"For a Letter Does Not Blush": The Signification of Troilus's Letters in *Troilus and Criseyde*[*]

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Ⅰ. What the Letter Can Do

The physical distance or separation that exists between correspondents is the ontological condition of letter-writing. Letters, as A .C. Spearing rightly summarizes, "normally exist only because of the absence from each other of the sender and the recipient"(211). This so-called "epistolary situation"(Schneider 28, Constable 13-14, Jagodzinski 87) seems to have been perceived and exploited distinctly, depending upon who are involved in the epistolary communication, what emotional and material circumstances they find themselves, and with what intentions they

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communicate. If the letter is composed to reassure and solidify affection, trust, and intimacy between friends, family members, or lovers, then the representative capacity of the epistle as a substitute for the absent body is prone to be assertively substantiated by way of various devices to reduce the distance, albeit imaginatively and scriptively. It is generally true to say that St. Ambrose's early medieval defining of letter-writing as "a seeming likeness of the other's presence"[1]and John of Salisbury's much later conceptualization of the letter as "*absentium dicta sine voce*"[2] reflect the long-lasting western belief of writing as a representation of the speech of remote correspondents. But it may be equally rational to contend that these medieval masters place their observations in a particular epistolary coordinate, where the correspondents intend to demonstrate the letter as a "testimony" to affection (Schneider 126) and therefore as "a closer of distance"(Jagodzinski 180, n. 5). The immediate and affective language of "orality and physicality" that letter-writers frequently and meticulously inscribe in their letters, in the references of such corporeal elements as voice, face, lips, hands, tears and of such intimate gestures as kissing, touching, embracing, etc., may best illustrate the epistolary devices to materialize affection, intimacy, and presence on parchment or paper (Schneider 16 & 118-19).[3]

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1) This phrase is taken from Ambrose's Epistle 66 addressed to Romulus: "There is no doubt that letter-writing was devised that the absent may converse with those far away, and his improves in service and in form when many pleasant words are exchanged …for then truly there is conveyed to those far removed in the body *a seeming likeness of the other's presence*"(484: italics mine).

2) "Letters …speak voicelessly the utterances of the absent"(Spearing 211).

3) The humanist Erasmus is known for having meticulously engaged bodily and affective rhetoric in his letters. One of the examples can be taken from his letter to Servatius: "as I often read it, which I do almost hourly, I think I am listening to the *sweet tones* of my Servatius' *voice* and *gazing* at his most friendly *face*. Since we are seldom permitted to talk face to face, your letter is my consolation; it brings me back to you when I am absent, and joins me with my friend though he be away"(Schneider 118: italics mine).

Not all letter-writers may wish to annul the distance that exists between themselves and their recipients, though. They rather need the very separation as an essential condition of writing letters. When such undesirable affects as anger, shame, and bashfulness, are the issue, and, as a result, if the writer wants to avoid expressing them to his addressee face to face, letters can be conveniently hired as what Gary Schneider calls "emotional pressure valves" (133) or "social and emotional buffer[s]"(134), through which the writer can ease and negotiate the tension built up between his emotional pressures and the appropriate courtesies expected of him. This is possible because, as Cicero wittily asserts, "a letter does not blush."[4] When courtship is concerned in particular, where such uncomfortable emotions as "shame and modesty" become frequently at issue, the letter may act as "a paper deput[y] for love"(Schneider 136), because it will save the suitor-writer from unfolding his emotional weaknesses in real contact with the lady and thus help to maintain his composure and civility.

As German socialist Georg Simmel points out, as he explicates the different semiotics operating in the oral and written communications, people "in physical proximity give each other more than the mere content of their words"(353). It is because, when individuals are present and thus oral communication is made possible, "each of them *sees* the other, is immersed in the unverbalizable sphere of his mood, [and] feels a thousand nuances in the tone and rhythm of his utterances"(Simmel 353: italics original). And, as a consequence, "the logical or the intended content of his words gains an enrichment and modification for which the letter offers only

4) In his letter to a Lucceius, Cicero says that: "Often, when I have attempted to discuss this topic with you face to face, I have been deterred by a sort of almost boorish bashfulness; but now that I am away from you, I shall bring it all out with greater boldness; *for a letter does not blush*" (Schneider 134: italics mine).

very poor analogies"(Simmel 353). Also, principally because of these para–linguistic signs that are inherently concomitant with oral communication and more often than not emasculate the speaker's efforts to keep things in secrecy, it is extremely hard not to disclose the speaker's secrets in the arena of speech. However, different stories wait in unfolding themselves when it comes to the letter. At least in principle, as Simmel further notes, the letter gives out "only the pure, objective content of [the writer's] momentary ideational life, while being silent concerning what one is unable, or does not wish, to say"(353). For this reason, "the letter is clearer than speech where the secret of the other is *not* the issue," but when the secret is at stake, the letter becomes "more ambiguous" than the spoken communication, (Simmel 355: italics original). Taken together, it will be expedient for one to communicate through the letter in the case where face to face contact is burdensome and thus better to be avoided. Nevertheless, with this said, I should not mean to imply that the letter would never leak what the writer may want to hold back from their correspondents. Indeed, as the final letters of Troilus and Criseyde do in *Troilus and Criseyde* illustrate (V.1317–1421 & 1590–1631)[5], letters more often than not betray the writers' emotional and material realities, perhaps even without the writers being conscious of doing so.

