>
> E la camiscia sua gittata via,
>
> nelle sue braccia si ricolse avaccio;
>
> e stringendo l'un l'altro con fervore,
>
> d'amor sentiron l'ultimo valore.

Chaucer, on the contrary, decides to circumvent the description of the actual deed, perhaps partly because of the higher degree of innocence of his characters by comparison to those of the *Filostrato*[73]. Therefore, he accepts Boccaccio's reticence "Of hire delit or joies oon the leeste / Were impossible to my wit to seye;" (ll. 1310-1) but than he skips to the very end of Boccaccio's account, when the two lovers "Felten in love the grete worthynesse" (line 1316). Rather interestingly, Chaucer at this point adds a personal comment on the modifications mentioned before by means of an *excusatio*, in which he confesses his reductions and amplifications of his original source:

> But sooth is, though I kan nat tellen al,

73 We need to remember that in the *Filostrato*, both lovers are not untrained in the matter of sexual intercourse, while in Chaucer's account, this is Troilus's first experience, and we are not sure about Criseyde's actual consummation of her previous marriage either, since she is portrayed as childless.

As kan myn auctour, of his excellence,
Yet have I seyd, and God toforn, and shal
In every thyng, al holly his sentence;
And if that ich, at Loves reverence,
Have any word in eched for the beste,
Doth therwithal right as yourselven leste.[74] (ll. 1324-1330)

After having admitted his adjustments, in the following lines Chaucer decided to stick to *Filostrato*'s narrative, and the only addition we find are some instances of *expolitio* (Lewis 2006, 455), in which Chaucer repeats the sense of what was said before, varied with some mythological references. So, when Boccaccio begins an invective towards the "dolorosi avari" (st. 38), who say that gold is as fulfilling as love, Chaucer does the same with "a coveytous or a wrecche" (line 1373), but than varies the theme with a reference to "Mida, ful of coveytise" (line 1389) and to "Crassus" (line 1391). The very same pattern applies at dawn, when the two lovers are put in distress by the cock's call. While Boccaccio only hint of dawn is indeed the crowing of the cocks: "Ma poi che' galli presso al giorno udiro" (st. 42), Chaucer also mentions "Lucyfer, the dayes messager" (line 1417) and "Fortuna Major" (line 1420). A third time in which such device is used to "secure the additional advantage, from the medieval point of view, of 'som doctryne'," (Lewis 2006,455) is found when the lovers blame Night and Day for their continuous chasing after each other, a concept that Chaucer once again expand with a reference to mythological episode, i.e. "whan Almena lay by Jove" (line 1428).

These lines against Night and Day represent Chaucer's last *addendum* to the love scene, and are incapsulated into the tradition of the *aubades*, medieval dawn-songs where lovers

74 "But the truth is, even if I cannot tell all / as my author does, of his pleasure, / yet I have conveyed, as God is my witness, and will / in every thing wholly his meaning. / And if I, out of reverence for love, / have added any word, it was for the best; / make them right if it pleases you."

grieve for their impending separation, which has often been handled by the Provençals before[75]. The only hint Boccaccio provides us of such a blaming is a short reference to Troiolo's curses towards the new day:

> Troiolo l'abbracciò quasi piangendo,
>
> e stringendola forte la basciava,
>
> il giorno che venia maladicendo (st. 44)

Chaucer keeps Troilus curses "O cruel day, accusour of the joie" (line 1450), but they are balanced by Criseyde's previous invocation against the night: "O blake night, as folk in bokes rede, / That shapen art by God this world to hide" (ll. 1428-1430). As a brief, final remark on Chaucer's keenness for rhetoric devices, it might be interesting to notice that both Troilus's and Criseyde's curses are in the form of *apostrophes*, another feature of medieval rhetoric that was lacking in Boccaccio and that Chaucer decided was worth to be weaved into the narrative.

The examples above, though they represent an extremely cursory glance over Chaucer's poem, are nonetheless representative of one aspect of the method Chaucer employed in dealing with translation and, if we trust Lewis (2006,455), "a detailed study of the Book of Troilus would reveal this 'rhetoricization', if I may coin an ugly word, as the common quality of many of Chaucer's additions."

5.1.3. The Parliament and the "chaungynge of Criseyde"

After the long-desired consummation of Troilus and Criseyde's love, the Boethian Wheel of Fortune starts moving once again, revolving the fates of the lovers and turning their happiness to grief. The next scene under discussion takes place at the very beginning of

75 See Chaucer (2006,199) and Lewis (2006,455). A similar tradition, called *Tagelied*, is also present in the repertoire of the German *minnesänger*.

Boccaccio's Book IV (st. 1-22), and its Middle English counterpart can be found in *Troilus and Criseyde*'s Book IV, lines 29-231. The scene is not as convoluted as Pandarus's devious plans in Book III, nor as lyrical as Troilus's song in Book I, but still it will turn out to be extremely relevant to our discourse. At the Parliament of the Trojans, Criseyde is sent over to the Greek on her father's request to ransom the recently captured Antenor. This marks the beginning of the downfall that will result at first in the two lovers' despair, and that will ultimately lead Troilus to his death by the hands of Achilles. All the events that take place in the scene are already present in the *Filostrato*. However, as we have seen in the previous sections, Chaucer felt the need to slightly rearrange Boccaccio's narrative elements, in order to bring the story closer to his aims. The short Parliament scene, as it happens, compresses two themes which Chaucer held extremely dear: the concept of “exchange” and that of Fortune and Destiny.

The theme of exchange lays at the foundations of the military practice of ransom, and it must have been felt at a personal level by Chaucer who, during his brief experience as a soldier in the Hundred Years War, was captured in 1359 (Scanlon 2009,166) and ransomed by the King for £16 (Coulton 1950,26). At the beginning of Book IV, an ill-fated sortie led by Hector forces the Trojans to accept the Greek's offer and declare a truce: “Of Priamus was yeve, at Grek requeste, / A tyme of trewe …” (ll. 57-8). However, rather than taking advantage of the time of peace to bury the respective dead, as it was common practice in the *Iliad*, Boccaccio makes use of the truce to set up the negotiations for an exchange of prisoners

> Chiese Priamo triegua e fugli data,
>
> e cominciossi a trattare in fra loro
>
> di permutar prigioni quella fiata,
>
> e per li sopra più di donare oro. (st. 4)

Chaucer found nothing to object to the insertion of this very medieval law of warfare into the

narrative, and therefore follows closely what is believed to be his original

> … and tho they gonnen trete
>
> Hire prisoners to chaungen, meste and leste,
>
> And for the surplus yeven sommes grete.[76] (ll. 58-60)

It is possible that in translating Boccaccio's octave, Chaucer remembered his own time spent as a French prisoner and, thankful to his King, wanted to highlight the fact that no prisoner is left behind, be him "meste" or "leste." Indeed, "One must remember that being a man's prisoner was, in idea at least, an honourable relationship[77]" and one that was fully codified by the chivalric code. In Murray's (2002,340) fascinating view, "Much in the same way that the ideal of 'fin amor' implies the indefinite deferral of actual sex … so the highly artificial practice of ransom would defer, or indeed replace, the actual death of the vanquished."

Having a large number of freshly captured prisoners, the Greeks are in vantage position, and can require the Trojans to pay high fees to have their heroes back, or to release any valuable warrior they might have captured in previous battles. Calkas[78], however, begs the Greek high council to grant him one of the prisoner, in order to exchange him for "a doughter that I lefte, allas, / Slepyng at hom, whanne out of Troie I sterte" (ll. 92-3). The Greeks are moved by the priest's plead, and "to hele hym of his sorwes soore, / They yave hym Antenor, withouten moore" (ll. 132-3). After everything has been deliberated, the Greeks sent envoys inside the walls to discuss the matter with the King. Therefore, the ageing Priamus summoned all his sons and generals and with them held a Parliament to discuss whether or not they should accept the Greeks' proposals. In Boccaccio, the discussion is rather simple, and no real

76 "... and then they began to negotiate / to exchange their prisoners, the most important and the least, / and to give great sums for the surplus."

77 Maurice Keen, qtd. in Murray (2002,338)

78 Calkas was a Trojan priest of Apollo, and Criseyde's father. At the very beginning of Book I, he fled the city to seek refuge in the Greek camp after a prophecy foretold him of the impending doom of the city of Troy.

objection is made to the exchange of Criseida for Antenore. Troiolo is too distressed and anguished to oppose the decision, and when the Parliament comes to an end,

> … a che quelle aspettava
>
> fur le risposte interamente date,
>
> e che fosse Criseida renduta
>
> che mai non v'era stata sostenuta. (st. 17)

To this point, Chaucer's translation of the scene was fairly close to the supposed Italian original, but when it comes to the proceedings of the Parliament, he had to intervene and add some verses to mend Boccaccio's faulty interpretation of the concept of ransom. As a matter of fact, from the standpoint of medieval warfare, to exchange a free citizen, and a woman on top of that, for a captive warrior was not an honourable choice. The whole concept of ransom rested on the assumption that, as traded goods, the exchanged prisoners had to be of equal value. Doing otherwise would have been a dishonourable thing, and Chaucer could not allow his characters to fall for the same errors Boccaccio's did. Therefore during the Parliament, while Troilus ponders his best way of action, Chaucer has Hector speak as the defender of the chivalric code:

> "Syres, she nys no prisonere," he seyde;
>
> "I not on yow who that this charge leyde,
>
> But, on my part, ye may eftsone hem telle,
>
> We usen here no wommen for to selle."[79] (ll. 179-182)

Hector's words restore its proper values to the practice of ransom, but his courteousness is not enough to contrast the greatest of the forces that control human behaviour, i.e. Destiny, the second focal point of the Parliament scene.

Murray (2002,342) comments on the ineffectiveness of Hector's speech by saying that

79 "Lords, she is not a prisoner, he said; / I don't know on the part of those who lead this commission, / but on my part you can tell them in reply / that here we are not accustomed to sell women."

"Hector expresses a minority opinion based more on personal feelings than on typical practice." In my opinion, though it is certainly true that Hector is indeed in the minority – otherwise Criseyde would have remained in Troy and the two lovers would have lived happily ever after – Murray's interpretation completely misses the point. The concept that Chaucer wanted to highlight in the Parliament scene might be epitomised paraphrasing the famous latin sentence "*Quisque Faber est Fortunae suae"* as "Everyone brings about his own doom." The people of Troy never forgave Calkas's betrayal, and neither forgave Criseyde for being the daughter of a traitor (Cook 1907,541).

> "Ector," quod they, "what goost may yow enspyre
> This womman thus to shilde and don us leese
> Daun Antenor …"[80] (ll. 187-9)

What might seem just a little diatribe, is indeed the very centre of Chaucer's argument on the ignorance of men about what is to come. By forcing the Parliament to agree to the exchange, the Trojan people are allowing their fate to be accomplished, and their "blind desire … is the operation of adverse fortune" (apRoberts 1969,390). What was only anticipated in the *Prohemium* to Chaucer's Book IV (cf. *Filostrato*, Book III, st. 94), i.e. that the wheel of Fortune is ever-changing and never resting, is finally explained in full. The downfall of the city of Troy is foreshadowed by the downfall of the love story between Troilus and Criseyde, since it is the very same Antenor that the Trojans want freed that will bring about the doom of the city he was supposed to fight for. Chaucer makes this perfectly clear, and by an invocation to Juvenal he once again remind us of our human condition: that we are made blind to what is to befall us[81].

80 "Hector, they said, what evil spirit had inspired you / to protect this woman and cause us to lose / the Lord Antenor ..."

81 This may be considered as another of Chaucer's interventions to bolster up his original with medieval rhetoric, "he introduces a *sentence* from Juvenal, partly for its own sake, partly in order that the story of

> O Juvenal, lord, trewe is thy sentence,
>
> That litel wyten folk what is to yerne
>
> …
>
> This folk desiren now deliveraunce
>
> Of Antenor, that brought hem to meschaunce,
>
> For he was after traitour to the town
>
> Of Troye. Allas, they quytte hym out to rathe![82] (ll. 197-205)

At this point of the narration, it is no more questionable that “the characters' actions are governed by that necessity which divine providence imposes on all human actions” (apRoberts 1969,390). However, it is worth notice that if Criseyde's departure is instrumental to the city's destruction, her infidelity is not. It is true that every character in Chaucer's poem is subject to the changing whims of Fortune and bound to act in accordance with his own Destiny, nevertheless they are never deprived of free will (apRoberts 1969,391).

Clearly, Chaucer's main reference in this regard is Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (see ??), represented by the aforementioned metaphor of the revolving wheel. Some critics (see e.g. Stroud 1951) have gone as far as saying that the whole *Troilus and Criseyde* is nothing but an allegory of Boethius's treatise. Though Stroud's hypothesis might be a little too over-elaborated, it is true that the feeling of reading a poem written constantly under Boethius's shade is pervasive. It is undeniable that the story of *Troilus and Criseyde* is governed by an inescapable necessity, and that a Boethian God controls “every incident working out the plans of Providence through His ministers, Destiny and Fortune” (Curry 1930,152). Book IV is therefore the turning point, where the fortunes of every character

---

Antenor may thus acquire an exemplary, as well as *historical*, value” (Lewis 2006,456)

82 “O Juvenal, lord, it is true what you say, / that men know little about what is to be desired / … / These people now desire the deliverance / of Antenor, he who brought ruin onto them / because he became a traitor of the town / of Troy. Alas, they released him too hastily!”

change through an exchange of prisoners. But it is through this new spin to the wheel of Fortune that we are made capable of discerning “the destinal powers moving under the direction of God” (Curry 1930,148)

Besides the discussions already mentioned on the concept of ransom and on the futility of fighting predestination, we can see that Chaucer has not forgotten to amend Boccaccio's work even in less elevated regards, whenever they are in conflict with his own ideas. The first of such manipulations in the scene under analysis is found at the end of Calkas's plead to Greeks' assembly. Boccaccio's Calcàs ends his speech with a promise of victory, assuring the Greeks that the city of Troy is already doomed.

> … ch'io vi giuro per Iddio,
>
> ch'ogni troiana forza, ogni ricchezza
>
> è nelle vostre man per certo …   (st. 11)

All that Calcàs needed to persuade the Greeks to grant him their help had already been said, and therefore Boccaccio ends the priest's advice with a prophecy about the imminent death of Hector, and the end of the war

> … tosto la prodezza
>
> fallerà di colui che al disio
>
> di tutti voi tien serrate le porte,
>
> come apparrà per violenta morte.   (st. 11)

Chaucer was not satisfied with the treatment of Calkas's prophecies that he found in the *Filostrato*, and as he did in Book I, line 146 (see § 4.2.1), he wanted to offer an accurate account of the events, in order to better position his poem within the greater frame of the Matter of Troy. Therefore, to Boccaccio's prophecy about the fall of the city, Chaucer adds a brief explanation of the reason why the city had to fall, reminding his audience of Ovid's story where King Laomedon, Priamus's father, refused to pay Neptune and Apollo their wages for

having built the Wall of Troy:

> "For certein, Phebus and Neptune bothe,
>
> That makeden the walles of the town,
>
> Ben with the folk of Troie alwey so wrothe
>
> That they wol brynge it to confusioun,
>
> Right in despit of kyng Lameadoun; …"[83] (ll. 120-4)

As Lewis (2006,454) correctly remarks, "[t]he Greek leaders did not need to be told about Laomedon; but Chaucer is not thinking of the Greek leaders; he is thinking of his audience who will gladly learn, or be reminded, of that part of the cycle."

