

Writer or the Written? Remarks on Gender and Language in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

Paweł Wojtas
Lingwistyczna Szkoła Wyższa, Warsaw

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to situate Criseyde, the protagonist of Geoffrey Chaucer's medieval romance *Troilus and Criseyde*, in the medieval model of phallogentric society and establish to what extent she is dominated by men, and how far she can act autonomously by organizing independently her own female economy, given that she is caught up in the medieval gendered metaphysics of writing. The questions of male dominance will be subjected to both literal and allegorical representations of writing. Since this aspect of writing is deeply ingrained in the story through the prolific letter-production of the protagonists – which has been interrogated by Sarah Stanbury ("Womens letter's" 280), who goes as far as to hail the poem an "epistolary romance" – this article will seek to expose the ways in which writing serves as a powerful manipulative mechanism of patriarchal dominance in the medieval courtly love tradition. I will also elaborate on the aspects of narration testifying to deliberate alterations of the original story, namely Boccaccio's *Ill Fostrato*.

KEYWORDS: Chaucer, writing, femininity, phallogentrism, silence, the Other.

ABSTRAKT

Celem artykułu jest usytuowanie Kresydy, bohaterki średniowiecznego romansu rycerskiego Goeffrey'a Chaucer'a pt. *Troilus and Criseyde*, w modelu średniowiecznego

społeczeństwa fallocentrycznego. Po drugie, jest nim ustalenie w jaki sposób Kresyda jako kobieta jest zdominowana przez mężczyzn, a w jakim stopniu potrafi działać autonomicznie poprzez manifestowanie własnej kobiecości. Należy przy tym wziąć pod uwagę fakt, że bohaterka jest 'uwięziona' w średniowiecznej metafizyce pisania. Kwestie męskiej dominacji będą zestawione z dosłownymi jaki i alegorycznymi egzemplifikacjami pisania. Ponieważ czynność pisania jest wyraźnie obecna w dziele poprzez motywy epistolarne (Sarah Stanbury określiła nawet utwór jako 'romans epistolarny') ("Womens letter's" 280), artykuł ma na celu także ukazanie sposobów, za pomocą których pisanie pojmowane jako proces służy mechanizmom utrwalania struktur dominacji patriarchalnej w średniowiecznej tradycji 'courtly love'. Zostaną również omówione procesy narracyjne, uwydatniające elementy świadczące o alternatywnej reinterpretacji znanej historii Troilus and Criseyde przez Chaucera (wzorowanej na Ill Fostrato Boccaccia).

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Chaucer, pisanie, kobiecość, fallocentryzm, cisza, Inny/a.

"Her behavior and her voice constrained, she becomes the text itself, written on rather than writing her own destiny." (Pugh and Weisl 117)

Since Ferdinand de Saussure laid the foundations of the study of linguistics, the multi-layered quality of writing has become a focal point of structuralist and post-structuralist philosophy. In his *Doubling the Point* J.M. Coetzee underscores that writing has become irreducible to the function of unidirectional automaton of thought, but at the same time reciprocated a performative agency upon the writer him/herself: "Writing reveals to you what you wanted to say in the first place. In fact it sometimes constructs what you want or wanted to say... That is the sense in which one can say that writing writes us." (Coetzee 18). Accordingly, writing does not only reflect the thought, but also alters it in the active process of writing. Writing as an active event is essentially performative, yet simultaneously involves inextricably intertwined in the written text interpretative processes through reading, and this reciprocal relation of reading and writing, interpretation and translation, reception and response, render the author as much the writer of the text as him/herself being written by it.