When the letter is deployed as an affective buffer or as a concealer of secrets, the distance located between writer and recipient is "self–consciously exploited," rather than being scriptively and imaginatively "bridged," as Schneider well summarizes. This is what the male and female characters of Geoffrey Chaucer's psychological story *Troilus and Criseyde* commonly do with their letters. Chaucer's re–rendering of an Italian poem *Il Filostrato*, written by Giovannie Boccaccio in the late 1330s (Barney 471) and having the Trojan War as

5) All the references to *Troilus and Criseyde* are from the *Riverside Chaucer* edition.

the backdrop, *Troilus and Criseyde* narrates itself around the amatory inception, advance, and dissolution that take place between Troilus, son of King Priam of Troy, and Criseyde, who is a young and beautiful noble widow. The second and the fifth books of *Troilus* register bodies of accounts where Troilus and Criseyde communicate with each other through letters. The characters' letters certainly illuminate their distinct manners of exploiting the separation between them, depending upon their different exigencies. If the affects of fear, shame, and timidity are the chronic problem for Troilus as a new lover to have to cope with, shrouding her real emotions, thoughts, and determinations in ambiguity or mystery seems to be what Criseyde is always up to. Criseyde's letters remain altogether reactionary, nebulous, and elusive in the language and the ethos, wherein no voluntary or serious gesture to lessen the distance between her body and the absent Troilus is evidenced. While they are whiney through and through, Troilus's letters nevertheless suggest some noticeable changes in light of envisioning the spatial lacuna. While in his first letter he needs the physical separation as a sort of emotional ballast to ease his affective insecurities, he is desperate in attempts to close the distance between his body and the remotely relocated Criseyde in his last letters. Leaving Criseyde's letters for a separate discussion,[6] this paper will examine the accounts where Troilus's letters are presented in summary and verbatim. The focus will be placed upon how the male character in his letters manages to negotiate the epistolary situation. At the heart of this examination lie the questions of what would make him deploy his particular epistolary language and gestures and of how effectively the emotions and intentions of the letter-writer may be textualized in the letter.

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6) In fact, I have been working on an essay about the letters of Criseyde, as a sort of companion essay to this one, with the title of "Th'entente is al, and not the letters make": The "Slyding" Criseyde and Her Letters in *Troilus and Criseyde*."

Ⅱ. The Shameful Troilus and His First Letter

In "To the Knowing Reader touching Familiar Letters" prefacing his *Epistolae Ho-Elianæ*, James Howell[7] explains what the letter can do on behalf of a "bashful" lover:

> The bashful Lover, when his stammering Lips
> Falter, and fear some unadvised Slips,
> May boldly court his Mistress with the Quill,
> And his hot Passions to her Breast instill:
> The *Pen* can furrow a fond Female's Heart,
> And pierce it more than *Cupid's* Dart. (15: italics original)[8]

The crux of this passage may be that even a shy, timid lover can boldly court his lady when he tries with letters because his "Quill" or "Pen" should be in cooperation as it keeps silence about what he does not wish to expose to the mistress, illustrated as stammers, slips, and fear. What this passage also conveys is the convictions that the affects like "hot Passions" can be epistolized, and that the textualized emotions can obtain the heart of the woman whom he desires to obtain. Certainly, this is the same reason why the otherwise hopeless and helpless Troilus raises his body and takes pains to write letters, and this is also what he, as well as Pandarus who is Troilus's schemer and spokesman, seems to believe, at

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7) A Welsh-born royalist writer, diplomat, private secretary, and later Clerk of the King's Privy Council, James Howell wrote *Epistolae Ho-Elianæ* (the "letters of Howell") in four volumes that were issued between 1645 and 1655. A series of "familiar letters," the *Epistolae* was written to a diverse body of his friends and associates on a wide variety of topics, including travel, politics, history, philosophy, and aesthetics. Most of the entries are short letters, but some of them are more like essays ("James Howell's *Epistolae Ho-Elianæ*")

8) I owe my initiation into this source to Gary Schneider (136).

least when he composes his first love letters to Criseyde.

When he first appears in the poem, Troilus is presented as "fierce and proud"(I. 225), as a "peacock"(I. 210) who is completely inexperienced and indifferent to amatory business and whose action and language seems to be filled with confidence and control. Pacing up and down the temple of Pallas and leading a pack of his young knights(I.183-5), he smugly smiles away(I.194), brandishes critical remarks towards men who show interest in women and love(I.195-203), and indulges in his own scornful eloquence —"Lo, is this not wislyy spoken?"(I.205). However, this is perhaps the first and last moment in the poem where readers may encounter Troilus's sociality, mobility, and self-possession. For he is dramatically transformed into a man of solitude, passivity, and timidity the moment his eyes spot Criseyde in the crowd(I.271-74) and his heart is "though-shotten and through darted" with "her look"(I.47). In lieu of confidence and assertion, as Benson points out, his language starts being deeply permeated with questions and confusion("If no love is, O God, what feel I so? / And if love is, what thing and which is he?," I.400-1), and oxymorons("O quicke death, O Sweete harm so quainte," l.411; "my swete fo," I.874) (99). Physically, he gets inert and immobile. In Books 1 and 2, as Marzec keenly notes(68), Troilus is observed to be chronically solitary and "supine," confining himself in chamber and "alone abedde … in a traunce / Bitwixen hope and derk disesperaunce"(II.1305-7). This inclination of isolation and inactivity continues to be watched in later books. Psychologically, he feels so incapable and insecure that he grows suicidal: "I were aryved in the port /Of deth, to which my sorwe wol me lede"(1.526-27). Such a desperate impulse from Troilus is not unexpected, considering that he has been so fearful that he cannot dare to confess his love(" 'Allas, of al my wo the welle / Thanne is my swete for called Criseyde!' /And wel neigh with the word for feere he deide," I.873-75), and also considering that he

has dreaded the thought of Criseyde's cold responses to him and his love(I.1019-21, II.1046-49, III.92-94, III.706-7). Indeed, when he finally meets Criseyde face to face for the first time, it turns out that his fear or dread imbricated with shame and bashfulness overtakes him so much that he bumbles his words and cannot speak intelligibly(III. 78-112), to the point of irritating her. But the climax has yet to come, until the "timorous"(Aers 137) and shameful Troilus, who in Pandarus's pejorative remarks has a "mouses heart"(III.736), swoons when he is thrown into Criseyde's bed (III.1092).