The last of Chaucer's modifications is a complete elimination of Boccaccio's stanzas 18-21. In a scene in which the Middle English translation has been as close as possible to the Italian text, this skipping could seem rather uncalled for, but if we consider the content of Boccaccio's omitted stanzas, Chaucer's point of view would be soon evident enough. The passage under consideration is placed just after the Trojan Parliament's final decision to give Criseyde back to her father, where Boccaccio tells us that Troiolo is overwhelmed by sorrow and faints

> … tale alle parole
>
> rendute a' Greci del determinato
>
> consiglio infra' Troiani, 'n tanta mole
>
> di danno e di periglio, tramortito
>
> lì cadde Troiol d'alto duol ferito. (st. 18)

In the following stanzas, Troiolo is assisted by his brothers, and when he is revived he runs away, to avoid any further inquiry

> si levò su, e pria che 'l domandasse

83 "Certainly, both Apollo and Neptune, / who made the walls of the town, / are so angry with the people of Troy / that they want to bring it to destruction, / in defiance of King Laomedon; …"

alcun che fosse ciò ch'avea sentito,

altro fingendo, da lor s'è partito. (st. 21)

Chaucer's hero could most certainly not swoon at a public parliament, where his honour as a knight, and possibly his secret as a lover could be under threat. Thus, without any questioning, Chaucer removes the scene, and when the parliament is done, Troilus returns promptly to his chambers, the dedicated place for a knight to mourn over his grief.

Departed out of parlement echone,

This Troilus, withouten wordes mo,

Unto his chambre spedde hym faste allone[84] (ll. 218-220)

For the sake of completeness, it must be said that it was not the mere action of fainting that made Chaucer frown at the episode of the *Filostrato*, but rather the public environment in which such fainting took place. As a matter of fact, Chaucer is perfectly fine with Troilus fainting at his lover's bedside, the first time they met in Deiphebus's house (*Troilus and Criseyde*, Book III, line 1092). So, it might be said that "in rescuing his hero from a swoon at the public "parlement" and in contriving his fainting at the bedside of his *innamorata*, it would almost seem that Chaucer were rearranging the text of Boccaccio with the code of courteous love open before him" (Young 1938,51).

5.1.4. Criseyde's betrayal

In the Parliament scene mentioned above we have seen how the fate of the city of Troy is intertwined with that of Troilus and Criseyde, and how Fortune changes its route to assure that the events may proceed as they must, in accordance with the individual destiny of each one. With their choice to exchange Criseyde for Antenor, the citizens of Troy are bringing about their own fate, so that the joy for the warrior's comeback will soon be changed into tears

84 "Having each one departed from the Parliament, / Troilus, without any other word, / ran fast into his chamber to be alone

by his betrayal of the city under siege. However, as already pointed out, if Criseyde's departure is functional to the machinations of Fortune, her betrayal of Troilus is not, as it is to be considered an act of free will.

The realisation that Criseyde's removal and her consequent disloyalty to Troilus are not connected by a link of causality is a thought that many critics have found disturbing, and many have tried at length to reconcile this breach of the chivalric code with her impeccable behaviour in the previous scenes of the book. I suppose that Chaucer had the same problem when he first read how easily the Criseida of the *Filostrato* changes the object of her affections. Therefore, in the scene under analysis (*Troilus and Criseyde*, Book V, ll. 687-1099) it will be shown how Chaucer, finding the whole account of *Filostrato*'s Book VI rather inconsistent, tried to make Criseyde's motivations a little more likely.

The first problem he had to tackle was that Boccaccio does not offer any real hindrance to Criseida's return to her lover. Her situation is not particularly happy, since she is a woman cast in a predominantly male environment. Although this should have been one more reason to search a way out, Boccaccio's Criseida only manages to cry through her nights

> Dall'altra parte in sul lito del mare,
> con poche donne, tra le genti armate,
> stava Criseida, ed in lagrime amare
> da lei eran le notti consumate (st. 1)

The character Chaucer gave life to, on the other hand, is more resolute and independent than her Italian counterpart[85], and therefore Chaucer had to offer his readers some solid reasons that would impede her coming back. Her situation as a captive alone would not, in medieval practice, prevent her from reaching the city, since Chaucer knew very well that “captives held in a ransom bargain, particularly in 'tyme of trewe', could easily find some opportunity to

85 Remember, for instance, her sturdiness while confronting her uncle's propositions

leave their place of imprisonment" (Murray 2002,343). Thus, even though his Criseyde is "With wommen fewe, among the Grekis stronge," (line 688) too, Chaucer has to devise for her a more difficult situation from which trying to escape.

Therefore, in the following verses, we get to know that she could not appeal for a permit (common practice in a ransom covenant, see Murray 2002,338) because

> "My fader nyl for nothing do me grace
>
> To go ayeyn, for naught I kan hym queme"[86] (ll. 694-5)

Criseyde then considers the possibility to act outside the accepted rules of a ransom covenant to try and run off at night, but that is proven to be equally impossible, because if she was to be caught by a sentry she would have been considered a spy

> "And if that I me putte in jupartie
>
> To stele awey by night, and it befalle
>
> That I be kaught, I shal be holde a spie"[87] (ll. 701-3)

Nevertheless, be it only for the sentries, she might have tried the nightly sortie anyway, were it not that Chaucer put in her heart a righteous fear for being caught by some less honourable man, which would be her sure perdition

> "Or elles – lo, this drede I moost of alle –
>
> If in the hondes of som wrecche I falle,
>
> I nam but lost, al be myn herte trewe"[88] (ll. 704-6)

Chaucer's Criseyde is therefore a "woful creature" with a "woful herte" (lines 714 and 720), unable to escape, even though not for lack of trying, quite different from Boccaccio's Criseida,

86 "My father will never allow me / to go away, and I cannot please him in any way."

87 "and if I put myself in jeopardy / and steal away by night, and it happens / that I am caught, I will be considered a spy."

88 "Or else – indeed, I dread this most of all - / if I fall in the hands of some villain / I am lost, even if my heart is true."

who is constantly portrayed crying in her father's tent: “in lagrime amare”, “ella piangeva”, “fé de' suoi occhi un'amara fontana”, “con lei di pianger”, “ella piangeva si amaramente” (stanzas 1-3). Similarly, when Criseida finally resolves to try and steal away despite all adversities, she expresses a greater fear in Boccaccio's account than she does in Chaucer's. In the *Filostrato*, Criseida complains of all the disgraces that have befallen her, and she concludes her grievances with a resigned abandonment to death as her only means of comfort

> Oimè lassa, che tardi m'avveggio,
> e 'l senno mio mi torna ora nemico;
> io fuggii 'l male e seguitai il peggio,
> donde di gioia il mio cuore è mendico;
> e per conforto invan la morte cheggio (st. 6)

In Chaucer's Middle English, this complaint “is changed to an expression of woe at blindness to the future” (apRoberts 1969,385 note 8), in which Criseyde, borrowing Dante's notion of a three-eyed Prudence (*Purgatorio*, Canto XXIX, lines 130-2), subsumes her pain under the greater paradigm of human blindness towards future events.

> Prudence, allas, oon of thyne eyen thre
> Me lakked alwey, er that I come here!
> On tyme ypassed wel remembered me,
> And present tyme ek koud ich wel ise,
> But future tyme, er I was in the snare,
> Koude I nat sen; that causeth now my care.[89] (ll. 744-9)

Therefore, Criseyde's ensuing decision to escape “bityde what bityde” (line 750) is stronger than her Italian counterpart, who only reassures herself saying that she will try what is in her power: “Ma mio poter farò quinci filggirmi / se conceduto non mia fia 'l venire” (st. 7). Both

89 “Prudence, alas, one of your three eyes / I always lacked, before I came here! / I remembered well the past, / and I could see well the present too, / but the future, before I was caught in his net / I could not see, and that now causes my despair.”

of them are nevertheless proven wrong, and Criseyde's greater resolution only makes her failure more tragic and lamentable, that will lead to the author's pity, in opposition to the full scale condemnation that Boccaccio offers her Criseida.

But let us come to the man that is going to be instrumental in Criseyde's undoing. In the *Filostrato* it is told plainly that what made Criseida set aside her intentions to escape was her new found love for Diomede

> Ma da sì alto e grande intendimento
>
> tosto la volse novello amadore. (st. 8)

Chaucer is more cautious, and breaks the chain of causality implied in Boccaccio, since he does affirm that Criseyde decided to remain in the Greek camp, and that in less than two months she forsook her promises to Troilus, but he never openly states that all this happened because of her new born love for the Greek hero:

> But God it wot, er fully monthes two,
>
> She was ful fer fro that entencioun!
>
> For bothe Troilus and Troie town
>
> Shal knotteles througout hire herte slide;
>
> For she wol take a purpos for t'abide.[90] (ll. 766-770)

Hence, if in the *Filostrato* Criseida's unfaithfulness is “the direct product of her own sensual and wanton nature” (apRoberts 1969,385), in *Troilus and Criseyde* the situation is more complicated. Criseyde decided to remain in the Greek camp, probably because she found the aforementioned obstacle too difficult to overcome, and it is her prolonged stay among the Greeks that gave way to Diomedes's attempts to court her.

If Chaucer's Criseyde is more strong-willed and determined than Boccaccio's character,

90 “But God knows, before two months have passed / she was very far from that intention! / Since both Troilus and the city of Troy / shall slide, as a rope without a knot, through her heart, / and she will take a purpose to remain.”

Chaucer's Diomedes is far more bold and cunning than “the love-smitted Diomede of Boccaccio” (apRoberts 1969,386). When it is clear to the Greek that Criseida is pining for another lover, his reaction in the *Filostrato* is that of lamenting his mischance “oh me, che male andai / per me 'n Troia quando qui la menai!” (st. 10), while in Chaucer's account Criseyde's unavailability awakes Diomedes's nature as hunter and “conquerour” of women.

> “But for t'asay,” he seyde, “it naught n'agreveth,
>
> For he that naught n'asaieth naught n'acheveth.”[91] (ll. 783-4)

and again

> … “Happe how happe may,
>
> Al sholde I dye, I wol hire herte seche!
>
> I shal namore lesen but my speche.”[92] (ll. 796-8)

Diomedes's behaviour in *Troilus* seems to characterise him as an uncourtly character, but such an interpretation needs some further refinement. From line 799 to line 854, Chaucer inserts some shorts descriptions of the three characters involved in the love triangle. The purpose of this insertion is once again that of gaining more credibility for his work by citing some *auctoritates*, since his audience was sure to appreciate to be reminded now and then that his story was carefully told “as bokes us declare” (line 799). Barney (Chaucer 2006,355 note 3) confirms, as Chaucer's own public was surely aware, that his descriptions follow closely the portraits of Diomedes, Criseyde and Troilus given in the Latin poem commonly known in the late Middle Ages as *Dares*[93]. In Chaucer's rendition of Dares, we can see that the two heroes, Troilus and Diomedes, are depicted extremely similar. Where Troilus is described as “fressh”,

---

91 “But from trying, he said, comes no harm, / because he who does not try achieves nothing.”

92 “... Whatever may happen, / even if I shall die, I will seek her heart! / I shall lose nothing more than my speech.”

93 It is the *Ylias of Dares the Phrygian*, by Joseph of Exeter, based on Dares Phrygius *History of the Destruction of Troy*

“strong” and “hardy” (line 830), we can see that Diomedes matches him in every respect (ll. 844 and 803)[94]. It would be therefore incorrect to state that Diomedes is an uncourtly character as a whole, but it will be soon apparent why it would be more accurate to declare him an uncourtly lover. While on the one hand it is obvious that “the uncourtly nature of Diomede must have impressed at least some medieval readers for it is the starting point for Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid*” (apRoberts 1969,386 note 13), it is also obvious that on the other hand Chaucer could not allow his heroine to lose herself over a man in complete opposition to her previous paramour. In Murray's view (2002,344) “rather than an utter volte-face, then, we should see Criseyde's commitment to Diomedes in Greece as a recreation of the combined “sovereyntee” and service that marked her relationship with Troilus in Troy.”[95]

However, it is when it comes to courtship that we can see how Chaucer's Diomedes is a profoundly different lover than Troilus. In the *Filostrato*, the fault of the betrayal falls hard on Criseida's shoulders. Boccaccio's Diomede is not as cunning as Chaucer's, he never hides his true purpose, and his courtship resembles in various ways that of Troiolo. He comes to her as a suitor and plainly disclose his love and all the pains that Love made him suffer for her sake

> … con seco stesso prese,
>
> s'el ne dovesse per certo morire,
>
> poi quivi era venuti, l'aspre offese,
>
> ch'Amore gli acea per lei sentire,
>
> di dimostrarle, e sì come s'accese
>
> prima di lei; … (st. 11)

---

94 Moreover, the Greek hero is also described as “prest”, “corageous”, “testif”, “chivalrous” and “of tonge large” (ll. 800-4)

95 In the *Filostrato*, as we have seen before, the situation is different since in Boccaccio we do not find any reference to the medieval concept of ransom and exchange that Chaucer employs to justify, though only in small part, Criseyde's behaviour.

Chaucer's Diomedes, on the contrary, is a deceitful lover and approaches Criseyde like a hunter approaching his prey. At first, he comes to her feigning some business with her father

> Com to the tente ther as Calkas lay,
>
> And feyned hym with Calkas han to doone;
>
> But what he mente, I shal yow tellen soone.[96] (ll. 845-7)

As soon as she greets him, however, he takes advantage of his position and of her hospitality, and when wine and spices are brought forth[97], Diomedes makes good use of his "tonge large" (line 804) and starts an amiable chit-chat with Criseyde, tricking her into believing his intentions are those of a friend

> And after this, withouten longe lette,
>
> The spices and the wyn men forth hem fette;
>
> And forth they speke of this and that yfeere,
>
> As frendes don, of which som shal ye heere.[98] (ll. 851-4)

What ensues is a long monologue by Diomedes about the Greek's (and his own) worthiness, which focuses on the inevitable fall of the city of Troy, but while in Boccaccio the speech is delivered by a Diomede who is explicitly trying to woo his Trojan damsel, in Chaucer the Greek hero is talking as a confidant to a lady whom he purportedly wants to befriend. And since we have seen that Diomedes is an extremely skilled deceiver, Criseyde is still not aware of his net

> As ferforth as she konnyng hadde or myght

96 "He came to the tent where Calkas lodged / and pretended to have some business with him; / but what he meant, I shall tell you soon"

97 Spice and wine might be an hint of Dimoede's true intentions, since in the Middle Ages they were commonly related to the amatory passion (cf. Cook 1907,574)

98 "and after this, without delay, / men brought before them spiced cakes and wine, / and at length they spoke together of this and that, / as friends do, some of which you shall hear."