Through the investigation of the concept of 'supplement' (introduced by Jean Jacques Rousseau) Jacques Derrida in his *Of Grammatology* pinpoints the destructive, parasitic authority of writing over speech and thought, identified by the philosopher as the view of writing within western metaphysics. 'Supplement' according to Derrida supplies the deficient original body, but at the same time supplants it, being thus complete in itself. Thus writing which is to supply the body of speech becomes in this instance its 'dangerous supplement' which substitutes speech. The very theory of the contagious qualities of writing lends validity to the analysis of *Troilus and Criseyde*, where writing assumes a profound significance in male-female relations as well as in the intralinguistic matters of gender. Just as thought is subject to distortion due to a rigid corset of language as a supplement (the written language in particular), gendered writing as a historically consolidated cultural phenomenon exposes implicit linguistic processes, resulting in (often involuntary) misogyny or misandry at the semantic level. Such unintentional misogyny consolidated in language on the speaker's or writer's part, serves as a supplement and supplants the author's original intention. In fact, the subject of the gendered metaphysics of writing traces back to the Middle Ages, which is observable in the literary convention of the courtly love tradition. With this in mind, the two suggested supplements of western metaphysics, that is gender and writing, will be inextricably the focal points of my investigation of feminine literacy of the Middle Ages.

Medieval philosophy and theology associated feminity with the notion of the 'carnal', therefore (with reference to language) the literal, and 'spiritual' Word was to belong, by the same token, to the realm of masculinity. Hence, the monopoly for creative writing as a performance of skill, wit, spirituality was inextricably bound up with masculinity, as opposed to feminine carnality and fickleness (Cox 9). Indeed, women were offered little opportunity to demonstrate their writing proficiency, since feminine 'carnal' letters had to be (as shown later in this paper) mistrusted by a dominant masculine judgment.

In accordance with the mainstream poststructuralist approach, the author (along with his authorial intention) is supposed to 'die'. Namely, in W.K. Wimsatt's *The Intentional Fallacy* and R. Barthes' *The Death of the Author* the theorists state that the author ought not to be treated as an undisputed source of uniform meaning of the text. However, does the author's gender die with him or her? With this in mind, Carolyn Dinshaw states: "Love, sex, gender and literary activity are intimately, metaphorically related in the Middle Ages. ... In fact, literary activity as it is represented in Chaucer is always, I believe, a gendered activity." (15) In fact, in Chaucer's *Troilus* a manifestly masculine account (an overwhelming male-characters' narration, which injures potential feminine autonomy)

ornamented with the festival of allegorical phallic representations, dangerously reduces its female protagonist Criseyde to a passive pawn on a male chessboard, played with, instead of playing her own game; ‘written on’, as opposed to ‘writing’ by herself.

Where in the poem does the author leave room for Criseyde ‘the writer’? Is her intellectual province merely limited to the image generated by men? If it be so, she is an artifact of phallogentric hegemony, never independent since looked at through a masculine prism and conceived of through her relationship to men. If otherwise, how can oppressed Criseyde verify her autonomy? Is it perhaps not what Criseyde does not speak that shouts loudest? Or is it conceivably the silence of the narrator, gamely washing his hands of textual authority and creativity that conveys more than the text attempts to?

And of his song naught only the sentence, As writ myn auctor called Lollius, but plainly, save oure tonges difference ... (1.395-96).

I make bold to give not only the gist of his song (as my author called Lollius, writes), but in full, save for the difference in our languages.” (9-10).

Finally, how can silence recuperate the protagonist from the stigma of ‘the written’? Having elaborated on the questions posited, the ensuing assumptions will be to establish not only the position of women, but first and foremost to expose the ways language and writing serve to ascertain the inferiority of women in the phallogentric medieval culture.

However, before the stated problems are scrutinized, a short synopsis of the long poem in question should be rendered as a backdrop for the arguments as well as to assure maximum readability.

The long poem’s main plot revolves around the Siege of Troy. Criseyde, the daughter of Calchas who betrayed the Trojans to support the Greeks, stays in Troy unaided and vulnerable. She suddenly becomes an object of Troilus’ (a young Trojan warrior) desire, who manages to win Criseyde’s favours thanks to the help of her uncle Pandarus. Criseyde’s father anticipating the destruction of Troy organizes an exchange of prisoners to save his daughter and take her away from Troy. Criseyde, assures Troilus she would return shortly, yet once she realizes the return is impossible, she yields to the courtships of Diomedes betraying Troilus. When Troilus finds a brooch, which he presented Criseyde back in Troy, pinned to Diomedes’ armour he becomes heartbroken and attempts to take revenge on him, yet is killed by Achilles. The last scene depicts Troilus’ ascension during which he resignedly comments on the futility of life. Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*

was modelled on Boccaccio's *Ill Fostrato* and later rewritten by Shakespeare in his verse drama *Troilus and Cressida*. Chaucer's version is apparently the least misogynistic, and the most determined to recuperate the reputedly 'fickle' female protagonist.