Given all this, when he suggests that Troilus first try to win Criseyde's heart with letters (II.1005-8), the quick-witted Pandarus, who has been watching and advising Troilus in close proximity ever since he heard of the prince's secret love to Criseyde, must have anticipated what would happen if the shy Troilus were brought together with her in person. In other words, it was probably not hard for him to predict that Troilus's characteristic shame, bashfulness, and dread —the feelings which generally do not conform to the conventional masculinity or manhood — are least likely to earn Criseyde's admiration and affection. Certainly, later in the swooning scene, she becomes aghast at what Troilus's shame can do to him: "Is this a mannes game? / What, Troilus, wol ye do thus for *shame*?"(III.1126-27: italics mine). Before getting into the three-stanza summary of Troilus's first letter, therefore, it may be worth making some observations on the first face-to-face meeting between Troilus and Criseyde where he ventures to court her orally, despite his emotional insecurities:

> This Troilus, that herde his lady preye
> Of lordship hym, wax neither quyk ne ded,
> Ne myghte o word for *shame* to it seye,
> Although men sholde smyten of his hed.

> But Lord, so he wex sodeynliche red,
> And sire, his lessoun, that he wende konne
> To preyen hire, is thorough his wit ironne.
>
> (….)
>
> In changed vois, right for his verray drede,
> Which vois quook, and therto his manere
> Goodly *abaist*[abashed], and now his hewes rede,
> Now pale, unto Criseyde, his lady dere,
> With look down cast and humble iyolden chere,
> Lo, the alderfirste word that hym asterte
> Was, twyes, "Mercy, mercy, swete herte!"
>
> (III.78-98: italics mine)

What this passage starkly conveys to readers is that Troilus, who is so baffled and arrested by his own shame, abashment, and dread, at the presence of Criseyde, cannot control his facial expressions, voice, tone, and speech. When he finally finds his words, they come out only in a halting manner ("And stynte a while. And whan he myghte out brynge, /The nexte word was…," III.99-100). And the style and content of his speech addressed to Criseyde never sound spontaneous and genuine but histrionic and empty[9], pathetically and altogether "tainted by the artifice of courtly conventions"(Behrman 316). Namely, it sounds more like a self-affected performance of a conventional courtly love lyric than an

9) "O swete herte deete? /…. O goodly, freshe free, / That with the stremes of youre eyen cleere / Ye wolde somtyme friendly on me see, / And thane agreen that I may ben he, / Withouten braunche of vice on nay wise, / In trouthe alwey to don yow my servise /(….)/And I to ben youre—verray, humble, trewe, /Secret, and in my paynes pacient, / And evere mo desiren freshly newe/ To serve, and ben ylike diligent, / And with good herte al holly youre talent"(III. 127-45).

actual speech made to a real individual, such that Criseyde gets puzzled and has to whisper to Pandarus about what Troilus may really intend to do with such a highly theatrical language that is aimed at her: "To telle me the fyn of his entente. / Yet wist I nevere wel what that he mente"(III. 125-26).

Troilus's first letter to Criseyde, which comes more than seven hundred lines earlier in the poem than their first meeting, should be considered in the same vein as this awkward and pathetic speech in terms of the content and ethos, in that the letter is described to be equally courtly and conventional. However, the letter on the whole seems to engender explicitly different effects and affects on Criseyde. The letter is presented in a short summary, rather than in a long, verbatim text as in *Il Filostrato* (McKinnell 80, Nuttall 57). But, as John McKinnell notes, the summarized letter is "full enough for a rough analysis to be possible"(80), and it especially suffices to serve our purpose to throw light on the defining distinction between the oral Troilus and the epistolary Troilus:

> First he gan hire righte lady calle,
> His hertes life, his lust, his sorwes leche,
> His blisse, and ek thise other termes alle
> That in swich cas thise lovers alle seche,
> He gan hym recomaunde unto hire grace;
> To telle al how, it axeth muchel space.
>
> And after this ful lowely he hire preyed
> To be nought wroth, thogh he, of his folie,
> So hardy was to hire to write, and seyde
> That love it made, or ells most he die,
> And pitousli gan mercy for o crye;
> And after that he seyde—and leigh ful loude
> Hymself was litel worth, and lasse he koude;

> And that she sholde han his konnyng excused,
> That litel was, an ek he dredde hire soo;
> And his unworthynesse he ay acused;
> And after that than gan he telle his woo—
> But that was endeles, withouten hoo—
> And seyde he wolde in routhe alwey hym holde;
> And radde it over, and gan the letter folde.
>
> (II.1065-85)

Troilus's letter, despite its apparently "muddled" sequence (McKinnell 81)overall, well observes the familiar letter-writing convention (the *ars dictaminis*) of the five parts that include *salutatio*, *benevolentiae captatio*(*exordium*), *narratio*, *peticio*, and c*onclusio* (McKinnell 80).[10)] In detail, in the *salutatio*, he greets Criseyde, calling her with many clichés that courtly lovers would employ habitually in praising their sweethearts: "his righte lady calle, / His hertes lif, his lust, his sorwes leche, /His