> Answerde hym tho; but as of his entente,
>
> It semed nat she wiste what he mente.[99] (ll. 866-8)

At the end of his speech, Diomedes discloses the real reason why Calkas wanted her daughter to leave Troy and, closely following Boccaccio's stanza 20 “ch'a tal partito omai Troia è venuta, / ch'ogni speranza ch'uom v'ha, è perduta” he strongly remarks that the city is now near to its collapse: “For Troie is brought in swich a jupartie / That it to save is now no remedie.”

Diomedes probably considered this statement to be his master stroke to crash Criseyde's resistance, and therefore immediately after this revelation he makes his move. In Boccaccio, this is simply a reprise of his profession of love,

> la gran biltà e l'angelico aspetto
>
> troverà qui assai degno amadore,
>
> se el vi ha di pigliarlo diletto;
>
> e se non vi spiacesse, io sarei esso,
>
> più volentier che re de' Greci adesso (st. 22)

In Chaucer, on the other hand, Diomedes's proposal becomes a declaration of intent, when he finally unveils the true meaning of the visit he paid to Calkas's tent

> And if ye vouchesauf, my lady bright,
>
> I wol ben he to serven yow myselve,
>
> Yee, levere than be kyng of Greces twelve![100] (ll. 922-4)

Another very interesting passage in which it can be seen how Chaucer craftily and subtly changed Boccaccio's account in order to make Diomedes appear far more duplicitous than his Italian counterpart lays in the following lines, where it is narrated Diomedes's reaction to his

99 “As far as she had understanding or might / answer him, she did; but as of his intentions, / it seemed that she knew not what he meant.”

100 “And if you agree, my bright lady, / I will be the one that will serve you myself, / yes, rather than be King of twelve Greeces!”

own words. In the *Filostrato*, we see him blush and quiver, lowering the eyes as if he fears to have dared to much. He is an honest man making an honest and heart-felt proposal, and after that he shows all the traditional signs of humility that would pertain to a declaring courteous lover

> E questo detto, diventò vermiglio
> come fuoco nel viso, e, la favella
> tremante alquanto, in terra bassò 'l ciglio,
> alquanto gli occhi torcendo da ella (st. 23)

In the *Troilus*, Diomedes's acts are exactly the same as those of his original, but Chaucer, adding just a little rhetorical device, casts a different light upon the Greek hero's demeanour

> And with that word he gan to waxen red,
> And in his speche a litel wight he quok,
> And caste asyde a litel wight his hed,
> And stynte a while; and afterward he wok,
> And sobreliche on hire he threw his lok
> And seyde …[101] (ll. 925-930)

Describing the scene with the addition of the initial anaphora, Chaucer conveys a different feeling about Diomedes's conduct, making his reaction seem rehearsed, just another of his dissimulations, to which Chaucer adds the ultimate slyness when Diomedes claims to be a virgin "and be the first of whom I seche grace" (line 940). This particular lie[102], which is not found in the *Filostrato*, though extremely simple it has an enormous bearing, Diomedes is enhancing the feeling in Criseyde that he is a suitable substitute to be exchanged for Troilus,

---

101 "and at that words he began to grow red, / and his speech quavered a little bit, / and he turned aside a little bit his head, / and stopped for a while, and then he raised himself, / and looked gravely upon her / and said"

102 Chaucer, like his audience, knew from Benoît that Diomedes had left a wife at home, see Graydon (1929,152)

which in Chaucer's account had been a virgin too.

Therefore, to summarise, in the *Filostrato* Criseida faces a Diomede which is the embodiment of a perfectly courteous knight, just as suitable for her to love as Troiolo was. Chaucer modifies the character of Diomedes to present us with a cunning and mischievous man, a good and valiant knight, an able mystifier and not at all a courteous lover[103]. Notwithstanding the differences in Diomedes's portrayals in the two poems, Criseyde's reaction is the same in both accounts. In Boccaccio, at first she is shocked by his boldness, and still loyal to Troiolo's memory “tanto poteva ancor Troiolo in essa” (st. 26) she gracefully refuses him saying that after the death of her husband she never loved and neither will love anybody (st. 29), but she does not deny that it flatters her to be loved by a king[104] (st. 30) and asks him to return to her when the war will be over (st. 31). However, when Diomede takes his leave, Criseida found herself thinking of his worthiness, value and comeliness, and Boccaccio tells us plainly that these thoughts finally convinced her to remain among the Greeks

> Queste le fer raffreddar nel pensiero
> caldo ch'avea pur di voler reddire;
> queste piegaro il suo animo intero
> che 'n ver Troiolo aveva, ed il disire
> torsono indietro, e 'l tormento severo
> nuova speranza alquanto fé fuggire;
> e da queste cagion sommossa, avvenne
> che la promessa a Troiol non attenne. (st. 34)

103 Probably, the purpose of this modification was to relieve Criseyde of part of the guilt deriving from her later betrayal (cf. § 5.2).

104 Diomedes was king “of Calydoyne and Arge” (line 934), cf. (st. 24)

Thus, in Boccaccio's account, it is Criseida who is to blame in full for having let herself be overcome by desire and therefore it can be said, as apRoberts (1969,388) harshly did, that "Boccaccio's heroine loved Troilus not as an individual but as a means of satisfaction, and when deprived of that means, she turned quite readily to Diomede as an acceptable substitute."

Chaucer's Criseyde reacts in a very similar way, but the underlying motivations for her acceptance of Diomedes as a lover are different form those described in the *Filostrato*, and worthy of a brief explanation. At this point in the scene she has understood Diomedes's play, and did not fall for his deceptions. Chaucer makes sure to tell us that "… she that hadde hire herte on Troilus / So faste that ther may it non arace," and, as befits her strong character, she is not so easily convinced of the impending destruction of the city

> That Grekis wolde hire wrath on Troie wreke,
>
> If that they myght, I knowe it wel, iwis;
>
> But it shal naught byfallen as ye speke[105] (ll. 960-2)

As Boccaccio's heroine did, Criseyde tells her cunning suitor that she had once a husband whose memory she will not forsake since "other love, as help me now Pallas, / There in myn herte nys, ne nevere was" thus lying to hide her relationship with Troilus, in accordance to the laws of courtly love[106]. She then tries to buy some time to decide the best course of actions, and tells Diomedes to come back the next day, letting him believe to have succeeded in winning her, without openly allowing the possibility

> I say nat therfore that I wol yow love,
>
> N'y say nat nay; but in conclusioun,

105 "The fact that the Greeks would like to avenge their wrath on Troy, / if the may, I know well, indeed, / but it shall not happen while we speak"

106 I'll remind once again that "The canons of Courtly Love, requiring trithfulness on all other subjects, not only permitted but required lying to protect the disclosure of a secret love affair" Graydon (1929,154)

> I mene wel, by God that sit above![107] (ll. 1002-4)

As in the *Filostrato*, when Diomedes takes his leave, Criseyde thinks back to what he had said to her, but instead of focussing on his beauty and worthiness, she considers her dangerous position, and the vantages she would gain by befriending such a prominent member of the Greek army

> Retornyng in hire soule ay up and down
>
> The wordes of this sodeyn Diomede,
>
> His grete estat, and perel of the town,
>
> And that she was allone and hadde nede
>
> Of frendes help …[108] (ll. 1023-7)

We could say that if Boccaccio's Criseida betrayed Troiolo out of a new interest in the Greek warrior, who successfully managed to conquer her, Chaucer's heroine conceded herself to Diomedes “because he provided the least difficult way out of the nearly insoluble situation confronting her” (apRoberts 1969,338).

It is to be noted, as a final remark, the fact that even in Chaucer's account Criseyde eventually starts to feel some kind of affection for Diomedes, but the author is extremely wary, and insists on telling his audience that even though his account comes from authoritative sources (“the storie telleth us”, “in stories elleswhere”, cf. lines 1037 and 1044), he is not sure whether she actually betrayed Troilus and gave her heart to Diomedes or not “Men seyn – I not – that she yaf hym hire herte” (line 1050). The only thing the author is certain of (“But trewely, the storie telleth us” line 1051) is that Criseyde deeply resented her final decision to exchange Diomedes for Troilus, since “Ther made nevere womman moore

107 “By that, I don't mean that I will love you, / but neither I say that I won't; but in conclusion, / I mean well, by God who sits above!”

108 “Turning over in her mind, up and down, / the words of the impetuous Diomede, / his high status and the peril of the town, / and the fact that she was alone and needed / the help of a friend …”

wo / Than she, whan that she falsed Troilus" (ll. 1051-3).

In the conclusion of the scene, Chaucer offers us his personal reflections:

> Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde
>
> Forther than the storye wol devyse.
>
> Hire name, allas, is publysshed so wide
>
> That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise.
>
> And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,
>
> For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,
>
> Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe.[109] (ll. 1093-9)

Following them, we could eventually argue that when Chaucer tells us that Criseyde has often been judged too hard[110], and that maybe she would deserve our pity rather than our scorn, he is making evident the aim of his manipulations in the scene discussed so far.

5.1.5. The Epilogue

The last scene under discussion is Chaucer's conclusion to the poem, which spans the final 126 verses, from line 1744 of Book V to the *Explicit Liber Troili et Criseydi*. It consists for the most part of Chaucer's original material, as it expands on Boccaccio's account of Troiolo's death with a lyrical description of the hero's ascent to the heavens. Therefore, in analysing the epilogue of the poem I will refrain from a close comparison of the two texts, to focus on these problematic verses, which were variously described as "a sorry performance" (Curry 1930,165), "as surprising as [they are] dazzling" (Nolan 1992,244) "medieval and

109 "It does not please me to chide this hapless woman / further than the story needs to describe. / Her name, alas, is so widely known / that it ought to suffice for her guilt. / And if I may excuse her in any way, / since she is so sorry for her infidelity, / indeed, I would excuse her out of pity."

110 Maybe a reference to Boccaccio's misogynistic moral, cf. *Filostrato,* Book VIII, stanzas 29-33

conservative" (Muscatine 1957,165), "not organically connected" (Wimsatt 1977,210) or "implicit in the whole poem" (Lyndon Shanley 1939,271).

Boccaccio's Troiolo meets its final destiny in the short space of three stanzas. When he is sure that Criseida has resented him for Diomede, he enters every battle, desperately looking for his nemesis to quench his thirst for vengeance "nelle battaglie Troiol sempre entrava, / e più d'altrui Diomedès cercava" (*Filostrato*, Book VIII, st. 25). They get to fight more than once, but we are told that Fortune had already decided that neither of them should perish by the other's hand

> E spesse volte insieme s'avvisaro
>
> con rimproveri cattivi e villani
>
> …
>
> ma non avea la Fortuna disposto
>
> che l'un dell'altro fornisse il proposto (st. 26)

If he is not able to kill Diomede, nevertheless the enraged Troiolo causes great troubles for every foe he faces, but in the middle of his *hybris*, he is finally cut short, in the space of one verse, by the fearless Achille.

> … e dopo lungo stallo,
>
> avendone già morti più di mille,
>
> miseramente un dì l'uccise Achille. (st. 27)

As was said before, Chaucer's audience would have considered his poem not only as an autonomous piece of poetry, but also as an epic to be inserted in the greater frame of the Matter of Troy. Therefore Chaucer the historian had to expand on Boccaccio's meagre account, giving the proper references wherever needed. We are told of Troilus's impetus in battle, of his great might and of his desperate chase for Diomedes "As men may in thise olde

bokes rede" (line 1753). As in the *Filostrato* we are said that neither of the two opponents was allowed by Fortune to kill his rival "But natheles, Fortune it naught ne wolde / Of oothers hond that eyther deyen sholde" (ll. 1763-4). At this point, at variance with Boccaccio, Chaucer feels the urge to remind his audience that his purpose was to tell a love story, and not an epic, so he excuses himself for neglecting Troilus's deeds in battle, but directs the interested reader to Dares instead

> But for that I to writen first bigan
>
> Of his love, I have seyd as I kan –
>
> His worthi dedes, whoso list hem heere,
>
> Rede Dares, he kan telle hem alle ifeere –[111] (ll. 1768-71)

Barney (2006,423 note 3), however, points out that Chaucer could not entirely restrain himself from giving his poem an epic flavour, and therefore he weaves into his account two rather clear allusions to the *incipits* of both the *Eneid* "And if I hadde ytaken for to write / The armes of this ilke worthi man" (ll. 1765-6) and the *Iliad* "The wrath, as I bigan yow for to seye, / Of Troilus the Grekis boughten deere" (ll. 1800-1)[112]. Afterwards, to appease his audience's need for a reference to the *auctoritas,* Chaucer explicitly pays homage to all the classics who had told before him the stories of the Matter of Troy. However, he does that with a device that is classically drawn from Provençal love poetry[113], i.e. with an address to his own book

> Go, litel bok, go myn tragedye,

111 "But since I first began to write / of his love, I have said what I could - / whoever wants to hear about his worthy deeds / should read Dares, he can tell them altogether -"

112 Compare with *Eneid* "arms and the man I sing" and *Iliad* "the wrath of Achilles"

113 The troubadours had put the target of their *amor de lonh* in their distant ladies, while Chaucer uses the same device urging his letter to reach his predecessors. For a more accurate treatment of the topic, see Yves Leclair and Roy Rosenstein, *Chansons pour un amour lointain de Jaufre Rudel* (Gardonne: Éditions Fédérop, 2011).

> …
>
> And kis the steppes where as thow seest pace
>
> Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace[114] (ll.1786-92)

In the end, as in the *Filostrato,* Chaucer's Troilus perishes by the hands of the Greek champion Achilles "Despitously hym slough the fierse Achille" (line 1806).