The Manipulative Writing

Manifestly, writing a letter becomes the first nexus in the chain of Pandarus' subterfuge, aimed at persuading Criseyde to reciprocate Troilus' desire, leading to the lovers' sexual consummation:

Towchyng thi lettre, thou art wys ynough:
I woot thow nyht it dygneliche endite,
As make it with thise argumentes tough;
Ne scryvenyssh or craftyly thou it write;
Biblotte it with thi teris ek a lite;
And if thow write a goodly word al softe,
Though it be good, reherce it not to ofte. (2. 1023-2)

Regarding your letter – you're smart enough. I know you won't write it with haughty airs, showing off, or being argumentative; and nor should you write it like some secretary, or artfully. Blot it with your tears a bit, too! And if you write some fine and very tender word, even if it's good, don't repeat it too often! (42)

Letter writing appears to assume a profound significance in Pandarus' conspiratorial stratagem. The contriver's agency in the quoted fragment is not merely limited to encouraging Troilus to write the letter to Criseyde, but he also audaciously imposes a scrupulous stylistic technique of letter writing upon Troilus. The fact that Troilus is encouraged to simplify the letter and adjust its eloquence to a female reader (which is implicitly misogynistic) evinces a substantial degree of male manipulation. The letter is expected to be not merely a means of communication between the correspondents, but an executor of Pandarus' calculated stratagem.

Furthermore, fetishizing the letter by way of a medieval custom of tear blotting, emphasizes the manipulative deliberation of Pandarus, which entails Criseyde's invitation to take pity on Troilus. In the medieval courtly love tradition the custom of a woman taking pity on a man in heterosexual relations does not merely function as a gesture

of sympathy, but is to alleviate the pain of the person in love, which is commensurate with reciprocating sexual desire or love. Therefore, the deliberate structural scheming of the letter testifies to manipulative inclinations of the writers, whose contrivance inevitably pushes Criseyde into the whirlwind of phallogentric domination.

Writing becomes an insignia of male authority, and Criseyde is expected to succumb to the masculine primacy. At this point, through the depreciation of the female reader, Pandarus commits his first blunder. The deliberate simplification of the letter combined with his earlier misogynistic remark: “Forthi hire wit to serven wol I fonde” (2.273) [So I’ll try and adapt what I say to her intelligence.] (28) – impudently thrust Criseyde into the medieval stereotypical mould of female intellectual inferiority to men.

The ‘carnalization’ of Troilus’ feeling, realized through the letter writing, is superficially to communicate the affection of the writer, but in effect the undertaking harbingers a tacit responsibility of reciprocity imposed on Criseyde, who is manifestly deterred by the plotters’ conduct:

Gan for to change, and seyde, ‘Scrit ne bille,
For love of God, that toucheth swich matere,
Ne bryng me noon; and also, uncle deere,
To myn estat have more reward, I preye,
Than to his lust! What sholde I more seye? (2. 1131-34)
Refuse it naught’, quod he, and hente hire faste,
And in hire bosom the lettre down he thraste. (2. 1154-55)

For the love of God, don’t bring me any letter or anything in writing that relates to such matter! And also, dear uncle, I beg you, do have more regard to my position than to his pleasure! What more should I say?

...don’t refuse it-! And [Pandarus] caught hold of her firmly and thrust the letter down in her bosom... (44)

Criseyde’s refusal to read the letter, followed by her subsequent refusal to answer it in writing: “For trewely I nyl no lettre write.” (2. 1161) [I won’t write any letter] (44) proclaims that she does not necessarily wish to avoid speaking to Troilus as such, she does, however, evade *written* dialogue for some reason. Pandarus and Criseyde’s conversation testifies to their mutual awareness of the pertinence of writing, as the more persistently Criseyde refuses to answer the letter, the more coercive Pandarus grows. As it happens,

the oppressor becomes as impertinent in his urging as to resort to thrusting the letter into Criseyde's bosom.