10) McKinnell outlines these five steps as follows: *salutatio* is "the greeting" wherein the "style should be appropriate to the rank of the person to whom the letter is sent, the sender is to express his name humbly, and it should come after the name of the recipient; *benevolentiae captatio*, or *exordium*, is the part where the sender attempts to "gain the sympathies of the recipient, by praising him and/or expressing one's own humility, invoking a special relationship, or making some offer." This second step is very often found to be merged into *salutatio. Narratio* is "an explanation of something done, being done, or about to be done, or of a state of affairs." *Peticio* is a request whose tones are varied, such as "pleading," "instructing," "threatening," "exhorting," "encouraging or inciting," "warning," "advising," and "chiding." And *conclusio* is conclusion in either "a logical conclusion or a summary." Depending on the purpose of the letter, some of these five parts may be ignored. For instance, the first two steps may be omitted if "one wishes to insult or is afraid of having the letter intercepted," and the *peticio* is dropped when "one does not wish to ask for anything." Yet every letter is supposed to have either a *narratio* or a *peticio*(79-80). According to Norman Davis's observation of the English letter-writing conventions popular in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this first letter of Troilus can be further sub-divided into seven steps (148-49).

blisse, and ek thise other termes alle /That in swich cas thise lovers alle seche"(II.1065-67). Then follows the first *benevolentiae captatio* where Troilus commends himself to Criseyde in humility (II.1069-70). Ostensibly, the subsequent part of the letter sounds unusual, in that Troilus places his *peticio,* where he asks Criseyde for "mercy" (II. 1072-76), ahead of the *narratio*, in which he unwinds his "woo" without ceasing (II.1082-83).What is equally unusual is that he adopts another long *benevolentiae captatio* where he emphasizes "his unworthynesse" (II. 1077-81) between the *peticio* and the *narratio*, before he moves onto the simple *conclusio* where he promises Criseyde his steadfast love (II.1084). McKinnell claims that this switched order of *peticio* and *narratio* and the inclusion of the second *benevolentiae captatio* "muddl[e]" the letter, attributing it to Troilus's "naïve inability to handle the letter form correctly." But I would rather contend that this twist of the sequence and the repeated use of *benevolentiae captatio* should be Troilus's deliberate deployment, rather than stylistic blemishes, considering that, in so doing, he can get across what he expects Criseyde of much earlier in a more urgent and more assertive manner, but without threatening her. Troilus appears to execute this artifice by tactfully toning down the pressure of his request. Reiterating the courtly formula of humbleness(*benevolentiae captatio*), according to whose principle, irrespective of his superior status as prince in real life, Troilus renforces that he must be Criseyde's "humble, trewe" and "secret" servant to serve "in [his] paynes pacient," as he does so later in his poor recitation in the first meeting with Criseyde (III.141-44).

The contention that Troilus is actually deliberate and perhaps even feigning the piteous (II.1076) and exigent tone of his letter finds other rational grounds when readers witness the ways that he deals with his letter after composing it. First, contrary to his Italian counterpart Troilo in

Il Filostrato who never reads his letter again but folds and puts it away once he is done with writing it (McKinnell 83), Chaucer's Troilus is said to have "radde it over, and gan the leettre folde" (II.1085). This act of re-reading or studying the letter can be read as an ample sign of Troilus's deliberation, and even of "savouring what he has just written"(McKinnell 8382-83). The narrator's abrupt and humorous interception, where he comments that Troilus is telling a lie ("leigh ful loude") when he confesses his "litel worth"(II.1077-78), doubles one's suspicion of the sincerity of Troilus's emotional exigencies. As McKinnell astutely observes, the deftness with which Troilus seals his letter—"with his salte teris gan he bathe /The ruby in his signet, and it sette /Upon the wex deliverliche and rathe"(II.1086-88) — hints at his "suppressed hopefulness," and in a sense it further suggests that "he is even enjoying himself"(82). Therefore, these signs that work both inside and outside of the epistolized text all undercut the urgent, pitiful, and grave ambience that Troilus has just created in his letter, and they ultimately pose a question of whether the letter can be taken as an embodiment of his genuine affection, or whether it is no less than his epistolized "posturing" (McKinnell 81), or whether it is even just a game. Of course, the letter that Criseyde receives through Pandarus is completely silent about all these stories.

In the sense of content and spirit, the courtly convention that Troilus textualizes in his first letter to the absent Criseyde is more or less the same as what he delivers face to face to the present Criseyde in their first encounter. Perhaps, this may be one reason why Chaucer decided to give the letter in a summary, rather than in a verbatim rendering. Namely, he may not have wanted to bore his audience with the same conventional courtly substance. Despite their semantic analogy, however, the letter has different stories to unfold from the oral performance, in terms of the ways that it works. Above all, aside from the *topos* of "dredde"(II.1880) which

is textualized as part of the courtly formula, unlike in the actual speech that we witnessed earlier, the letter reveals no such cumbersome feelings as shame and bashfulness that would lead to his own embarrassment and halt sentences from flowing naturally. Based on the letter itself, there is certainly no way for Criseyde to tell whether Troilus's face turns red when he calls her as "his righte lady," or whether his voice sounds changed or shaky when he says that he is dreadful of her responses to him and his love. It is because, as we observed earlier through Simmel, the letter as a written communication is stripped of all those subjective para-linguistic elements that accompany spoken words, and, as a result, it makes one focus on the "logical sense of the words" that the letter ismeant to transmit (354). In Simmel's term, Trolius's "objectification of the subjective" in his letter seems to work out well with Criseyde. After reading his letter, she assesses that he represents himself well according to the circumstances —"she thought he koude good" (II.1177), and she begins to hum and answers positively when Pandarus asks her if she likes his letter and if she thinks that Troilus knows such matters as what he is dealing with in the letter (II.1199).