The poem could have easily ended there, with the anaphoric lamentation of the dead hero in which the poet mourns over "swich fyn" (ll. 1828-32), echoing Boccaccio's anaphora "cotal fine" in Book VIII, stanza 28. Nevertheless, between Troilus's death and the poet's lamentation, Chaucer decided to insert another scene, which is as problematic as it is revealing to the interested scholar. The added lines are actually drawn from Boccaccio, but instead of taking as a reference the *Filostrato*, Chaucer decided to insert in his work some lines from the *Teseida* (Book XI, stanzas 1-3), Boccaccio's epic masterpiece. The added lines are extremely close to the Italian original, and are a brief account of how Troilus's soul reaches the eight sphere of heaven (probably an allusion to Dante *Paradiso*) and, looking back, perceives how fool he had been to follow the ephemeral terrestrial beauty rather than the beauty of heaven. In the *Teseida*, the slain soul which reaches heaven is that of Arcita, a Theban prince killed by an injury he took fighting his own brother over the love for a woman. The situation is similar but not identical, but Chaucer decided nonetheless that the three beginning stanzas of the eleventh book of the *Teseide* should serve his purposes just as well. And once again, as he has done extensively in translating the *Filostrato*, he slightly modifies Boccaccio's words to bend the narrative to his own purposes. When Arcita stares down to earth from the eighth sphere, he judges it to be nothing compared to heaven "e ogni cosa da nulla stimare / a rispetto del ciel" (*Teseida*, Book XI, st. 2). Troilus's feelings towards the

114 "Go, little book, go my tragedy, / … / and kiss the steps where, as you see, / Virgil, Ovid, Homer, Lucan and Stace walk"

planet he has just left are far more resentful

> … and fully gan despise
>
> This wrecched world, and held al vanite
>
> To respect of the pleyn felicite
>
> That is in hevene above; …[115] (ll. 1816-9)

The ultimate words we hear from Troilus before reaching his assigned dwellings are an exact parallel to those of Arcita, who damns all human beings who, because of their blindness, follow the "falsa biltate" instead of the glory of heaven

> And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so
>
> The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,
>
> And sholden al oure herte on heven caste[116] (ll. 1823-5)

Critics have been variously bewildered by this alleged repudiation of courtly love. If we consider the narrative alone, the ending is troubling indeed, because Chaucer "without having given the slightest hint of warning, suddenly denies and contradicts everything that has gone before the poem" (Curry 1930,165). I will endeavour to show that this is however the very essence of Chaucer's message, and that it would be an injustice, and a serious deviation from the intentions of the author, to assume the Epilogue to be "detachable at will" (Curry 1930,168). I will in no way state that one interpretation is intrinsically better than another, what I am going to do is simply present the one that in my humble opinion is the most likely, always bearing in mind that each hypothesis cannot be ascertained but up to a certain point.

The first interpretation that comes to mind is that, as Andreas Capellanus[117] and

115 "... and he began to fully despise / this wretched world, and considered it all vanity / with respect to the perfect happiness / that is in heaven above."

116 "and condemned all our troubles, that follow so / the blind desire, the one that will not last, / when we should turn all our hearts towards heaven."

117 *De amore* or *De arte honeste amandi* (cf. Young 1925,274).

Guinizzelli[118] before him, by the end of his poem Chaucer was caught by a fit of *timor dei*, and reverently proceeded to add a renunciation of everything he had written before. This possibility, though a concrete one, is of little satisfaction to the admirer of Chaucer's clarity of vision. Moreover, it does not explain why he wasted so much time reflecting on the principles of courtly love in order to amend Boccaccio's errors and had not had some sort of epiphany at some point before the very end of his work. A slight modification of this interpretation can be of some use, and therefore we should also ponder the possibility that Chaucer had devised such ending from the very beginning, and that he had carefully built such a perfect representation of courtly values only in order to eventually "repudiate the unmoral and unsocial system which he has pretended to uphold" (Kittredge qtd. in Young 1925,273). Another sustainable proposition is that Chaucer decided to manipulate Boccaccio's poem in order to provide "Boethian arguments" (Stroud 1951,4) against the possessions of love. This hypothesis is very similar to the one mentioned before since it implies a feigning of some sort. In this peculiar interpretation, however, the focus is shifted from the principle of courtly love to the concept of the Wheel of Fortune. It is in fact proposed that Chaucer only pretended to uphold a vision of the world ruled by Fortune, just to prove it wrong in the end, thus making of the affair of Troilus "an exemplum of the lesson which the *Consolation* promulgated" (Stroud 1951,5).

Each of the previous interpretations rests on the recognition of a sheer division, a sort of clear-cut distinction between the two endings, variously considered as either juxtaposed or encapsulated. The point which I find crucial is that critics have often overlooked what this division represents[119]. Line 1806 is not only a watershed between these two parts of the epilogue, but also a metaphorical watershed for Troilus himself, because it is in this line that

118 *Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore*, ll. 51-57.

119 The division itself is indeed undeniably present, and it would be factional to state otherwise.

"hym slough the fierse Achille." If we focus on Troilus's life, his death is to be considered a clear and irrefutable cleavage, and thus the two parts of the epilogue represent a "before" and an "after". The verses Chaucer translated from the *Teseida* are in their own way a *katabasis,* a voyage to the underworld. In life, neither Troilus nor any other character did perceive the vanity of their love, and the same can probably be said for Chaucer's audience, since "Accustomed to the conventions of courtly love, Chaucer's readers would have found nothing unfamiliar in the early stages of the love affair" (Lyndon Shanley 1939,272). Troilus had to be cast on the eighth sphere of heaven to understand that we "sholden al oure here on heven caste" (line 1825), in a process of recognition which immediately reminds us of the otherworldly experience of the same Dante from whom Chaucer took most of his vision on love and poetry itself[120]. It must be pointed out that Troilus is not repudiating the chivalric code of courtly love, but rather all kinds of earthly affections that make men forget about the greater Love which controls the universe.

Chaucer's message is re-stated in full in the very last verses of the poem, where he turns once again to the *Filostrato* to revise it for the very last time. As mentioned before, Boccaccio conclusion is a piece of advice for young men to seek carefully their lovers. He instructs the youths not to put their trust in young women, because they are fickle and vain

> Giovane donna, e mobile e vogliosa
>
> è negli amanti molti, e sua bellezza
>
> estima più ch'allo specchio, e pomposa
>
> ha vanagloria di sua giovinezza (Book VIII, st. 30)

Furthermore, he advises them to mistrust every noble woman who constantly brags about her wealth or her ancestors. In Boccaccio's view, these are scornful and contemptuous women, who assume that they are the only ones who deserve to be loved, and therefore men should

120 On the connection between Dante and Chaucer, see chapter 3 above.

despise such kind of woman

> queste schifate ed abbiatele a vili,
>
> ché bestie son, non son donne gentili (st. 31)

Hence, in the *Filostrato* Boccaccio does suggest a repudiation of earthly lust in favour of heavenly bliss, but rather advises his male audience against the disgraces that may befall them by the hands of their women.

Chaucer has no interest in such misogynistic slanders upon the virtues of the fair sex. His blame does not fall on Criseyde's shoulders alone, but on hers and Diomedes's alike. Chaucer knows that his story is rapidly coming to its conclusion, and so even before telling us of Troilus's final disgrace, he beseeches "every lady bright of hewe" (line 1772) to pardon him if he had told the story of the unfaithful Criseyde rather than that of Penelope or Alceste[121]. He assures them, though, that he had decided to tell the story of *Troilus and Criseyde* especially to warn them against the false nature of men

> N'y sey nat this al oonly for thise men,
>
> but moost for wommen that bitraised be
>
> Through false folk – God yeve hem sorwe, amen! –
>
> That with hire grete wit and subtilte
>
> Bytraise yow.
>
> …
>
> Beth war of men, and herkneth what I seye![122] (ll. 1779-85)

As a consequence, Chaucer's final remarks are not directed to the young men only, but rather towards the "yonge, fresshe folkes, he or she" (line 1835) who should know better than to put

121 Alceste's reference here is interesting, since it will be her to take Chaucer's defences against the accuses of uncourtly treatment of womankind moved to him in the *Parliament of Good Women.*

122 "I don't say all of this only for these men, / but mostly for those women who have been betrayed / by false people – God may give them sorrow, amen! - / that with their great wit and subtlety / betrayed you / … / Beware of men, and listen what I say!"

their trust in each other, thus allowing for the possibility to be betrayed. In my opinion, in this final lines Chaucer wanted to put things into perspective, sharing the views of Troilus from the celestial heaven. He is sympathetic with the toils of men and women alike to seek happiness and bliss on earth, but he thought it was better to remind them of their mortal condition. Thus he added a final Christian appeal and, since in the medieval mind the best kind of love was still the one that derived from God, he asks the lovers to consider their sentimental turmoils with a pious sense of proportions and to put their trust fully into Christ

> For he nyl falsen no wight, dar I seye
>
> That wol his herte al holly on hym leye
>
> And syn he best to love is, and most meke,
>
> What nedeth feynede loves for to seke?"[123] (ll. 1845-8)

5.2. So, what is gained in translation?

The close analysis and the comparison of selected portions of Boccaccio's *Filostrato* and of Chaucer's *Troilus* allowed us to pinpoint the emergence of a pattern, and to identify a list of key values clearly linked together. If considered in its entirety, such a list can be said to mirror the ideals that were at the foundations of Chaucer's translation strategy. Moreover, the Middle English modifications can be seen as a measure of the cultural and social distance between the Renaissance of the Italian Trecento and the Medievalism of Chaucer's England, "nagged by an interminable war and beset internally by social, political, and religious turmoil" (Muscatine 1957,128).

The main lines of intervention along which Chaucer decided to organise his work follow a set of general criteria. None of them is found in every scene, but each one surfaces several times in the narrative, and any modification the English poet decided to operate can be

123 "Because he will not be false to anybody, I dare say, / who will entrust his heart wholly on him. / And since he is the best one to love, and the most kind, / who needs to search for feigned loves?"

ascribed to one or more of these criteria. First of all, we need to mention probably the most pervasive change, that is to say that of the point of view. Boccaccio is intimately related with his poem, up to the point to identify himself with the male protagonist of his story. Chaucer is more detached, he takes care to signal his stance from the very beginning and his role is at any point of the story only that of the narrator

> For I, that God of Loves servantz serve,
>
> Ne dar to Love, for myn unliklynesse,
>
> Preyen for speed, al sholde I therfore sterve[124] (Book I, ll. 15-17)

With a more impartial view on the events comes the need to justify and explicitly declare the sources of the narrative material, especially to an audience fond of such historical background. However, Chaucer's treatment is also in many ways more subtle. He produces a list of the usual suspects (Dares, Ovid, Dictys, etc.) whenever he needs to appease his audience, but weaves into the narrative, unnoticed and "under cover" his true cultural references. Besides the widespread use of Boethius, we have illustrated many other instances in which we can spot the direct borrowing from either Petrarch or Dante. The very same Boccaccio, the source of most of Chaucer's material, is concealed under the Latin name Lollius. In a way he was, so to speak, smuggling Renaissance while selling antiquity.

The theme with which he was concerned the most, however, was still a medieval one, and one borrowed not from the Italian Trecento but from the Provençal lyric tradition. We should remember that "England's culture was still dominated by its French history with a weight that the Italian debt to France did not approach" (Muscatine 1957,128), and so we are not surprised if Chaucer considered his responsibility to mend the errors that plagued the *Filostrato* insofar as its treatment of courtly love was concerned. Major and minor

124 "For I, who serve the servants of the God of Love, / dare not, for my unsuitableness, to love, / pray for success, even though I shall therefore die"

modifications in this area can be spotted in numerous occasions, and it is extremely easy to recognise them once aware of their presence within the story. With Chaucer's attention to the chivalric code comes a profound reverence for the feminine, a feature that the young Boccaccio of the *Filostrato* is still lacking. The importance of this factor is not to be underestimated, since it is central if we analyse the moral stance of the characters, and especially that of Criseyde. If a complete absolution cannot be argued for, not even in the *Troilus,* we are nonetheless made aware of the extremely difficult position of Criseyde, and if not acceptable, her guilt is treated as comprehensible, and she is to share the blame with the deceitful Diomedes.

Also connected with the medieval chivalric code are the concept of ransom and exchange, the honourable tradition that spared the life of Antenor and in little part prevented Criseyde from fleeing the Greek encampment. In the poem, this theme is linked with that of destiny and fortune. The turns of the Wheel of Fortune that Chaucer borrowed from Boethius put an end to the lovers' happiness with an exchange of prisoners, according to the superior will of Destiny. Troilus and Criseyde's separation was fundamental to place Antenor within the walls of Troy, the city which he was destined to betray. As a counterpart to the "destinal forces" controlling the poem, Chaucer left some space also for free will, which is necessary to incapsulate the poem in a Christian frame since, as Scholastics teaches, there would be no true faith if men were not endowed with free will. Men have to be allowed to follow their good freely, as freely as they are to err and pursue their damnation. This is the human condition, and in Chaucer's view, which is essentially a Christian view, we should not despise those who fell out of the right path, but took pity on them, as the Narrator does with Criseyde (Book V, ll. 1093-9).

The last feature that Chaucer decided to modify, tough not immediately apparent, is also extremely pervasive. The employment of medieval rhetoric is not a modification in meaning or in ideals but rather in the form of the argument. It was probably implicit in Chaucer's mind as a poet, and it was surely helpful to gain the favours of his erudite audience, which probably included other literates and "several knights in royal and civil service whom Chaucer knew in the 1370s and 1380s, including William Beauchamp, Lewis Clifford, Philip la Vache, John Clanvowe, William Nevill, and Richard Stury; London acquaintances of the 1380s, including Ralph Strode and (with certain qualifications) John Gower; and newcomers of the 1390s, including Henry Scogan and Peter Bukton.[125]" As a conclusive and cursory note on the audience for *Troilus and Criseyde*, Professor Doyle (1954,98) proposes that, due to the prominence of love over the events of the war, Noble and Gentlewomen were the intended target of Chaucer's poem. The educated lay-women were usually presented with text that, for the most part, maintained conventional medieval morality, and therefore it comes not as a wonder that, for a change, they may have found engrossing stories of amorous intrigue. "Feminine taste probably more often than not compromised between the inclinations to triviality and to sobriety, a fact on which a masterpiece like *Troilus and Criseyde* could be built" (Doyle 1954,99)

5.3. Chaucer's heritage and his cultural context

The story of Troilus and Criseyde is often regarded as one the most outstanding pieces of Middle English literature. Its importance, however, is not restricted within the limits of literature, and the poem is also relevant from a more widely cultural point of view. Literature, culture and society are often intertwined, and understanding the relations that connect them can be extremely instructive. Since "[a]ll actions and emotions represented in literature have

125 Strohm (1989,41) qtd. in Firth Green (2009,33)

to be considered in a context of contemporary convictions and conduct" (Doyle 1954,90), if we want to analyse the cultural value of a work like the *Troilus*, we have to understand both the cultural context in which Chaucer composed the poem, and the original context in which his source was produced. While the latter has been already discussed (Ch. 2), the former still needs to be properly addressed.