Criseyde, as a woman, a widow, the daughter of a traitor, is entirely aware of her susceptibility to social inhibitions as well as public condemnation. Yet, it may at first appear perplexing that writing causes such an acute anxiety for Criseyde. Yet, it is not writing *per se*, about which she is agitated, since she affirms her literacy by declaring: "Ye, for I kan so writen." (2. 1205), as particularly letter-writing – "And ek I noot what I sholde to hym seye." (2. 1206). [Well, yes I could write ... and yet I don't know what I should say to him.'] (45).

Socially constrained as a woman, she is accordingly inhibited as a writer, which the narrator signals by emblematically providing a third person synopsis of Criseyde's letter to Troilus, as opposed to a reliable first person account:

[...] but holden hym in honde
 She nolde nought, ne make hireselven bonde
 In love; but as his suster, hym to plese,
 She wolde ay fayn to doon his herte an ese. (2. 1222-25)

She thanked him for all his good intentions towards her, but she would not play him along with false promises, nor make herself a slave to love; but, to please him she would gladly comfort him as sister. (46)

The letter exposes a flagrant incongruity between male and female writing in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Whereas the male protagonists perform strategic, hence manipulative, writing, the writing of Criseyde defensively sketches her feminine milieu. Compromise is a requisite for her to keep a safe distance from phallic intrusion, and the infringement on her private fortress coerces Criseyde to negotiate with the oppressors (Stanbury, "Womens Letter's" 279). The negotiation is therefore the only possible means to defer the inevitable infringement of the female protagonist's private enclave by the manipulators. As a literate person she is reluctant to write back to Troilus not because of her inability to write letters as such, but because she senses the utter futility of negotiating with its reader. Therefore, as a writer she is careful not to undermine masculine authority on the one hand, and let her female territory become occupied by intruders on the other. Accordingly, in order not to get entangled in the phallogentric *cul-de-sac*, Criseyde has to take up the battle she has got involuntarily caught up in: "It nedeth me ful sleighly for to pleie." (2. 462) [I need to play a very sly game] (31).

Criseyde is undoubtedly an exceedingly vigilant reader of Pandarus' scheme. Therefore, if phallic imposition, expressed in Troilus' asking for pity as well as fetishistic ornamentations of his letter, testify to the rhetorical aspirations of masculine writing, feminine passivity produces successful female *readers*. Criseyde's potential does not lie in riposte, but in the ability to defend against, negotiate, understand, *read* men; that is to say, her attack is realized in defense.

Troilus the Doubter

Troilus as a reader, on the other hand, displays a glaring ignorance and distrust of female letters. Criseyde's written assertions will always be either mistrusted or misinterpreted:

So thorough this lettre which that she hym sente
Encrescen gan desir, of which he brente. (2.1336-37)

But in hire lettre made she swich festes,
That wonder was, and swerth she loveth hym best,
Of which he fond but botmeles bihestes. (5. 1429-1431)

This Troilus this letter thoughte al strangue. (5. 1632)

So this letter that she sent him served to increase the desire that was burning him. (48)

But in her letter she paid such compliments that it was most surprising, and swore she loved him best – in which he found only groundless promises. (146)

Troilus thought this letter very distant. (149)

Troilus proves to be an emblematic 'male' reader, as his interpretation of female writing is adjusted to his narcissistic ambitions. The feminine *text* is therefore subjugated to 'meaning' (attributed in the Middle Ages to masculinity), which offers no opportunity for dialogue, due to its inherent solipsism (Dinshaw 33). Therefore, on account of his inability to read like a woman, Troilus egotistically fits Criseyde's writing into the stencil of his own male comprehension. His interpretation of Criseyde's letters is by no means objective and unbiased, since he reads only whatever he wants to read. Criseyde's sisterly

consolation: “[B]ut as his suster, hym to plese” erroneously evokes an insatiable “desir”, whereas on further occasions Criseyde’s assurances of faithfulness are received as false promises.