The comparison between the bungling oral Troilus and the eloquent literate Troilus attests to and magnifies the different semiotics operating in speech and writing as distinct modes of communication. In courting the yet-not-so familiar Criseyde, it turns out that the shy Troilus considers the need for the distance and separation between himself and her as a must. Judging through Criseyde's affirmative responses to his letter, we can tell that Troilus successfully represents himself in a socially appropriate manner. This is possible, first because the distance, which his letter is predicated on and sustains, helps him keep in check the non-verbal and physical elements, which are later found beyond his control and mostly detrimental to him in the face-to-face setting. Also, the fact

that Criseyde is absent when Troilus is working on the letter provides him with some mental and emotional room, in which he can plan the structure and rhetoric of his letter and even look back and appreciate his own writing.

Ⅲ. "youre absence is an helle": Troilus and the *Litera Troili*

Through the entire *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer renders only two letters verbatim. They are Troilus's last letter "*Litera Troili*" (V. 1317−421) and Criseyde's last letter "*Litera Criseydis*"(V.1590−631). Critics of this poem more or less seem to concur with the idea that the fifteen−stanza letter from Troilus to Criseyde in the last book is modeled on Troilo's almost double−length long letter in *Il Filostrato* (Nuttall 177, McKinnell 80, Davis 145). They also observe that instead of simply abridging and translating the letter from the Italian source (and perhaps from the French translation of *Il Filostrato*, as well), Chaucer modifies the contexts of the original phrases and adds new turns, whereby he ingrains in Troilus's letter "entirely original subtlety and force"(Davis 148). Troilus's new letter to Criseyde looks to maintain a rough parallel with his first letter in light of the ways where the five− or seven−step[11] writing formula and the courtly convention are adopted. Nonetheless, as McKinnell rightly notes (84), the tone of this letter is quite different from the tone

11) As he illuminates how Chaucer exploits ordinary letter−writing conventions of his time in English, as well as in French, Norman Davis analyzes Troilus's letter according to the seven−step formula which contains further sub−divisions as compared to McKinnell's method. For more details as to how Davis does, see his "The 'Litera Troili' And English Letters," especially pages 150−52.

of the first letter. In especial relation to our purpose for examining the ways in which the epistolary situation is exploited by the letter-writer, this new letter of Troilus seems to be laden with much different stories to unfold. This is the topic that I would like to draw attention to in this section. Aside from this letter, Troilus is said to have written more letters to Criseyde —"To hire he wroot yet ofte tyme al newe"(V.1583). With this said, the letter that continues from lines 1317 through 1421, precisely speaking, cannot be Troilus's last letter. Despite this, it may be still rational to consider the letter as Troilus's real final letter, in that this verbatim letter illustrates the possible full content and scale of the *narratio* and/or *peticio,* with which Troilus is expected to fill his later letters.

Two months after Criseyde was surrendered to the Greeks in exchange for the captured Trojan nobleman Antenor , the now lifeless Troilus, again goaded by Pandarus(V.1291-1309), just as he was for the first letter, decides to write a letter to her. Running in 105 lines, this last letter is shown to have been written according to the five-step formulas of letter-writing. But it compromises the sequence, as Troilus's first letter does, albeit with a different structure. The *salutatio* and *benevolentiae captatio* are presented in combination in the first stanza (V.1317-23), where Troilus addresses Criseyde with the conventional courtly terms that we already witnessed in his first letter, and then he recommends himself as her true, humble, and loyal servant. Then, as McKinnell points out(84), Troilus tediously alternates the two *narratio* (V.1324-37 and V. 1366-79) with the two *peticio* (V.1338-65 and V.380-1407) in the subsequent twelve stanzas, before he finally moves on to the conventional and summary *conclusio* that is mixed partially with the *benevolentiae captatio* (V.1408-21). Despite the prolixity of *narratio* and *peticio*, their crux is simple as that Criseyde's "absence is an helle"(V.1395), and therefore "[she] coming hom ayeyn to Troie"(V.1380); or, if she cannot,

at least "[she] wolden write [him]"(V.1391) and explain how she has been doing in the Greek camp and what would delay her from coming back to him (V.1358).

The "absence" or distance that Troilus is dealing with in this letter is essentially different from the distance that he formerly dealt with in his first letter, in respect to their significance and function. As he was working on the first letter, as discussed earlier, Troilus needed Criseyde's absence owing to his emotional insecurities and perhaps also because he did not feel intimate enough with her yet. Certainly, though Criseyde was absent from him, she still stayed in the same city, and she was hence accessible in person through Pandarus's mediations, as well as through letters. So, though she is absent, it was not a total absence but could be conveniently remedied into presence, according to Pandarus's machinations. However, the absence that Troilus has been facing after Criseyde's departure to the Greek camp is absolute, in the sense that no intermediary or device is available to meet her face to face, unless he sneaks into the Greek camp. It is said that in *Il Filostrato*, Troilo is able to employ Pandaro as a messenger who delivers in person the woeful prince's letters to Criseida in the Greek camp, every time a truce is called (McKinnell 84). However, Chaucer is found to have not readopted this small but still significant detail in his poem. Chaucer's dropping of this account, as McKinnell suggests, also works to "make Criseyde more remote"(84). Because they consummated their love long ago (III.1583-1820) and Criseyde has been his sweetheart since, Troilus certainly no longer needs distance between him and her. Quite contrarily, what he needs and desires is her corporeal presence. In this light, Criseyde's absence, which Troilus is bound to experience, should be felt as immeasurably painful and irreversible. This awareness of the irremediable separation between him and Criseyde perhaps pressures him to write such a prolix and redundant

letter in desperation to overcome the distance. In Simmel's terms, his "memories of direct personal contact" (353) with Criseyde and the former intimacy built through the somatic communication with her may embolden him to strive to reproduce some sense of closeness in the letter. By presenting Troilus's last letter verbatim, Chaucer perhaps invited his audience to decide how effectively, or poorly, the desperate lover bridges the physical distance that exists between his own body and the absent Criseyde in his letter.