Muscatine (1957,244) describes the position that Chaucer occupies in the history of literature in English as "an anomaly". He was a merchant's son and a bureaucrat, a King's envoy and a Parliamentarian, by all accounts a well integrated gear in medieval London society. He was the living embodiment of the Aristocratic State, the evolving social milieu of medieval England, "which begins far back in Chaucer's time and before; chiefly by an alliance between the Barons and the great merchants of the City of London" (Chesterton 1965,41). And yet, as a poet, he "has no significant predecessors" (Chesterton 1965,41) in the whole of English literature. By the time he produced his *Troilus and Criseyde* (sometime around 1380, at the age of forty) he had already fought with King Edward III in France, served as a squire in the Royal Household and gone abroad several time as a King's envoy. From 1374 he was made Comptroller of the Customs and Subsidies in the Port of London, while his wife Philippa was in attendance upon the wife of the extremely influential John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and son to the King[126]. His position within the hierarchy of the English Court was that of a mere bureaucrat, but nonetheless he was certainly one of the most successful men of his time. An interesting episode can be used as an example of the consideration Chaucer managed to gain at Court. In November 1372 we found the English poet

126 For a more detailed exposition of Chaucer's life and career, see Coulton (1950) and Scanlon (2009)

> joined in a commission with James Pronam and John de Mari, citizens of Genoa, to treat with the Duke, citizens, and merchants of Genoa, for the purpose of choosing some port in England where the Genoese might form a commercial establishment. (Rymer, *Foedera* qtd. in Coulton 1950,40)

It was not uncommon for a 14th century poet to be sent as an ambassador to a foreign country, since "medieval society had not developed the minute sub-divisions of labour which have often been pushed to excess in modern times" (Coulton 1950,39). More relevant to our purposes are the peoples to whom Chaucer was a fellow envoy. Sir James Pronan was a knight and the vice-admiral of the Genoese auxiliaries, and therefore certainly had a rather high position in the hierarchy of the English Court, at least military-wise. We do not have much documentation about John de Mari, but according to Godwin (1974,462) "we find him, as to the essentials of the embassy, put before sir James Pronan." The high status of his fellow ambassadors, and the importance of their mission, is indeed a strong indication of the relative prestige Chaucer acquired at the Court of Edward III. In Scanlon's formulation (2009,166) "Whatever their feelings about his poetic talents, Chaucer's royal sponsors clearly recognised his linguistic skills at a very early date, and trusted him to represent their interests."

The 1372-3 expedition to Italy was not only a confirmation of the prominence of Chaucer's status within the King's entourage, but also a central episode in his career as a poet. The roll which records Chaucer's payments while carrying out the King's business in Genoa, in fact, mentions that such business took him to Florence too. The Tuscan city was an extremely prosperous city of merchants and patrons of arts, the place where Dante was born, where Petrarch spent his youth before leaving for Avignon, and where an aged Boccaccio had already finished his *Decameron*. It is therefore not difficult to argue that Florence was indeed the crib of the Italian Trecento, and the place in which it was most lively felt. In 1372, Florence was already having its Renaissance. Chaucer's own home country, on the other hand, was "going through a much more protracted and difficult changing; with suppression and

regression, England was not to have its own renaissance for another two hundred years" (Muscatine 1957,129). The persons he met and the things he saw in Florence must have aroused his sharp interest in such a way that later, when he put himself to the task of writing the *Troilus*, they were still chiselled in his mind, and the effects of Chaucer's recollections can be seen in those "smuggled" passages from Dante, Petrarch or Boccaccio's other works which I have already commented upon.

However, there are some other elements that point to a more palpable legacy Chaucer had during his sojourn in Italy. The first of such elements is provided by Chaucer himself, weaved into the Prologue to the Clerk's Tale, where the Clerks tells his fellow pilgrims that

> I wol yow telle a tale which that I
> Lerned at Padowe of a worthy clerk,
> As preved by his wordes and his werk.
> He is now deed and nayled in his cheste;
> I prey to God so yeve his soule reste!
> Fraunceys Petrark, the lauriat poete,
> Highte this clerk, whos rethorike sweete
> Enlumyned al Ytaille of poetrie[127] (*Clerk's Tale*, ll. 26-33)

If we assume that Chaucer is shadowing his own experience in the words of the Clerk, than this short passage gives us plenty of material to discuss. Basically, the Clerk is saying that he went to Padua, that there he met Petrarch and that the Clerk get from him in person the story which is about to be told. Even without this direct reference, we could have easily inferred the possibility for an encounter between the two poets by the content of the story itself. The Clerk's Tale is in fact a re-telling of the story of Griselda, the dramatic and inspiring tale that

127 "I will tell you a tale which I / learned at Padue by a worthy clerk, / as it is proven by his words and his works. / He is now dead, and nailed in his coffin, / I pray God to give rest to his soul! / Francesco Petrarch, the laureate poet, / this clerk was called, whose sweet rhetoric / illumined of poetry all Italy."

concludes Boccaccio's *Decameron*[128]. Petrarch himself read the Decameron, and in a letter sent to his friend Boccaccio (*Seniles*, XVII, 3), he declared that the story he appreciated the most was Griselda's: "Lessi poi sulla fine l'ultima delle tue storie che mi sembrò diversa molto da tutte le altre: e tanto me ne piacqui e ne presi diletto.[129]" Moreover, in the same letter Petrarch said that he enjoyed the story so much that he decided to translate it in Latin so that it could reach a wider audience. Therefore, it is probably in this Latin form that Petrarch told Chaucer the argument of what was later to become the Clerk's Tale, if indeed they ever met at all.

The only evidence of the meeting to this day remains the one Chaucer himself provided, since Petrarch never included the meeting in his memoirs. Nevertheless, some other indirect pieces of evidence can be gathered to support Chaucer's claim. First of all, Petrarch's letter is dated "Fra i colli Euganei, a' 4 di giugno 1373[130]." By that time, we can safely assume that Petrarch had already translated *Decameron*, X, 10, since in the same *Seniles* XVII, 3 he mentions the positive reactions he had when he read the translation to some friends of his. Chaucer voyage to Italy began in late 1372, and after being to Genoa and Florence on the King's business, it is not impossible that "he went to Padua and met Petrarch in person" (Coulton 1950,46). At the age of 68, Petrarch had by that time retired in Arquà, a small city on the Euganean Hills which now bears the poet's name, as the letter testifies. However, it is important to notice that due to the interminable internal wars within the Carraresi family raging on that territory, since November 1372 Petrarch had already left Arquà to seek refuge within the walls of Padua (Fracassetti 1869, vol.II, p.565). Thus, the indication given by the

128 Decameron, X, 10.

129 Petrarch's *Seniles* were written in Latin. The Italian translation is taken from *Lettere senili di Francesco Petrarca; volgarizzate e dichiarate con note.* (Fracassetti 1869)

130 "On the Euganean Hills, the 4th of June 1373"

Clerk comes out to be extremely precise, and it would imply Chaucer's precise knowledge of Petrarch's whereabouts. Petrarch died the following year, another fact promptly recorded in the Clerk's Prologue, which Chaucer could have known when, on his voyage to Milan in 1378, he tried to get in touch once again with the poet he revered greatly.

To get back to the purposes of our matter, it is to be said that by far the most probable theory, on the whole, is that Chaucer translated Boccaccio from some not better identified manuscripts he gathered during one of his trips to Italy. These were either anonymous (Coulton 1950,47-8), or Chaucer decided to omit the name of the author, for the reasons already discussed (see § 5.1). Nevertheless, it a fascinating hypothesis to consider the aforementioned coincidences not as coincidences at all. If we follow such a line of thoughts, we may be able to argue that the old Petrarch, near to his death and by his own admission lacking the time to read the whole of the *Decameron*, gave his own copies of his good friend's works (possibly including the *Filostrato*) to the reverent, awestruck but promising English poet and envoy he once met sometime in the year 1373. It cannot be said with enough emphasis, though, that we have no definite prove of any of the hypothetical facts mentioned above. Moreover, since we do not know the exact nature of the manuscripts Petrarch had from Boccaccio, this would be of little help in establishing the exact debt of Chaucer in his regards.

To conclude, there are some things that can be gathered from the reading of Chaucer's *Troilus* which have the solid nature of facts. He was truly a European poet, able to reconcile the different poetical traditions and to see in relationship to each others "the wide range of values, some of them antithetical, which had once made up the richness and poise of medieval civilization" (Muscatine 1957,247). If he indulged in some incidental satire on the clergy, his standpoint was essentially that of devout Christian (Chesterton 1958,46). He takes from the Provençals and form the poets of the Trecento alike, combining them into a Matter (the War

of Troy) which enables him to bring together the ancient world of the *auctoritas* with the new, strictly medieval, world of courtly love. In an unstable period for English society, Chaucer managed to translate a poem written fifty years before in the wealthy and prosperous Kingdom of Naples. Despite all these conflicting elements present in his poetry, he was able to avoid the contrasts that could arise form the dualistic nature of his creation thanks to his clarity of mind. And yet, his highest achievement is that of maintaining his perspective intelligible to his twenty-first century readers.

6. BEYOND CHAUCER'S LEGACY:

HENRYSON'S *TESTAMENT OF CRESSEID*

When Chaucer set out to translate and adapt the story he found in the *Filostrato*, he provided the English literature with a new plot to be exploited. When thinking about the legacy *Troilus* had after Chaucer's time, the eminent names of Shakespeare (*Troilus and Cressida*, 1602) and Dryden (*Troilus and Cressida; or, Truth Found Too Late*, 1679) are the first that come to mind. Nonetheless, their treatment of the story could have been far less compelling were it not for the intervening genius of a 15th century Scottish poet, the Dunfermline schoolmaster Robert Henryson, who provided them with a Middle Scots poem called *Testament of Cresseid*. Manuscripts sources for Henryson's poem are fragmentary[131], but the *Testament* survives in some early printed editions, the most reliable of which is the Charteris Edition (*The Testament of Cresseid.* Edinburgh: Henrie Charteris, 1593). However, the earliest printed edition, and also the most important for extra-textual history is the Thynne Edition of *The Workes of Geffray Chaucer*, printed in London in 1532, where the text was appended to Chaucer's *Troilus*[132].

Both Chaucer's and Henryson's re-workings can be defined in modern terminology as *adaptations*. However, if we focus on the medieval audience of these poems, the main difference between the texts was that while Chaucer's was deemed an independent creation, Henryson's was considered by all means inextricably yoked with his predecessor's work.

131 According to Kindrick (1997) the *Book of the Dean of Lismore* (National Library of Scotland, Gaelic MS XXXVII) contains only one stanza and the *Ruthven MS* (University of Edinburgh Library, MS Dc. I. 43) the first three. Moreover, according to Fox (1987) the *Asloan MS* (National Library of Scotland, MS.16500) cites the poem in the table of contents, but the pages containing the text have been lost.

132 Besides being the earliest printed text to survive, this edition was also responsible for the widespread impression in the sixteenth century that Chaucer had written the work.

While Boccaccio was, in fact, almost unknown in England prior to Chaucer's retellings themselves, Henryson's source was, on the other hand, one of the most established of all the canonical poets of Middle English Literature. Therefore, the most appropriate term for Henryson's poem is that of *rewriting* (if not of the whole, at least of the final part of *Troilus and Criseyde*), since its comprehension by the public was based on the recognition of a definite source, from which the poem diverged significantly.[133]

Bearing this fundamental observation in mind, in the present chapter I will analyse the relationship between Henryson's Middle Scots poem and Chaucer's *Troilus*, highlighting in particular the relevance of the 15th century author in the Scottish context and the importance of the *Testament of Cresseid* in the wider panorama of English Literature.

6.1. Henryson! who was he?

To delineate beyond any reasonable doubt the main tracts of the elusive historical figure of Robert Henryson has proven to be a very difficult task. Possibly, the cause of such uncertainty lies in the fact that, unlike his younger contemporary poet William Dunbar (c. 1460 - ?)[134], Henryson was not associated with the Scottish Court, but rather with the Church. Biographical information on Henryson is scarce to say the least, and it consists, essentially, of two verses provided by the aforementioned Dunbar. In his *Lament for the Makaris* (c.1505), a short poem in the form of a *danse macabre*, Dunbar laments the deaths of many fellow poets

---

133 cf. Genette's discourse on hypertextuality in *Palimpsests* (1997,5): “It may yet be of another kind, such as text B … being unable to exist, as such, without A, from which it originates through a process I shall provisionally call *transformation*, and which it consequently evokes more or less perceptibly without necessarily speaking of it or citing it.”

134 The exact date of Dunbar's death is yet to be ascertained, though he was surely deceased by 1530. For an extensive account of Dunbar's poetical activity, see Mackenzie (1990).

(Scots: *Makaris*), expressing the fear for his own imminent demise with the Latin refrain "Timor mortis conturbat me." He lists most of his predecessors, starting with Chaucer, Lydgate and Gower

> He hes done petuously devour,
>
> The noble Chaucer, of makaris flour,
>
> The Monk of Bery, and Gower, all thre;
>
> Timor mortis conturbat me.[135] (ll. 49-52)

After them, Dunbar enumerates many other famous poets, but also some names which are known only through his poem and otherwise shrouded in mystery, since no extant work features any reference to them. It is towards the end of the poem that we find the two lines that constitute the core of Henryson's biography:

> In Dumfermelyne he hes done roune
>
> With Maister Robert Henrisoun;[136] (ll. 81-2)

Basically, what we can gather from this short passage is a scanty silhouette of an educated man – *Maister* meaning "university graduated" (Gray 1979,2) – associated with the Royal Burgh of Dunfermline, in the County of Fife, who was certainly dead by, but probably not long before, 1505.

Even though we do not know where Henryson completed his studies (Gray, 1979,2), the fact that he was a learned man is transparent in his works, where he shows a deep understanding of canon and civil law, of medicine and astronomy together with a keen eye for sociological and economical issues of his time (see e.g. *The Morall Fabillis of Esope the Phrygian*, and esp. *The Taill of the Uponlandis Mous and the Burges Mous*). Dunbar's reference to Dunfermline finds some confirmation in legal documents from the Dunfermline

135 "He [death] has grievously devoured, / the noble Chaucer, the flower of poets, / the Monk of Bery, and Gower, all three; fear of death troubles me."

136 "In Dunfermline he [death] has whispered / with Master Robert Henryson"

Abbey, where a certain notary public by the name of Magister Robertus Henrison witnessed to many charters in the years 1477-8 (Gray 1979,3). Other references to the name of Robert Henryson are not uncommon, but unfortunately for us his was not an uncommon name indeed, and more precise biographical details are probably bound to remain unproven.

Dunbar's poem fixes the shady figure of Robert Henryson in a definite time and place, thus providing a relatively accurate context in which his works can be analysed. The fifteenth century in Scotland was a period of unrest. Although the political scene was firmly in the hands of the Stewart dynasty, in the 15th century four Stewart kings met violent deaths (Gray 1979,6) and most of them had to seek the aid of either the nobility or the clergy to establish their authority. As Gray (1979,7) reminds us, Scottish monarchs had to strive to maintain both internal and external authority. Due to the untimely deaths of their fathers, kings acquired power very young, and had to struggle against over-mighty nobles and powerful families, while leading numerous campaigns along the border against the English enemies. As far as we can judge, however, Henryson was never implicated in politics. His was the life of a scholar, and the later tradition that bestows on him the alleged occupation of Dunfermline's schoolmaster is now by the most believed to be correct. Nowadays, the city of Dunfermline "though a pleasant town, is hardly one of Scotland's showplaces" (Gray 1979,9). During Henryson's times, on the contrary, it had the status of Royal Burgh, which means that it was one of the most important trading centres in the country, with many privileges that were not shared by the most part of the other Scottish cities, and it was also one of the favoured residences of the Scottish kings. But the city's real strength came from its Abbey, which was the burial place of the Stewarts and the object of pilgrimages from all over the country, thus raising it to the status of one of the most important sources of power in Scotland.