Criseyde has no license to write like a man. Her aspiration to produce persuasive, rhetorical writing is likely to become rapidly depreciated by Troilus’ solipsistic criticism. Criseyde, however, appears to be aware of masculine socially constructed reading ‘autism’ as well as distortions of meaning brought about by (written) language which is registered in her concluding statement:

I darn at, ther I am, wel letters make,
Ne nevere yet ne koude I wel endite.
Ek gret effect men write in place lite;
Th’entente is al, and nat the lettres space.” (5. 1627-30)

I dare not write letters where I am, and I have never been good at putting things in writing. And things of great consequence are written in few words – the intention in everything, and not the length of the letter. (149)

Just as Criseyde mistrusts writing, which distorts pure intention, Troilus is reluctant to welcome Criseyde’s “entente”, which becomes buried in the solipsistic masculine meaning, and thus strips Troilus of the potential to read like woman.

Dinshaw, however, observes that Troilus to some extent actually reads like a woman to some extent on account of his recognition of the singularity of woman as the *Other* (30). Yet, the very acknowledgement of feminine *otherness* juxtaposed with his tacit approval of social inequality, realized in his assent to condone male patriarchy, implies that Troilus might in fact work part-time as a reader-like-woman, yet his full-time employment is inherently secured by masculine reading inclinations.

Hermetic Textuality

Furthermore, *Troilus and Criseyde* displays a complex stratification of writing, which signals inescapability of the female protagonist from textual slavery. Not only is she ‘written’ into her dependence upon male protectorate, but she also becomes a diagram of her own inevitable destiny; as if to say, she “struggles to stand outside her own text” (Evans 95). Although the reader is notified in advance about the outcome of the story by the

narrator (in Book 1), it is bewildering that Criseyde herself evinces the flashes of predictability of her fate:

Alas, of me, unto the worldes ende,
Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
No good word... (5. 1058-60)

Alas, no good word shall either be written or sung about me until the end of the world... (139)

Chaucer therefore allows a slight degree of irony by making Criseyde conversant with her destiny. In truth, the aspect of Criseyde's inevitable destiny, which insistently promises her eventual infidelity, is intermittently signaled within the plot. The reader witnesses a chain of metaleptic pointers, realized in the premonitions or dreams of the characters, gradually translating Criseyde into the fate that is to come to fruition:

And as she slep, anonright tho hire mettre
How that an eagle, fethered whit as bon,
Under hire brest his longe clawes sette,
And out hire herte he rente, and that anon,
And dide his herte into hire brest to gon –
Of which she nought agroos, ne nothing
smerte. (2. 925 – 31)

And as soon as she slept, she dreamed that an eagle, with feathers as white as bone, fixed his long claws under her breast and suddenly tore out her heart, and put his own into her breast – at which she was neither frightened nor felt any pain... (40)

Criseyde's dream is pivotal because it induces her to reciprocate Troilus' love. Yet a crucial question arises: does the dream serve as another mark of inevitable destiny, or is it merely an unconscious stimulus that compels her to love Troilus? The former should corroborate the postulate that Criseyde literally subsists as a written text stripped of authorial autonomy; the text which, since incapable of writing itself, becomes itself written. Otherwise, it is Criseyde who writes her destiny, and who craftily liberalizes her economy of choice. This economy is, however, insistently hindered by both carnal and metalinguistic writing which evinces itself as "male fantasies at both the private and the public level." (Margherita 262).

The dream cannot elude its phallic repercussions, whose image acts as a palpable allegory of sexual harassment. Seemingly, since assailed, she becomes inscribed in her vulnerability and subjection to phallic tyranny, yet paradoxically it is also herself who writes at the same time. Indeed, the urge to manage her own private space seems to be a priority for Criseyde, as further on in the poem she corroborates her claustrophilic propensity by shutting herself off in a chamber from Pandarus's invigilation in order to read Troilus' letter: "And streght into hire chamber gan she gon; ... Ful pryvely this lettre for to rede." (2. 1173, 1176) (And went straight to her own room ... to read this letter very privately) (45). Male intrusion develops in the protagonist an exigency to organize her own hermetic dominion immune to phallic imposition. The eagle does perform grotesque physical abuse, yet due to the fact that "she nought agroos, ne nothing smerte", Criseyde gives permission for the incursion. Therefore, the successful management of the textuality she has been inscribed in comprises her natural defense mechanism, that is to say, the ability to write her own text as opposed to it being written.