Letter-writers who are anxious about the physical distance that separate their bodies from their loved ones normally attempt to offset it by inscribing in their letters what Gary Schneider terms "the language of orality and physicality"(16) that may represent their "body, actions, emotions, and behaviors"(110). When it comes to love letters, in particular, intimacy and presence are expected to be much more powerfully imagined (Schneider 123). It is therefore highly peculiar that in his lengthy letter to the absent Criseyde, Troilus does not deploy this epistolary rhetorical strategy as assertively and consistently as he can, even though it would allow him to effect the senses of bodily presence, intimacy, and authenticity. He seems to be aware of the force of such language, but his efforts overall turn out to be strangely scanty and fairly topical. Despite the general dearth of the epistolary rhetoric, one salient physical bit of language that Troilus repeats in the letter is "teris"[tears]:

> And that defaced is, that may ye wite
> The *teris* which that fro myn eyen reyne,
> That wolden speke, if that they koude, and pleyne.
>
> Yow first biseche I, that youre eyen clere
> To loke on this defouled ye nat holde;
> (….)

> Myn eyen two, in veyn with which I se,
> Of sorwful *teris* salte arn waxen welles.
> (V.1335–36, 1373–74: italics mine)

Troilus's "teris" first bridges the first *narratio* and *peticio*, and it also consists of part of the second *narratio*. In the first use, Troilus explains that his copious tears soaked and spoiled his letter, and he wishes that, nonetheless, Criseyde's eyes looking at the letter may not be defiled by the spoiled look of the letter. In the second use, Troilus complains that he can barely see his own writing because his eyes are constantly welling with salty, sorrowful tears and thus stay blurred. Representing sorrow of the letter-writer, tears are frequently employed as "an icon of emotional truth"(Schneider 122). Epistolizing tears which he says to be incessant and profuse, Troilus himself may also intend to say that his "unrest sorwes soor"(V.1355) is genuine and real. The additionally implicated situation, where Troilus hand-wrote the letter instead of dictating it to his scribe, likewise works to represent presence and intimacy and to demonstrate his authenticity and fidelity to Criseyde. However, it is also found out that the grammatical construction, in which tears are textualized, sounds incomplete, vague, and overdone in general. The principal clause—"that defaced is" — remains truncated and never reaches completion when the stanza is through. The use of the relative pronoun as a linking device is overflowing the subsequent five lines ("that," V.1335; "which that," V. 1336; "That" and "that," V. 1337; "that," V. 1338), sometimes redundant ("which that," V.1336) and sometimes unclear ("that," V.1337). Consequently, the flow and clarity of the lines suffer. Therefore, despite his efforts, the intimate and authenticating impact of Troilus's epistolized tears is effaced immediately by the rhetorical awkwardness, and on the whole by the ponderosity of the repeated *narratio* and *peticio*, in which the tears becomes simply an isolated theme.

Another rhetorical device that Troilus employs in hopes of engendering the ambience of emotional proximity is seen in the use of endearments. Within the fifteen stanzas of the letter, Troilus uses ten endearments in total, and their length varies, from a simple "swete"(V.1399) to the long-winded "myne owene deere herte trewe"(V. 1401), or "myn hertes day, my lady free"(V.1405). There is no doubt that, by using these terms of affection, Troilus intends to create the aura of intimacy and affection between himself and the remote Criseyde. However, bumping into endearments frequently, sometimes even twice within one stanza, as in stanzas 11 and 13, which naturally interrupts reading (or listening) consistently, one cannot avoid feeling that Troilus indeed overuses those affective expressions. Theoretically, as a proximal social deictic[12], the first-person possessive pronoun "my"("myne"/"myn"), with which most of the endearments begin, should build the sense of immediacy and proximity. However, what really happens in this particular epistolary setting is that, as the "my" expressions increase, they seem to act more as an entry of what I would call Toilus's "my" catalogue than as a rhetorical device of inscribing emotional and physical closeness. Troilus's preoccupation with his own misery and pains permeates profoundly through the entire letter. And such a persistent self-occupation of Troilus causes him, perhaps unconsciously, to add the possessive "my" before almost every noun. It seems that his "my" list goes on endlessly, as "my welle," ""myn eyen," "my cares," "my wit," "myn unrest sorwes soore," "my woful gost," "Myn eyen two," "My song," "myn adversitee," "myn ese," "My joie," "my lif," "my gilt," etc. Read in this characteristic milieu, the focus of such affective

12) Concerning the functions of deictics or deixis, see *Stylistics* by Lesley Jeffries and Dan McIntyre, 157-61. As to the analyses of the use of deictics in medieval English lyrics, see A. C. Spearing, "Epistolary Poem" (Ch.7) of *Textual Subjectivity* (212-21), and Ju ok Yoon, "An Encounter of Lyric and Epistle: Textualization of 'Partyng' in Late Middle English Epistolary Love Lyrics," 19-20.

terms as "my lady deere"(V.1340) and "my owen lady free" seems to be less on "lady" than on "my." In other words, according to this observation, whom Troilus is really interested in is paradoxically not Criseyde but himself. Criseyde's reaction to one of Troilus's last letters attests to this reading. In her final letter "*Litera Criseydis*," Criseyde complains that the epistolized Troilus is concerned only with himself— "Nor other thing nys in youre remembraunce, / … but only youre plesaunce"(V.1607-08), and she is naturally not happy with the unbridled self-preoccupation of Troilus.