It was in this *milieu* that Henryson's poems came to life, a context near to the Court but detached from it, and close to the Church tough not compliant with it (Henryson was most probably a layman, and in many instances of his works we find strong criticisms of some aspects of medieval religious life). It the following pages I will try to show how he was neither a courtly nor a religious poet: his allegiance was to his fellow people. He was, by all means, a Scottish Humanist.

6.2. Henryson, a Scottish Chaucerian?

It is generally reckoned[137] that there is a group of fifteenth and sixteenth century Scottish poets who, due to the alleged influence the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer had on their works, are collectively called "Scottish Chaucerians." This label was commonly attached to a large and diverse *ensemble* of writers[138] that took over, in various ways, many of the themes treated by Chaucer and tried to elevate the status of the vernacular as Chaucer had done. And, as Wood (1967,7) concedes, "the term 'Chaucerian' has, until recently, been good enough." Even though Chaucer has always been considered as a *primus inter pares* when it comes to Middle English poetry, it needs not be forgotten that it would be inappropriate to assume that, singlehandedly, in the time-span of less than a century Chaucer completely erased a "native tradition represented in the fourteenth century by such considerable poets as Barbour, Wyntoun and Henry the Minstrel" (Wood 1967,8). It would be more accurate, therefore, to say that the influence of Chaucer was deeply felt by this group of Scottish writers, but he was by no means the only (and not always the major) influence on such poets[139].

137 See e.g. Wood (1967) or Gray (1979)

138 Among others, William Dunbar, Gavin Douglas, Walter Kennedy and Robert Henryson.

139 Dr. Agnes Mure Mackenzie went as far as saying that "Douglas, Dunbar, and even Henryson are probably less disciples of Chaucer than I am." (Mackenzie, qtd. in Wood 1967,8)

Chaucer's impact on Henryson is indeed undeniable, but the boundaries within which his influence was felt may not be as clear as the influence itself, and therefore "the conventional label of 'Scottish Chaucerian' so often applied to Henryson … can be dangerously misleading if we interpret it in too limited a manner" (Gray 1979,18). The first element that sets Henryson[140] apart from Chaucer is the language. Although by many considered only as a dialect of Middle English, Henryson's Middle Scots is by all means a language of its own. Since the marriage of James III with Margaret of Denmark, which brought Shetland and Orkney under Scots rule, Scotland was a country of three languages (Norse, Scots and Gaelic), each with its definite status. It is fundamental to realise that writers who used Middle Scots (or *Inglis*, as most of them would call it), at least until 1603 and the Union of the Crowns, regarded it as "the accepted vernacular language of an independent kingdom" (Gray 1979,16). It was not considered an outlandish dialect and most of them did not feel any need to be defensive or self-conscious about it. The language that Henryson employs to write his *Testament of Cresseid* had its own literary tradition, its own rhetorical devices and its own distinctive sounds, which were different from the ones available to Chaucer. One example over all is the extensive use of alliterations, one of Henryson's favourite metrical devices, which he uses "much more readily than any English contemporary learned poet would have done" (Gray 1979,18). Alliterative verse was no more mainstream in England since the end of the 12th century, but in the North it lived longer, and was often weaved into rhymed stanzas, thus setting Scots verse apart from the Germanic tradition of the long alliterative verse. "Unrhymed alliterative poetry was not favoured by Scottish writers" (Turville-Petre 1977,115), and the mixed use of rhyme and heavy alliteration was in fact

---

140 What is said about Henryson can generally be applied to the majority of 15th century Scottish makars, but I will keep the focus of the discussion on him.

vastly adopted in Scots poetry up to the late 16th century. This fiery fondness for alliteration in Scottish poetry is, as Wittig (1972,108) argues, an original feature due to some co-occurring factors such as the richness of a mixed Anglo-Scandinavian vocabulary, the stronger accentuation and the influence from Gaelic syllabic poetry[141].

Another fundamental difference between Chaucer and Henryson that is reflected in many ways in their poetical production is their social and cultural background, which is probably best visible in their non-literary professions. Chaucer was a merchant, a bureaucrat and a sometime ambassador, while Henryson was a scholar, a notary public and probably a schoolmaster. Chaucer lived most of his life in London, and was a renowned personality at court, while Henryson led his life outside of the Royal circles, under the protective wing of the Dunfermline Abbey. Henryson was a learned and witty man, who certainly shared with Chaucer "a *humanitas* which may well owe something to the study of classical authors" (Gray 1979,25), but he was most of all a Humanist. In his poetical production, many of the central themes in Chaucer's works (most notably the chivalric code, the respect for the *auctoritas* and the religious undertone) play no significant part, and early in the *Testament* he put to question Chaucer authority itself: "Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?[142]" What Henryson was really concerned with was the relationship of fiction to truth, the search for an "aesthetic order for the 'chaos of things' in some 'authentic' manner, without 'lying'." (Gray 1979,30). He wanted to portray the socio-economic situation of the people of his time giving "familiar, visual convictions to conventional descriptions" (Wood 1967,13), but at the same time maintaining the inquisitive, unbiased and precise eye of a scholar.

Stearns (1943,293) agrees that "Henryson's allusions to the socio-economic scene of his

141 For an in-depth analysis, see Sir. William Craigie, *The Scottish Alliterative Poems* (London: H. Milford, 1943) and Osborn Bergins, *Irish Bardic Poetry* (Dublin: Dublin Institue for Advanced Studies, 1970).

142 "Who knows whether all that Chaucer wrote was true?" line 64.

day are detailed and discerning", a goal he achieved by living outside of the capital, closely in contact with the rural life of the countryside. Of course, Dunfermline itself was not a scattered group of mud huts, supported by subsistence-level agriculture[143], but rather a wealthy and thriving Burgh, developed upon foreign trade under the protection of special privileges. Nonetheless, it was probably witnessing the sheer contrast between living conditions in the city and in its outskirts that Henryson developed his tendency to identify himself with the poor people, and his interest in poignantly describing their lives. In all his literary production, it is "difficult to escape the impression that Henryson preferred the country folk, and it is certain that he was keenly aware of the contrast between living conditions in town and in country" (Stearns 1943,289).

Henryson's interest in his fellow men is balanced – and maybe enhanced, perfectly in line with Renaissance trends – by his keen interest in science and learning. Even for a notary public, his knowledge of the Scottish laws, both civil and canonic, is astounding, especially if we consider the fact that "in Henryson's day Scotland, unlike England, had no body of common law to guide its decisions, and there were continual but ineffective attempts to make a digest of the laws in order to remedy the confusion" (Stearns 1944a,261). This confusion most of the time favoured the leading classes (both civil and ecclesiastic), who used their superior status to prevail over the common and illiterate people, a situation that is very clearly denounced in Henryson's *Morall Fabillis*, and especially in *The Taill of the Scheip and the Doig*, where the poet expresses the "strongest sympathy with the poor man who suffers injustice at the hands of the courts" (Stearns 1944a,263). That these abuses were extremely common in Henryson's day is beyond doubt, what may not be clear to the modern reader is that to comment unfavourably upon them was a very serious matter. By doing such, even if from behind the very thin mystification of humanised animals, the poet was incurring in the

143 For an account of the living conditions in the 15th century Scottish countryside, see Stearns (1943,286-91)

risk of angering both the Crown and the Church, the sole entities who held the authority for judging people.

Besides his 'professional' interest in law, Henryson was also learned in the matters of medicine and astrology, whose correlation will play a central role in the proceedings of the *Testament of Cresseid* (see below). As it will be discussed later, in his version of the story, which condemns Cresseid to a leper death and keeps Troylus within the living, Henryson gets rid of centuries of medieval authority. However, his vivid description of Cresseid's leprosy, as well as of her torments and pain, will engage all subsequent poets (included Shakespeare) up to the point that "for authors and readers up to 1600 … Henryson's Cresseid was the Cresseid[144]" and the stigma of leprosy will remain closely attached to the Trojan heroine. Leprosy was quite common in Scotland[145], and Henryson's detailed description of the symptoms of the disease is so remarkable that Stearns (1994b,269) finds it "difficult to escape the conclusion that Henryson had … observed lepers at first hand." This might well be true, but as Parr (1945,491) points out, there is a wide array of medical treatises which makes "apparent that Henryson did not necessarily derive his description of Cresseid the leper from first-hand observation of lepers in Dunfermline." Henryson's interest in medicine is indeed well represented in his works, which testify his knowledge and familiarity with many medical tractates, especially on the subject of plague. The most interesting of such works are the mocking *Sum Practysis of Medecyne*, in which the poet makes a burlesque of medical recipes, and *Ane Prayer for the Pest*, which "reflects the pietistic rather than the astrological determinist view of the disease" (Friedman 1985,16).

The sheer amount of medical details in Henryson's works reflects his extensive knowledge on the subject which, especially in the *Testament*, is counter-balanced by a keen

144 Rollins, qtd. in Gray (1979,163)

145 On this matter, see Stearns (1944b,265-6)

interest in astrology. The position of the planets in the sky, accurately described in the first stanzas of the poem, is functional to our understanding of the later events. Among other things, we are told that

> … fair Venus, the bewtie of the nicht,
>
> Uprais and set unto the west full richt
>
> Hir goldin face, in oppositioun
>
> Of God Phebus, direct discending doun.[146] (ll. 11-14)

When the story of Cresseid is about to be told, the sun is setting down and Venus is rising in the sky, thus highlighting the importance of her influence throughout the whole poem. This description immediately catches the attention of the learned reader[147] (since, astronomically speaking, such opposition is indeed impossible) and at the same time casts a very gloomy and malevolent shade upon the destiny of Cresseid. The Planets will also have an active role in the development of the story, when an assembly will be summoned to punish Cresseid for her sins. At first glance, it might seem that in his poem Henryson is compliant with the classical correspondence of planets with pagan gods, but if we observe his description of the seven planets involved in the assembly, we notice that Henryson's treatment does not focus on their divine attributes, but rather on their astrological properties. It is true that the planets are personified, but it is not a subtle difference the fact that they do not represent celestial deities but actual celestial corps. They descend on earth according to their actual astronomical position, from the farthest (Saturn) to the nearest (the Moon), and their characteristics are not that classically attributed to the Greek and Latin gods, but that derived from astrological treatises, according to Stearns (1944c,926) especially from Albohazen's *Liber de Fatis Astrorum*. Again with Stearns (1944c,926), we may conclude that Henryson had discarded for

146 "fair Venus, the beauty of the night, / rose up and set right into the west / her golden face, in opposition / to the God Phoebus, directly descending down"

147 For an hypothesis on Henryson's readership, see § 7 below.

the most part the ancient mythological qualities of the gods, "substituting [to them] the astrological qualities of the planets in which his age believed."

We may conclude by saying that Henryson appears to have been a poet with a peculiarly strong scholarly undertone. He had an excellent knowledge of the law and a wide understanding of both medicine and astrology. His attitude towards the authority, both classical and contemporary is highly critical, which reveals "a skeptical intelligence with a hatred of injustice and love for his fellow men" (Stearns 1944a,264). Throughout his poems, he presents a vivid and deeply compassionate picture of the socio-economic scene of his times. His originality is especially remarkable in an age which devoted itself to the imitation of foreign models, and his attitude is in all regards that of a Humanist, and probably one of the most interesting forerunners of the Northern Renaissance.

6.3 "Fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troylus"

In the sections above, I discussed in some details how Henryson's background can be considered as the source of the different standpoint of the Scots poet, in relationship to his English predecessor. However, since such difference is best seen while operating within the texts themselves, I will now focus on the *Testament of Cresseid* and analyse in which ways Henryson deviates form his source.

The *Testament*, as mentioned before, is a retelling of Chaucer's ending. It could, theoretically, stand by itself, but "in conjunction with the original, it becomes more rewarding and intricate" (Sweney 2000,124). Henryson is aware of this, and does not fail to make certain that his readers recognise the relationship of the *Testament* with Chaucer's poem. At the beginning of his story, Henryson's narrator speaks directly to his audience, presenting himself as an old man who can now scarcely feel the heat of love, and therefore has to seek the

warmth of a hearth.

> Thocht lufe be hait, yit in ane man of age
>
> It kendillis nocht sa sone as in youtheid,
>
> Of quhome the blude is flowing in ane rage;
>
> And in the auld the curage doif and deid
>
> Of quhilk the fyre outward is best remeid[148] (ll. 29-33)

His point of view is therefore similar to Chaucer's, who in turns affirmed in the beginning of his poem to be unable to love. However, while Chaucer is only feigning detachment in order to shroud his poem with an appearance of objectivity, which is reinforced, as we have seen, by the constant references to classical *auctoritas*, Henryson's frigidity will inform in a pervasive way the development of the poem. The narrator, "to cut the winter nicht and mak it schort" (line 39), decides to read a book, which happened to be "Writtin be worthie Chaucer glorious / Of fair Cresseid and worthie Troylus" (ll. 41-2). What we are told next is fundamental to understand the nature of Henryson's poem, since if he had wanted to tell the same story that Chaucer told, he would have finished his introduction here. What he has in mind, however, is a different operation. The *Testament* is not just a parallel account of Chaucer's fifth book, but it "writes over Chaucer's ending, creating a palimpsest of sorts" (Sweney 2000,125). He is not going to tell Chaucer's story, he is going to tell his own. Thus, the narrator puts aside Chaucer's book, and takes "ane uther quair[149]," thus signalling the first, encompassing, rupture with *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Such breach of continuity has to be justified, and Henryson's way to do that is extremely consistent with his philosophical stance, which is encapsulated in line 64: "Quha wait gif all

148 "Though love is hot, yet in an old man / it does not kindle as soon as in youth, / of whom the blood flows enraged; / and in the old the lust is dull and dead / for which the external fire is the best remedy"

149 "another book". Though many critics compare this other fictitious source to Chaucer's Lollius, I believe it more coherent with the context to consider it as a *mise en abyme* (i.e. a mirror) of the *Testament* itself.

that Chauceir wrait was trew?" By questioning Chaucer's authority, Henryson is questioning literary authority as such, and more in general the medieval concept of *ipse dixit*. In one verse, Henryson is concentrating one of the grandest revolutions in scientific thinking, anticipating by a century and a half Descartes's concept of "methodic doubt[150]." Of course, Henryson's scope was far less pervasive than that of the later French philosopher, but nevertheless it signals a breaking in the chain of traditional association of the classics with irrefutable truth. As it was mentioned before, one of the main goals of Henryson's poetry is to explore the relation of fiction to truth. Therefore, his point of view on his poem is closely connected with his point of view on history. If he sets his work clearly apart from *Troilus and Criseyde*, telling us that his is a different story and that Chaucer's cannot be trusted, why can we still speak of a rewriting? Because of the lines that follow that poignant and meaningful question, where we are told that if Henryson cannot be sure of the truth of Chaucer's account,

> Nor I wait nocht gif this narratioun
>
> Be authoreist, or fenyet of the new[151]. (ll. 65-6)

Chaucer's is not the real story of what befell Criseyde, but neither what is told in the "uther quair" (i.e. in the *Testament*) can be assumed to be an historical account. These lines are Henryson's disclaimer. His is not the true story of Troylus and Cresseid, as much as Chaucer's was not a corrupted one. They are simply two of the possible retellings of the same story, a concept that Henryson wants to be extremely clear: they are both fiction, and not history. Only once cleared this fundamental, one might say philosophical, stance, Henryson can proceed with his version of the story.