The most apparent endeavor to translate Criseyde into 'written word' is contained in Cassandra's prophecy auguring Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus:

This Diomedes hire herte hath, and she his –
Weep if thou wilt, or lef, for out of doute,
This Diomedes is inne, and thou art oute. (5. 1517-19)

Diomedes has her heart, and she his. Weep if you will, or leave off, for, without a doubt, this Diomedes's in, and you are out! (147)

By invoking the story of Thebes, Cassandra lends verisimilitude to her prophecy. The invocation, as a hint of Criseyde's future misdemeanor, enslaves Criseyde in the story both symbolically and literally. Functioning as the potential fulfillment of the actual written story, Criseyde becomes already sold to the written, which inevitably defies the singularity of the protagonist. With regard to the latter, Derek Attridge investigates in depth the notion of 'singularity', which evinces itself as difference from other subjects, and can be stipulated only through idiosyncratic reception and production, as opposed to general, culturally predetermined norms (63).

It cannot be univocally stated whether Criseyde's lot is indeed sold in advance to destiny, or if it is conditional on a logical sequence of cause and effect. Like the dream haunting Criseyde, which eventually influences her resolution to love Troilus, Cassandra's prophecy does not fulfill itself without human intervention. According to Joseph

Graydon, Criseyde does not remain uninformed about Cassandra's knowledge of the affair (168). Criseyde's obsessive self-consciousness, intertwined with the fear of "wicked speche" (5.1610) (wicked talk) (149) and social censure, causes her to revile Troilus' indiscretion concerning the matter which could potentially result in the exposure of the affair and thus put her reputation in jeopardy. This is the apprehension of social condemnation which might contribute to prevent sociophobic Criseyde from returning to Troy. This theory would undoubtedly free Criseyde from the manacles of dependency on the inevitable destiny and, as suggested above, of the written word.

Incorporeal Criseyde

Criseyde becomes successively relegated to the realization of others' imagination throughout the poem:

Gan for to like hire mevyng and hire chere,
Which somdel deignous was, for she let falle
Hire look a lite aside in swich manere,
Ascaunces, 'What, may I nat stonden here?'
And after that hir lokyng gan she lighte,
That nevere thoughte hym seen so good a syghte. (1.291-94)

Troilus was simply wonderfully well pleased with the way she moved with her manner, which was somehow haughty, for she let fall a sidelong glance, as if to say: 'What! May I not stand here?' After that her look brightened, so that it seemed to him he had never seen so fine a sight. (8)

Significantly, the assertive remark: "[M]ay I nat stonden here?" does not belong to Criseyde's utterance, but comprises a third person account of Troilus's fancy. The ambiguous 'ascaunces'(as if to say) merely indicates Troilus' imaginary projection of the occurrence, rather than its actual realization, as well as renders the exclamation a made-up, narcissistically conditioned male interpretation of 'deignous mevyng' (Stanbury, "The Lover's Gaze" 231).

The scarcity of Criseyde's first person accounts in the poem turns her into a *ghost up to a point*, never fully embodied since breathing by means of the respirator of others' imagination rather than by the lungs of individual singular expression. Not without reason

was the expression: 'up to a point' italicized, since Criseyde's corporal presence in the text cannot be relinquished. Nor should the epithet 'ghost' be conceived of merely metaphorically, as it remains astounding how much is done to conceal Criseyde's corporeality in the vision of male protagonists.

Jacques Lacan, for instance, affirms that woman in the courtly love tradition does not exist at all, in view of the fact that female *raison d'être* is apprehended in the imaginary narcissistic projection of men (145). Therefore, the singularity of woman from the masculine perspective comes to be discerned only when female corporeality is renounced for allegory. Only woman as logos can epitomize the desirable *objet petit a* (which is Lacan's neologism introduced in his psychoanalytic theory), that is the cause of desire, because carnality strips woman (as the *Other*) of her inaccessibility. A ready access to the *Other* would render it no longer inaccessible; no longer desirable; no longer *other*.