As illumined thus far, Troilus's letters presented in summary or verbatim in the second and fifth books of *Troilus and Criseyde* demonstrate different functions and meanings. Troilus employs his first letter as a sort of paper deputy of his affection toward Criseyde. His own unmanly emotions such as shame and shyness, as well as the unfamiliarity between him and her, make him prefer to epistolize his heart rather than to orally communicate it to her face to face. Troilus's (or perhaps Pandarus's) decision to do so turns out to be successful, in that, while in her physical presence he barely gets across what he wants to say to Criseyde, he seems to be eloquent and confident in the letter, and he even demonstrates signs of deliberation in preparing the letter. By the time he works on his first letter, in other words, Troilus needs the separation and distance between himself and Criseyde. However, things have changed greatly by the time he composes his last letters in the fifth book. Maintaining an intimate relationship with her as lovers since the end of the third book, the physical distance that separates him from Criseyde is now the one big obstacle that he must overcome. The only way open for him to have access to her is through letters. The last letter from Troilus illustrates his efforts made on the physical and affective language that would help him to inscribe the senses of presence and intimacy.

Nonetheless, such efforts turn out to be in short supply and deflected eventually.

Ⅳ. "Soth" and Letter-Writing

Now, as I conclude this essay, I would like to turn to one of the questions that I raised in the beginning: To what degree can the letter textualize the emotions and intentions of the writer? It is Pandarus who pressures Troilus to write the first and last letters to Criseyde. Being a seasoned reader himself, who has his own perspectives on books and writing (II.106-08, V.977-80; Windeatt 1992, 291), he seems to best understand the semiotics of the epistle and writing. First, as noted before, Pandarus's making of the timorous Troilus revealing his affection to Criseyde through letters, before he arranges their first face-to-face meeting, suggests that he should recognize the distinctions between the written and the oral communications. Namely, he is certainly cognizant of the danger that Troilus's shame, bashfulness, and fear will have on lessening Criseyde's interests in him. Urging Troilus to handwrite a letter to Criseyde, moreover, Pandarus gives long, detailed stylistic advice to the prince that continues in three stanzas (II.1023-43). He advises that Troilus not write his letter haughtily("dygneliche," V.1024), boastfully("with thise arguments tough"), artfully("craftily), nor formally like a scrivener(V.1026); that he not repeat a "good word al softe" too often, like a fiddler who plays the one same tune over and again(V.1028-29); and that he not jumble different styles of language, which is likened to the act of throwing the terms of medicine and of love into one pot, or of painting a pike with an ass's feet(V.1037-43). What grasps the reader's attention the most in this lengthy catalogue may be his

council that Troilus should drop his tears ("teris") onto the paper and blot it intentionally(V.1025). The Troilus who not only mentions the term "teris" repeatedly in his letters but literally defiles letters with his tears is found to remain faithful to this initial advice from Pandarus. This characteristic advice from Pandarus about the use of tears in letters bespeaks that he understands well that, as a sort of rhetorical apparatus, tears will contribute to increasing the materiality of the letter.

Yet what makes Pandarus most special in relation to our question is that, of all the characters in the poem, he is the one who believes most strongly and most explicitly in the power of writing. When he first advises Troilus to write a letter, Pandarus explicates that the letter is a communicative mode where Troilus "wolde hire [Criseyde] tellen how / [he] ferde ayms, and hire biseche of routhe"(II.106-07). Later when he urges Troilus once again to write a letter to Criseyde, who has been detained in the Greek camp for two months, Pandarus emphatically stresses the close connection between writing and truth("soth"):

> That hastily a letter thow hire write,
> Thorugh which thow shalt wel bryngyn it aboute
> To know a *soth* of that thow art in doute.
>
> And se now whi: for his I dar wel seyn,
> That if so is that she *untrewe* be,
> I kan nat trowen that she wol write ayeyn.
> And if she write, thow shalt ful sone yse
> As wheither she hath any liberte
> To come ayeyn; or ellis in som clause,
> If she be let, she wol assigne a cause.
>
> (….)
> Now writ hire thane, and how shalt feele sone

A *soth* of al. Ther is namore to done.

(V.1293-309: italics mine)

According to this passage and his first explication of the utility of the letter, Pandarus seems to be convinced that letters, or writing in general, can represent the affective realities of the writer ("how / [he] ferde ayms," V.106) and that textualized affects can influence the reader to act in particular ways that the writer himself wants ("biseche of routhe," V. 107). What is more, especially according to this quoted speech of Pandarus, writing can be a trustworthy yardstick for measuring whether the recipient is genuine or not. His theory is that if Criseyde has changed her mind and replaced Troilus for her new, Greek lover, as the prince suspects, she would not respond to his letter (V.1297-98).On the other hand, if she has remained true to him, then she will write him back and tell him whether she will be able to come back, and, if she cannot come back, she will explain what makes her hold back. The actual letter-writing practices that Troilus and Criseyde adopt, however, manifest themselves differently from the ways Pandarus theorizes.