Briefly told, Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* focuses on what happens to Cresseid after she betrayed Troylus for Diomeid. When the Greek hero "... had all his appetyte, / And

150 René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method* (1637)

151 "Neither I know whether this narration / is authoritative or newly concocted"

mair, fulfillit of this fair ladie[152]" (ll. 71-2), he discards her, and Cresseid wanders for the encampment, basically becoming a camp follower, a prostitute. After some time, she decides to go back to her father's house, to try and escape her foul destiny. Calchas welcomes her back, and she retires in a "secreit orature" to pray. There, she cries out her sorrow, blaming Cupid and Venus for her mischance.

> O fals Cupid, is nane to wyte bot thow
>
> And thy mother, of lufe the blind goddes![153] (ll. 134-5)

When she finishes her crossed reproach, she falls asleep and dreams that Cupid, angered by her blasphemy, summons an assembly of the Planets to judge her conduct.

> Cupide the king ringand ane silver bell,
>
> Quhilk men micht heir fra hevin unto hell;
>
> At quhais sound befoir Cupide appeiris
>
> The sevin planetis, discending fra thair spheiris;[154] (ll. 144-7)

We have already commented upon Henryson's knowledge of astronomy and astrology, but the section on the Planets' assembly (ll. 141-343) is worth some further discussion.

The trial of the planets is one of the most remarkably crafted scenes in the poems, and even if scholars are still uncertain "whether the idea of the trial and horrible punishment of Cressida originated with Henryson" (Wood 1967,11), it remains a clear evidence of his unmatched imaginative artistry. As mentioned above, one of Henryson's most interesting deviations from Chaucer's medieval frame of thought is the fact that, rather than being representations of pagan deities, the planet portraits in the *Testament* are "fundamentally astrological in character" (Stearns 1944c,912) since they

152 "... had all his appetite, / and more, satisfied with this fair lady"

153 "O false Cupid, there is no one to blame but you / and your mother, the blind goddess of love!"

154 "Cupid the king, ringing a silver bell, / which one could hear from heaven to hell; / at whose sound before Cupid appear / the seven planets, descending from their spheres"

> ... hes power of all thing generabill,
>
> To reull and steir be thair greit influence
>
> Wedder and wind, and coursis variabill.[155] (ll. 148-50)

Henryson's treatment of the matter can be analysed as a way to reconcile the two extremes of astrological determinism – which assumed that human mischances were caused by the unfavourable position of the planets (much like modern horoscopes) – and religious morality, which correlates every human disgrace to a punishment for sins. Such middle ground, where planets are to be considered agents of an angry God, but not deities themselves, was traced down by Friedman (1985,13) to "a lengthy poem on the plague of 1348, the *Judicio Solis in Conviviis Saturni*, written in 1350 by a Liègois canon, Simon of Couvin," which also features an assembly of the planets. This point of view, which keep its distance from either religion and determinism, would have been "very congenial to Henryson" (Friedman 1985,15), a poet with a humanist faith in men and in their free will.

At the end of a short debate, an unfavourable sentence is passed upon Cresseid

> Than thus proceidit Saturne and the Mone
>
> Quhen thay the mater rypely had degest:
>
> For the dispyte to Cupide scho had done
>
> And to Venus, oppin and manifest,
>
> In all hir lyfe with pane to be opprest,
>
> And torment sair with seiknes incurabill,
>
> And to all lovers be abhominabill[156] (ll. 304-8)

155 "... has power over all things created, / to rule and direct by their great influence / weather and wind, and other variable courses". These are properties associated with the planets in general. For a detailed analysis of the astrological qualities of each of them, see Stearns (1944c,912-26).

156 "Then, thus said Saturn and the Moon / when they had wisely considered the case: / because of the insult she had done to Cupid / and to Venus, overt and manifest, / for all her life be she oppressed with pain, / and fiercely tormented with an incurable sickness, / and to all lovers be she abominable"

Coherent with his search for the middle ground between religion and determinism, Henryson made Saturn and Cynthia judges of Cresseid's fate. Thus, the sanction passed has to be that of leprosy, a condition associated with the two celestial bodies in astrological lore, which was thought to be sexually transmitted, and which was also ritually unclean in biblical thought[157]. The subsequent description of the disease shows that Henryson was not only knowledgeable about astrology, but also about medicine, since the symptoms of leprosy are so precise to credit the aforementioned hypothesis of Henryson's personal observation of lepers outside the city walls of Dunfermline.

> Thy cristall ene mingit with blude I mak,
>
> Thy voice sa cleir unplesand, hoir, and hace,
>
> Thy lustie lyre ovirspred with spottis blak,
>
> And lumpis haw appeirand in thy face[158] (ll. 337-40)

When Cresseid awakes from her dream, looking into a mirror she sees “hir face sa deformait” and understands that she has been punished for her blasphemy. When Calchas summons her daughter for dinner, she tells him what happened and shows him her leprous face. In disguise, Cresseid reaches the lazaretto out of town, where she perceives the sheer difference of the hard life in the countryside, compared to the comforts of her father's house. The socio-economic analysis of the differences between country and city life is one of Henryson's favourite themes, which is nowhere to be found in Chaucer's *Troilus*. This contrast – which gains a distinctive Scottish flavour thanks to the reference to “ane bawer hat[159]” and to the Scottish tradition on May Day for girls “to walk and tak the dew be it was day[160]” – is often reiterated by Henryson in many passages, which show his attention for the issue.

157 cf. Parr (1945) and Barney (2006,431).

158 “I make your crystal eyes spotted with blood, / your voice so clear unpleasant, grating and hoarse, / your lovely face covered with black spots, / and livid lumps will appear on your face”

159 “a beaver hat” (line 386)

160 “to walk and take the dew when it was day” (line 429)

God wait gif Cresseid was ane sorrowfull gest,

Seing that uncouth fair and harbery!

But meit or drink scho dressit hir to ly

In ane dark corner of the hous allone[161] (ll. 402-5)

That of her lost city-dweller wealth and present dismal condition is also one of the central themes of Cresseid's lamentations in the lazaretto, where the poem reaches its lyrical peak in the section called *The Complaint of Cresseid.*

Quhair is thy chalmer wantounlie besene;

With burely bed and bankouris browderit bene;

Spycis and wyne to thy collatioun,

The cowpis all of gold and silver schene,

Thy sweit meitis servit in plaittis clene

With saipheron sals of ane gude sessoun[162] (ll. 416-21)

…

This lipper ludge tak for thy burelie bour,

And for thy bed tak now ane bunche of stro,

For waillit wyne and meitis thou had tho

Tak mowlit breid, peirrie and cedar sour;

Bot cop and clapper now is all ago.[163] (ll. 438-42)

---

161 “God knows whether Cresseid was a sorrowful soul, / seeing that unpleasant food and lodging! / Without food or drink she prepared to lie / alone in a dark corner of the house”

162 “Where is your chamber pleasantly furnished; / with excellent bed and handsomely embroidered tapestry; / spices and wine as snacks before retiring, / all the cups made of gold and bright silver, / your sweet foods served in clean dishes / with saffron sauce of a good seasoning”

163 “Take this lepers' lodge as your lovely chamber, / and as your bed take now a bunch of straw, / instead of choice wine and food that you had then / take mouldy bread, pear juice, and sour cider; / except for a cup and a clapper now everything is gone”

After she has bitterly cried her grief "the nicht fra end to end," the other lepers convince her to accept her condition, to stop crying and start to live the life of a leper: "Go leir to clap thy clapper to and fro, / And leif efter the law of lipper leid.[164]" Convinced, Cresseid starts behaving as a beggar when one day Troylus – who, unlike in Chaucer's account, is still alive – returning victorious to Troy after a battle, stops by the leper's group to share his alms. In a highly pathetic scene, neither of the ex-lovers recognise the other, but the sight of the leper Cresseid nevertheless re-kindles Troylus's memories of their time together. Moved, instead of a few coins, he gives her all his purse and some jewels, and then departs. It is only when Cresseid asks the other lepers who was the knight that was so generous to her that she feels the heaviness of her guilt, and swoons. After this encounter, the poem comes hastily to an end. Cresseid is finally aware that her disgrace was caused only by her misjudgement and her fickleness, thus admitting her fallacy towards Cupid and Venus and declaring that her present situation was only her fault: "Nane but my self as now I will accuse.[165]" After her final epiphany, she writes the eponymous testament, committing her soul to Diane, the goddess of chastity, and then dies.

The end of Cresseid is meant by Henryson to be exemplary to "worthie wemen", since it was "maid for your worschip and instructioun[166]." While in Chaucer's *Troilus* the story was governed by an unescapable destiny, in Henryson's account, human choices are once again thrown into balance. While Chaucer decided to make of Troilus an *exemplum* of the futility of human love in comparison to the greater divine Love, Henryson focuses his attention on Cresseid, thus "exploring the ambiguity of Chaucer's picture" (Godman 1984,296). When he

164 "Go and learn to ring your clapper to and fro, / and live after the law of the leprous folk" (ll. 479-80)

165 "I will accuse [of my disgrace] no one but myself" (line 574)

166 "Made to honour you and for your instruction" (line 611)

read Chaucer's story, he noticed, rightly, that her betrayal was not at all functional to the completion of a higher plan, but rather an act of her own free will. Moreover, as Sklute (1977,194) observes, “the poem nowhere offers a Christian superstructure functioning beyond men's action and the cosmos' reaction … as Chaucer's *Troilus* does.” Henryson decided then to write the *Testament* as an admonishment on the dangers of free will, and on the unpredictable repercussions of a bad choice. Cresseid is punished because she blames the Planets/Gods for her own poor judgement, she is punished because she does not recognise her free will, and therefore “to speak of her soul as being redeemed, or becoming 'alive again unto God' is a sentimental confusing of creeds” (Wood 1967,15)[167]. Her leprosy is neither a penance for a sin, nor is it caused by some malevolent position of planets, it is simply the consequence of her lusty behaviour (since in Henryson's time it was thought to be a venereal disease). Henryson's point is that we are endowed with free will, but that comes at a price: nobody is there to save us from our error, and in the end, Cresseid understands “the deepest source of her suffering to be … her own infidelity to and loss of Troylus” (Godman 1984,298).

6.4. The High Concise Style

The last important issue to address in order to mark the differences between Chaucer and Henryson is the rhetoric the latter employed in the composition of his poem, sometimes referred to as “High Concise Style[168].” In the previous analysis of Chaucer's poem, it was clearly highlighted how widespread was the Middle English poet's use of *amplificatio*, a device on which the attention of medieval rhetoricians was “usually overwhelmingly

167 cf. also Sklute (1977,196) “Because we automatically assume a Christian vision on the part of the author, we want to think of her remarks as confessional.”

168 The phrase was coined by the Scottish poet Edwin Muir, in his *Essays on Literature and Society* (1949,18).

concentrated" (Spearing 1962,209) and which "is reflected in the diffuseness of most kinds of mediaeval poetry" (Spearing 1962,209). In the *Testament* there are indeed some sequences that are actually copious (e.g. the Planets sequence), but the Scots poet tells us that his main rhetorical ideal is that of conciseness, embodied in the exact opposite of Chaucer's *amplificatio*, namely the practise of *abbreviatio*. The harbinger of Henryson's rhetorical stance is, quite appropriately, Mercury, in his capacity as the speaker of the planets' assembly:

> Quha had bene thair and liken for to heir
>
> His facound toung and termis exquisite,
>
> Of rethorick the prettick he micht leir,
>
> In brief sermone ane pregnant sentence wryte.[169] (ll. 267-70)

As Spearing (1962,209) points out, in these lines "the poet himself gives us a hint as to what he is doing in his poem." Therefore, we have to consider Henryson's 'High Concise Style' as produced on the basis of a conscious literary theory which, due to the juxtaposition of two characteristically opposite rhetorical devices, can be seen as signalling an age of transition "between the ideas about literature which we distinguish as 'mediaeval' and 'Renaissance'" (Spearing 1962,216). Henryson's rhetorical style is functional to the epistemology he wants to endow his story with (the aforementioned discourse on the relationship between fiction and reality). His conciseness can include an appropriate amount of copiousness as a reflection of the variety of contradictory perspectives that can be mingled into one story. None of them can modify the nature of a fictitious account and turn it into an historical record, but all of them may concur in the creation of a new poem, both compassionate and harsh at the same time. After all, "Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?"

---

169 "Who had been there, taking delight in hearing / his eloquent tongue and exquisite terms, / might have learnt the practice of rhetoric, / to write a meaningful discourse in a brief speech"

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout the pages of my dissertation I have followed the story of three texts, all of them linked to each other in a chain. They represent, among many others, a small part of a wider tradition, which is most of the times referred to as "The Matter of Troy." However, the focus of my analysis was not that of investigating the position of the texts within the diverse and multifaceted corpus pertaining to the Trojan War. Instead, I wanted to inquire into the relationship between the three texts themselves, and into the connections, both literary and historical, that link the *Filostrato* to *Troilus and Criseyde*, and which in turn link it to *The Testament of Cresseid* in a hypertextual network.

These relationships work on different levels and are always characterised by some elements of innovation, which may or may not be recognised by the intended audience, depending on their knowledge of such hypertextual network (i.e. whether or not the audience is aware of the existence of a text A, of which text B is a hypotext). As remarked by Genette (1997,9) "[t]he less massive and explicit the hypertextuality of a given work, the more does its analysis depend on constitutive judgement: that is, on the reader's interpretative decision." In this framework, the audience plays a fundamental role, since it is its perception that validates a work as pertaining to a specific literary tradition, a fact of which every medieval author was well aware of. Therefore, studying what the author of a text explicitly says and what he implies, we can infer, if not the real audience of a work, at least its intended recipients. As I carried out such analysis, it became clear how different texts call for a different audience. Translations are never neutral, especially in the Middle Ages, and understanding the translation strategies that lay at the foundations of a re-telling can help us greatly to pinpoint

the divergences between the hypertext and the hypotext, both in form and intents.

The *Filostrato* is declaredly targeted to a single person, i.e. Boccaccio's Filomena, who (as argued in § 2.3) was a member of the Neapolitan nobility. However, the poem clearly transcended the boundaries of a private missive, and therefore the intended recipient for the poem is to be considered, more in general, as a member of that secular audience, ideally a damsel or a lady, which resided at the Court of the King of Naples. The motivations that lead to the production of the *Filostrato* are probably, at least in some part, connected to personal events, but it is the public environment of the Court that provided the adequate imagery to convey the poet's distress.

In Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, on the contrary, the personal motivations that may have led to the composition of the *Filostrato* are manifestly put aside from the very beginning, as to signal a precise and objective standpoint, with maybe a hint of judgement on Chaucer's side. Chaucer's point of view is justified by the different context of reception, and the Middle English modifications can be interpreted as a measure of cultural (and social) distance between the Italian Trecento, on the verge of the Renaissance, and the Medievalism of Chaucer's England. Chaucer's audience was still heavily under the influence of the French literary conventions "with a weight that the Italian debit to France did not approach" (Muscatine 1957,128), and was composed not only by Noble and Gentlewomen (Doyle 1954,98) but also by other fellow writers and intellectuals (Strohm 1989,41 qtd. in Firth Green 2009,33), as the widespread insistence on the employment of classic rhetoric testifies. The fact that Chaucer's audience was a learned one is also confirmed by several references to the medieval most well-established *auctoritates* (e.g. Dares, Ovid, Dictys), and his debt to French (i.e. Provençal) literature is ascertained by his thorough compliance with the rules of Courtly Love. Both aspects are not present in Boccaccio, and are therefore to be considered as

Chaucer's innovations to the text, as well as his contribution to the *mouvance* of the story.

Little and less is known about Henryson's life, and therefore to establish beyond any reasonable doubt the ideal members of his audience proves to be a difficult task. Nevertheless, some hypotheses can be made. Henryson was a *maister*, a learned man (university graduated), and a keen observer of the socio-economic condition of 15th century Scotland. Contrarily to Boccaccio or Chaucer, he did not produce his works within a courteous environment, but rather in the Royal Burgh of Dunfermline. Although the most prominent feature of Dunfermline's political establishment was Dunfermline Abbey, thanks to which the city acquired its prestigious status, Henryson was most probably a layman, compliant neither with the Court nor the Church. In his works, the most prominent among which is the *Testament of Cresseid*, his search for realism and his accurate descriptions of daily-life situations of the common people, often described as vexed by the power-holders (nobility and clergy alike) characterises him as a Humanist. While Boccaccio exploited the story of Troilus and Criseyde in order to achieve a personal goal, and Chaucer modified the story in order to appease and entertain a courtly audience, Henryson's retelling had primarily a didactic purpose. Therefore, we can put forth the hypothesis that his works, written in Middle Scots, were intended not for a courteous audience but for the more learned members of the middle classes, probably that mercantile and bourgeois establishment that flourished in Dunfermline thanks to the advantages and low rates deriving from its status. Moreover, the fact the some of Henryson's poems (especially *Orpheus and Eurydice*) were among the first works printed in Scotland in the Chepman and Myllar Prints (1508) shows that “Henryson's appeal was not only to the intelligentsia or the upper classes,” which is confirmed by “the evident popularity of both *The Fables* and *The Testament of Cresseid*” (Bawcutt and Riddy 1992,xi).

The story that these three poets tell is the same, and yet their stories are very different the one from the other. Hopefully, the present survey of the social and cultural context in which these three re-tellings took place, together with the analysis of the intertextual relationship between them, can help to shed some light over the motives and the operations that made such modifications possible, changes that allowed them to produce three compelling, though different, masterpieces.

8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

8.1. Primary Sources

Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Il Filocolo*. Edited by Enzo Quaglio. Milano: Mondadori, 1998.

———. "Il Filostrato." In *Boccaccio. Caccia di Diana, Filostrato*, edited by Vittore Branca. Milano: Mondadori, 1990.

———. *La Caccia di Diana*. Edited by Ignazio Moutier. Firenze: Stamperia Magheri, 1832.

———. *The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio*. Edited by Nathaniel Edward Griffin. New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1998.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Riverside Chaucer*. Edited by Larry D. Benson. Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1988.

———. "Troilus and Criseyde." In *Troilus and Criseyde*, edited by Stephen A. Barney. Norton Critical Editions. London: W.W. Norton, 2006.

Henryson, Robert. "The Testament of Cresseid." In *Troilus and Criseyde, Geoffrey Chaucer*, by Stephen A. Barney, edited by Robert Kindrick. Norton Critical Editions. London: W.W. Norton, 2006.

8.2. On Boccaccio

Asor Rosa, Alberto, ed. "Boccaccio, Giovanni." In *Letteratura Italiana: Gli Autori. Dizionario Bio-bibliografico e Indici*, 298–305. Torino: Einaudi, 1990.

———."Filostrato (Il)." In Letteratura Italiana: Dizionario delle Opere, 474–76. Torino: Einaudi, 1999.

Beekman Taylor, Paul. "Peynted Confessiouns: Boccaccio and Chaucer." *Comparative Literature* 34, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 116–29.

Clubb, Louise George. "Boccaccio and the Boundaries of Love." *Italica* 37, no. 3 (September 1960): 188–96.

Crescini, Vincenzo. *Contributo agli studi sul Boccaccio*. Torino: Loescher, 1887.

Lumiansky, R. M. “Aspects of the Relationship of Boccaccio’s ‘Il Filostrato’ with Benoit’s ‘Roman de Troie’ and Chaucer’s ‘Wife of Bath’s Tale’.” *Italica* 31, no. 1 (March 1954): 1–7.

Muscetta, Carlo. “Vita e opere minori del Boccaccio.” In *Storia della Letteratura Italiana. Il Trecento*, edited by Natalino Sapegno. Milano: Garzanti, 1987.

Perella, Nicolas J. “Boccaccio’s Lyric Poetry.” *Italica* 38, no. 1 (March 1961): 1–14.

8.3. On Chaucer

apRoberts, Robert P. “Criseyde’s Infidelity and the Moral of Troilus.” *Speculum* 44, no. 3 (July 1969): 383–402.

Chesterton, G. K. *Chaucer*. London: Faber & Faber, 1965.

Childs, Wendy. “Anglo-Italian Contacts in the Fourteenth Century.” In *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento*, by Piero Boitani, 65–87. Cambridge: CUP, 1983.

Coleman, Janet. “English Culture in the Fourteenth Century.” In *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento*, by Piero Boitani, 33–63. Cambridge: CUP, 1983.

Cook, Albert S. “The Character of Criseyde.” *PMLA* 22, no. 3 (1907): 531–47.

Coulton, George G. *Chaucer and His England*. London: Methuen, 1950.

Crane, Samantha. “The Pandering of Pandarus.” *Scholars* 18 (Spring 2012).

Curry, Walter Clyde. “Destiny in Chaucer’s Troilus.” *PMLA* 45, no. 1 (March 1930): 129–68.

Doyle, A. I. “The Social Context of Medieval English Literature.” In *The Age of Chaucer*, edited by Boris Ford, 85–105. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954.

Godwin, William. *Life of Geoffrey Chaucer, the Early English Poet*. Vol. 1. New York: AMS, 1974.

Graydon, Joseph S. “Defense of Criseyde.” *PMLA* 44, no. 1 (March 1929): 141–77.

Hanly, Michael G. *Troilus and Criseyde. Four Perspectives on Influence*. Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1990.

Lewis, Clive Staples. *The Allegory of Love. A Study in Medieval Tradition*. New York: OUP, 1977.

———. “What Chaucer Really Did to Il Filostrato.” In *Troilus and Criseyde*, edited by Stephen A. Barney, 451–64. Norton Critical Editions. London: W.W. Norton, 2006.

Lyndon Shanley, James. “The Troilus and Christian Love.” *ELH* 6, no. 4 (December 1939): 271–81.

Murray, Molly. “The Value of ‘Eschaunge’: Ransom and Substitution in ‘Troilus and Criseyde’.” *ELH* 69, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 335–58.

Muscatine, Charles. *Chaucer and the French Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957.

Nolan, Barbara. *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*. Cambridge: CUP, 1992.

Scanlon, Larry. “Geoffrey Chaucer.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100-1500*, edited by Larry Scanlon, 165–77. Cambridge: CUP, 2009.

Stroud, Theodore A. “Boethius’s Influence on Chaucer’s ‘Troilus’.” *Modern Philology* 49, no. 1 (August 1951): 1–9.

Tatlock, John S. P. “Dante and Guinizzelli in Chaucer’s Troilus.” *Modern Language Notes* 35, no. 7 (November 1920): 443.

Wimsatt, James I. “Medieval and Modern in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde.” *PMLA* 92, no. 2 (March 1977): 203–16.

Windeatt, Barry. “Chaucer and the Filostrato.” In *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento*, by Piero Boitani, 163–83. Cambridge: CUP, 1983.

Young, Karl. “Chaucer’s ‘Troilus and Criseyde’ as Romance.” *PMLA* 53, no. 1 (March 1938):

38–63.

8.4. On Henryson

Bawcutt, Priscilla, and Felicity Riddy. *Selected Poems of Henryson & Dunbar*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1992.

Elliott, Charles. *Robert Henryson. Poems*. Oxford: OUP, 1966.

Fox, Denton, ed. *Robert Henryson. The Poems*. Oxford: OUP, 1987.

Friedman, John B. "Henryson's 'Testament of Cresseid' and the 'Judicio Solis in Conviviis Saturni' of Simon of Couvin." *Modern Philology* 83, no. 1 (August 1985): 12–21.

Godman, Peter. "Henryson's Masterpiece." *The Review of English Studies, New Series* 35, no. 139 (August 1984): 291–300.

Gray, Douglas. *Robert Henryson*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979.

Kindrick, Robert. *The Poems of Robert Henryson*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997.

Parr, Johnstone. "Cresseid's Leprosy Again." *Modern Language Notes* 60, no. 7 (November 1945): 487–91.

Sklute, Larry M. "Phoebus Descending: Rhetoric and Moral Vision in Henryson's Testament of Cresseid." *ELH* 44, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 189–204.

Spearing, A. C. "The Testament of Cresseid and the 'High Concise Style'." *Speculum* 37, no. 2 (April 1962): 208–25.

Stearns, Marshall W. "A Note on Robert Henryson's Allusions to Religion and Law." *Modern Language Notes* 59, no. 4 (Apr. 1944a): 257–64.

———. "Robert Henryson and the Leper Cresseid." *Modern Language Notes* 59, no. 4 (Apr. 1944b): 265–69.

———. “Robert Henryson and the Socio-Economic Scene.” *ELH* 10, no. 4 (December 1943): 285–93.

———. “The Planet Portraits of Robert Henryson.” PMLA 59, no. 4 (Dec. 1944c): 911–27.

Sweney, Matthew. “Robert Henryson’s Testament of Cresseid.” *Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis* 73 (2000): 123–28.

Wittig, Kurt. *The Scottish Tradition in Literature*. Wesport, Connecticut: Wesport University Press, 1972.

Wood, H. Harvey. Two Scots Chaucerians. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1967.

8.5. Other Readings

Armour, Peter. “Dante’s Contrappasso: Context and Text.” *Italian Studies* 55 (2000): 1–20.

Bassnett, Susan. “Transplanting the Seed: Poetry and Translation.” In *Constructing Cultures. Essays on Literary Translation,* edited by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, 57–75. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998.

Boitani, Piero. *Il genio di migliorare un’invenzione. Transizioni letterarie*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999.

Chambers, Frank M. *An Introduction to Old Provençal Versification.* Darby, PA: Diane Publishing, 1985.

Chaytor, Henry John. *The Troubadours*. Cambridge: CUP, 1912.

Cooper, Helen. “Translation and Adaptation.” In *A Concise Companion to Middle English Literature*, edited by Marilyn Corrie, 166–87. Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2009.

De Vivo, Franco. “Istanze prefattive e riscrittura nelle traduzioni anglosassoni d’epoca alfrediana.” In *The Garden of Crossing Paths: The Manipulation and Rewriting of Medieval Texts*, edited by Marina Buzzoni and Massimiliano Bampi, 283–97. Venezia:

Cafoscarina, 2007.

Even-Zohar, Itamar. *Polysystem Studies*. Poetics Today. Vol.11 N°1, Spring 1990. Durham: Duke University Press, 1990.

———. "Polysystem Theory (Revised)." In *Papers in Culture Research*. Tel Aviv: Unit of Culture Research, Tel Aviv University, 2010.

Firth Green, Richard. "Textual Production and Textual Communities." In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100-1500*, edited by Larry Scanlon, 25–36. Cambridge: CUP, 2009.

Genette, Gérard. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

Gaunt, Simon, and Sarah Kay, eds. *The Troubadours: An Introduction*. Cambridge: CUP, 1999.

Griffiths, Jane. "The Author." In *A Concise Companion to Middle English Literature*, edited by Marilyn Corrie, 120–41. Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2009.

Jauss, Hans Robert. "Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature." In *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982.

Kelly, Samantha. *The New Solomon. Robert of Naples (1309-1343) and Fourteenth-Century Kingship*. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2003.

Leclair, Yves, and Roy Rosenstein. *Chansons pour un amour lointain de Jaufre Rudel*. Gardonne: Éditions Fédérop, 2011.

Mackenzie, W. Mackay. *The Poems of William Dunbar*. Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1990.

Meli, Marcello. "Riscritture eddiche. Il caso della Atlakviða e degli Atlamál." In *The Garden of Crossing Paths: The Manipulation and Rewriting of Medieval Texts*, edited by Marina Buzzoni and Massimiliano Bampi, 273–82. Venezia: Cafoscarina, 2007.

Molinari, Maria Vittoria. “Converging Voices and Independent Language at the Origin of German Lyrical Poetry.” In *The Garden of Crossing Paths: The Manipulation and Rewriting of Medieval Texts*, edited by Marina Buzzoni and Massimiliano Bampi, 79–94. Venezia: Cafoscarina, 2007.

Nergaard, Siri. “Translation and Power: Recent Theoretical Updates.” In *The Garden of Crossing Paths: The Manipulation and Rewriting of Medieval Texts*, edited by Marina Buzzoni and Massimiliano Bampi, 33–43. Venezia: Cafoscarina, 2007.

Petrarca, Francesco. Lettere senili di Francesco Petrarca; volgarizzate e dichiarate con note. Edited by Giuseppe Fracassetti. Firenze: Le Monnier, 1869.

Saibene, Maria Grazia. “Rewriting and Intertextuality: Metamorphosis, Interference and Reinterpretation of Medieval Texts.” In *The Garden of Crossing Paths: The Manipulation and Rewriting of Medieval Texts*, edited by Marina Buzzoni and Massimiliano Bampi, 15–31. Venezia: Cafoscarina, 2007.

Scase, Wendy. “Re-inventing the Vernacular: Middle English Language and Its Literature.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100-1500*, edited by Larry Scanlon, 11–23. Cambridge: CUP, 2009.

Turville-Petre, Thorlac. *The Alliterative Revival*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1977.

Warren, Michelle R. “Translation.” In *Middle English*, edited by Paul Strohm, 51–67. Oxford: OUP, 2007.