With this in mind, Criseyde becomes a figment of Troilus's imagination, anamorphically adjusted to masculine narcissistic fancy, and thus hyperbolized to the sublime:

Thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde
In which he saugh al holly hire figure,
And that he we koude in his herte fynde,
It was to hym a right good aventure
To love swich oon, (1. 365-9)

So he began to make a mirror of his mind, in which he saw her person completely. He could certainly find it in his heart to grant that it was a great good fortune to love such a good one... (9)

Troilus as the reader of Criseyde's 'figure' perceives her the way he wishes her to be, not necessarily the way she actually is. The passage displays conspicuous dynamics of visual projection. Having been 'photographed' by Troilus's gaze, her image is stored in the 'mirour of his mynde', where it lingers independent of the burden of carnality, vulnerable to mnemonic plasticity. This time it is memory that gives vent to the masculine urge to tame feminine instability, which constitutes a significant infringement on female autonomy. Similarly, Stanbury ("The Lover's Gaze") elaborates on medieval optical theory and claims the human eye fulfills both a receptive and performative function, hence the use of optical nomenclature "eyebeam", "visual rays" or "projection".

Inscribed in Troilus's memory, Criseyde's image becomes 'processed' to fit his subjective inclinations. Again, imprisoned in the claustrophobic memory of Troilus, Criseyde

falls victim to the yoke of masculine manipulation. Hence, she is no longer herself, but the *Other* which Troilus expects her to be. Troilus yearns to obtain the *Other* by a process of the renunciation of the carnal and investment in the spiritual. Body as the accessible carnal self remains to be no longer attractive, therefore memory turns out to be a convenient laboratory to fathom the unfathomable, to create the image of the object of desire as it *ought to be*, in order to meet the standards of the sublime *Other*.

Devil's Advocate

Whilst reading the poem, the reader might become justifiably perplexed by two somehow ethically contradicting factors: firstly, Criseyde will betray Troilus, secondly, the narrator defends Criseyde nonetheless. The singularity of the poem partly consists in the fact that the narrator plays devil's advocate by trying to rehabilitate Criseyde and perhaps protect her from the "wikked speche" (neither Boccaccio's nor Shakespeare's counterparts of the story attempt to defend Criseyde to the same extent). The narrator apparently sets himself a much more ambitious goal than to merely faithfully recount the story. By inviting numerous masculine voices to speak against Criseyde, the text oozes with the peculiar stylistic *noise* of a masculine account, which the female protagonist does not attempt to shout in the slightest – just the opposite. In other words, the author conserves the energy of silence to implicitly advocate Criseyde.

In effect, the silence – that is the rhetoric of the 'unwritten' – is deployed in the poem as a narrative strategy. Roland Barthes ("The Pleasure"), for instance, emphasizes that the pleasure of reading a text lies not only in what actually is written but also in what is omitted, left unwritten. Criseyde's declaration of her epistolary insufficiency provides just such an instance:

... and how that ye requeren me
To come ayeyn, which yet ne may nat be;
But whi, lest that this lettre founden were,
No mencioum ne make I now, for feere. (5. 1600-03)

...and how you request me to come back again, which as yet cannot be. But, out of fear,
I make no mention now as to why, in case this letter were discovered. (149)

Criseyde does not place confidence in the linguistic proficiency of the letter which she produces. Indeed, she encourages the reader of her letter to read between the lines, as opposed to trust the carnal writing. But why?

The unrelenting male impositions, intertwined with the fear of social censure, testify to the protagonists' utter alienation and justify her numerous appeals for protection, which could seem to verge on obsession. To be perceived through the lens of men is to become depicted, written by them. Criseyde is more intelligent than her manipulators may think she is. She is perfectly aware of masculine manipulation and her dependence on men; thus her sense of inferiority provokes apprehension over losing her thus far unblemished social status. Not being 'entitled' by the phallogocentric society to write, to have voice, her power is realized through silence, which she meticulously appropriates as an excellent writer, according to Stanbury even more eloquent than the male protagonists ("Women's Letters" 280).