First, Pandarus's theory on the relation between writing and truth is found to be too readily disproved with the example of Criseyde. Though this is not the place for a detailed discussion on how Criseyde exploits her letters to veil her complex emotions, decisions, and circumstances, a short reminder of what she does before and after she receives Troilus's last letters may serve to contend that writing, both as an act and as content, may not necessarily guarantee the truth of the correspondent. Criseyde indeed writes back to Troilus as a response to his last letters, and in her letters, writes that she still loves him best, and she promises him that she will really come back to him and amend all wrongs (V.1424-30). However, we readers have already overheard of her determination not to return to Troy (V.769-70, 1029) and to accept the Greek Diomede in

place of Troilus (V.1038−50,1087). In other words, we know that, though she pays off her epistolary “debt” to Troilus out of pity (Schneider 125), she is no longer faithful to him, and her epistolized promises are all empty lip service.

Furthermore, one may rightly wonder whether the courtly conventions, which Troilus is seen to adopt in his letters and whose formulaic content and ethos is orally performed (albeit clumsily) by Troilus himself in his first encounter with Criseyde, indeed embodies how he actually feels and what he really experiences as a lover. To start the conclusion in advance, Troilus proves to be more isolated from his own writing than he looks. His first letter magnifies most explicitly the gap between what he experiences and what he writes. Let’s be reminded of what happens once he falls in love with Criseyde. Troilus experiences dramatic and comprehensive changes in his act, language, and psyche. His confidence, pride, and eloquence are altogether lost, such that he is no longer the strutting prince. Now, he isolates himself from his company, confines himself inside, and spends most of his time lying in bed and lamenting. His mind starts to be overwhelmed with confusion and questions, and his language is flooded with paradoxes. He can neither sleep nor eat. And he feels almost mad and suicidal. But the courtly artifice that he employs in his first letter is so exclusive and self-sustaining that it provides no space where he can inscribe his own characteristics. Unfortunately, however, Troilus does not seem to perceive the “limitations”(Windeatt 1979, 130) or “absurdities”(McKinnell 83) of the courtly convention. In other words, he is not aware that he cannot avoid being isolated from his own emotions, experiences, and even life itself, so long as he writes within the courtly norms. Perhaps, the emptiness that results from such isolation because of his own writing makes Troilus keep writing, though in abortive attempts, to overcome it. When he says later in his final letter that “I say namore,

al have I for to seye / To yow wel more than I telle may"(V.1408-09), Troilus may once again be conventional[13], but he may also be partially truthful, based on his own experiences. That is, he may suggest that working within the limitations of the courtly standard in particular and presumably all sorts of writing in nature would make writers undergo the inevitable anxiety between what they desire to express and what they are able to do, anxiety that the lover-writers of several late medieval English courtly love lyrics are found to express, as well.[14] In a sense, we writers, medieval or modern, are all siblings of Pandarus because we more or less believe in the power of writing, albeit to different extents. And we are brothers and sisters of Troilus as well, because we constantly feel asunder between what we desire to textualize and what our abilities actually allow us to do.

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13) Troilus may sound conventional here, in that this expression of "I say namore" is, as Davis notes, frequently observed in late medieval English letters. For example, Elizabeth Clere and John Paston I, both from the *Paston Letters*, write in their letters respectively: "No more I wrighte to yow at this tyme, but Holy Gost have yow in kepying" and "No more to yow at this tyme, but God hym save that mad this ryme" (Davis 151).

14) In the late medieval English lyric that starts with "As I my-selfe," for example, the lover who is also a letter-writer repeats the same expression in the final: "no more to yow I can now saye"(Robbins no. 200). The lover-writer of another lyric that starts with "In my hertt" elaborates more in detail the conflict between what he wants to write and what he is allowed to do: "How ye be my souerayne lady, I-wyss I can-not wryte. / Ne ffynd I þerto papyr nor yng; / Wel I wote a hole ȝere it ys to lyte /To make yow to know so mych on yow I thynke"(I cannot write indeed how you are my sovereign lady / I cannot find paper or ink; / I know well that a whole year is too little /To make you know how much I think on you: my translation)(Robbins no. 192). Concerning how to apprehend this formula of "I say namore," see Yoon, 20.

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Abstract

“For a Letter Does Not Blush”: The Signification of Troilus’s Letters in *Troilus and Criseyde*

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This essay is about *Troilus and Criseyde,* Geoffrey Chaucer’s re-rendering of an Italian poem *Il Filostrato*, written by Giovannie Boccaccio in the late 1330s. The poem narrates itself around the amatory inception, advance, and dissolution that take place between Troilus, son of King Priam of Troy, and Criseyde, who is a young and beautiful noble widow. The second and the fifth books of the poem register bodies of accounts where Troilus and Criseyde communicate with each other through letters. This paper focuses on the accounts where Troilus’s letters are presented in summary or verbatim. His letters demonstrate different functions and meanings, depending upon what emotional and material circumstances he finds himself in and with what intentions he communicates. Troilus employs his first letter as a sort of paper deputy of his affection toward Criseyde. His own unmanly emotions such as shame and shyness, as well as the unfamiliarity between him and her, make him prefer to epistolize his heart rather than to orally communicate it to her face to face. However, by the time he composes his last letters, the physical distance that separates him from Criseyde is now the one big obstacle that he must overcome. Troilus’s last letters illustrate his efforts made on the deployment of physical and affective language that would help him to inscribe the senses of presence and intimacy.

Key Words: Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, letter, epistolary rhetoric, distance/separation
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