The process of writing entails the responsibility of the writer for the written. Therefore, Criseyde forcibly informs Troilus that her silence stems from a fear of a potential interception of the letter. In consequence, her vulnerability to masculine supremacy makes Criseyde an extremely vigilant writer, scrupulously weighing every word in order to fit it to male narcissistic expectations. This also prompts Criseyde's writing flexibility, and as a result, her rhetoric is reshaped and tailored to each male protagonist, vigilantly getting to grips with Troilus's and Pandarus's distinct linguistic idioms (Dinshaw 58). At the same time, Criseyde senses futility to sell her feminine rhetoric to male comprehension, reflected in her unsuccessful attempts at written dialogue with Troilus. She is totally conscious of the fact that her epistolary efforts will be rewritten in the "mirour of [Troilus'] mynde" anyway. Therefore she renounces her prerogative of writing: "I dar nat ... letters make"- and redirects the focus from carnal to metatextual stratum of writing: to "entente". In conclusion, the purpose of this article has been to confirm that Criseyde is not only, as Pugh and Weisl brilliantly put it, "written on rather than writing her own destiny", but also the one who actually writes by herself. The complexity of Criseyde, however, consists in the fact that she will never be fully realized as a successful writer, as she is already written in the dependency on male hegemony, which visibly casts a light on the overall position of women as writers in medieval culture. Indeed, the male reader, in medieval terms, mistrusts feminine instability of writing; the instability which masculine rigour has to bridle in order to discover solipsistically conditioned *objet petit a* of woman as the *Other*. The poem displays the narrator's substantial investment in Criseyde. E.T. Donaldson (in Dinshaw 37), for instance, argues that she is premeditated

to arouse the passion of a male reader. However, Criseyde will betray Troilus! Consequently, female textual as well as literal fickleness is a facet which a male reader could not condone in medieval terms. Therefore, the Criseyde who the male reader *must* love becomes paradoxically the Criseyde he *must* detest.

The narrator's advocacy of Criseyde, however, is by no means confined to the milieu of the *carnal*, but subtly transcends it, and thus expands the economy of writing as silence. The poem visibly escapes univocal determination of the female character, by casting a glow of mystique, fathomlessness, enigma, and ambiguity around her, which inspire the reader to affirm the singularity of Criseyde and assume the exceptionally sensitive disposition towards female social inadequacy of Chaucer himself. The singularity recuperates woman from the straitjacket of the letter; this singularity proclaims Criseyde's potential as a writer; not only as a proficient writer in her own right (whom she undeniably is) but most significantly as the writer of the 'unwritten'.

Works Cited

Primary Texts

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Windeat, B. London: Penguin, 2003

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Troilus and Criseyde*, trans. Windeat, B. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Secondary Texts

Attridge, Derek. *The Singularity of Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

Barthes, Roland. *The Death of the Author*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

—. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Miller, R. New York: Noonday, 1975.

Beardsley, Monroe and William K. Wimsatt. *The Intentional Fallacy*. Joseph Margolis, ed., *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, 3rd ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987.

Coetzee, J.M. *Doubling the Point. Essays and Interviews*. Ed. David Attwell. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Cox, Catherine. *Gender and Language in Chaucer*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1967.

- Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.
- Evans, Ruth. "Memory's History and the History of Criseyde: Chaucer's Troilus" *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 47 (2003): 87-99.
- Graydon, Joseph. "Defense of Criseyde." *PMLA* 44 (1929): 141-177.
- Lacan, Jacques. "Courtly Love as Anamorphosis". *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter, New York and London: Routledge, 1992.
- Margherita, Gayle. "Historicity, Feminity, and Chaucer's Troilus." *Exemplaria* 6. (1994): 243-270.
- Pugh, Tison and Angela Jane Weisl. "Chaucer and Gender Theory." *Approaches to Teaching Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde and the Shorter Poems*. Ed. Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl. New York: The Modern Language Association of America. (2007): 117-121.
- Stanbury, Sarah. "The Lover's Gaze in Troilus and Criseyde." *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde: Essays in Criticism*. Ed. R.A. Shoaf. NY: Binghamton, 1992.
- . "Women's Letters and Private Space in Chaucer." *Exemplaria* 6 (1994): 271-286.