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”Be ye mad?” Around Fools in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde

The question in the title was formulated by a noble, elegant and fragile lady, Criseyde, and was addressed to her honorable uncle. A few lines later, the same lady reinforces her utterance, leaving no doubt that she had chosen her somewhat surprising words: “3e ben so wilde” conscienciously. Although the phrases were meant to express the indignation of a young widow on hearing her uncle’s invitation to merriment in the nice May weather, the form of the expression still remains slightly odd. Reading further the text would strengthen this sense of incongruity: in this elegant and nicely chiselled late-medieval tragic romance all the main characters seem to adopt similar forms of address and phrasing quite often though. “Uncle deere, ffor goddes loue” sighed in one phrase with “be ye mad?” is not quite typical even by Chaucerian standards.

Although the text of the *Troilus* contains a surprisingly high number of the word ‘fool,’ and a great variety of terminology denoting the same notion,¹ it has escaped all examination of the aspect of the function of the ‘fool’ so far.² Scholarly attention has turned mainly to the fools and jesters of medieval courts,³ Chaucer’s texts have gained little scrutiny. Stephen Harper, examining Chaucer’s “The Summoner’s Tale,” argues that Jankyn, the lord’s squire, plays the role of

¹ Chaucer’s *Troilus* contains around 80 examples of the term ‘fool’ and its synonyms. The statistics were made using the corpus of the electronic Middle English Compendium of the University of Georgetown, as well as by consulting other major works in print. However, due to the incomplete nature of the corpuses no claim can be made about the all-inclusiveness of the survey, and it is obvious that the investigations cover only a limited amount of texts written in Middle English.

² This is even more surprising considering that the text has been subdued to a large variety of critical scrutiny.

³ See early studies by B. Swain. *Fools and Folly during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1932.; Enid Welsford. *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*. London: Faber and Faber, 1935; see also William Willeford. *The Fool and His Scepter*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969. Later scholarship may be exemplified by Janet T. Nelson. *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*. London: The Hambleton Press, 1986.; as well as by B. K. Otto. *Fooling around the World: The History of the Jester*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

a court jester in the poem.⁴ Rose A. Zimbaro's article about the *Book of the Duchess* seems to be one of the few pioneering works about how Chaucer incorporated folly in the main structure of his work.⁵

The *Troilus*, as regards the incidence of the word 'fool' and its synonyms, can be paralleled only by the *Canterbury Tales* (with approximately 50 examples); the *Early South English Legendary* (with approximately 46 examples); and the *Confessio Amantis* (about 16 examples); fewer cases can be found in polemical material, such as in Peacock's *Repressor* (around 11 examples) and in Wycliff's works, then considerably lower numbers follow. The reason for this abundance in the romance is presumably the important role the term plays. In my opinion this great number of occurrences; the use of uncommon forms denoting 'fool' for example 'nyce'; the variety of formations; the unparalleled ways of addressing, all suggest that Chaucer used the notion of fool-foolly conscienciously, as a unique means to form his characters as well as to depict the ambiguity of a multi-faceted reality, which seems to be one main artistic goal of his whole literary oeuvre. The similarities of the use of the term in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, composed right after the coming out of *Troilus*, may be a proof that his closest contemporaries recognized Chaucer's intentions and the significance of his game with the word folly whithin his text.

'Fool' all over

The different forms of the 'fool' vary in their semiotic mapping as well as according to the degree of their stylistic strength. The alternative use of *fool*, *fol*, *wood*, *mad*, *nyce*, *frenetik*, *furie*, *rage*, is also counterpointed by the extensive presence of such terms as *sapience*, *wise*, *konning*, etc. The one-word forms are interchanged with longer expressions, which are, in most cases, understatements in the form of circumscriptions: "Now knowe I that the reson in the failleth" (Book I, 764), "right at my wittes ende" (Book III, 931) "neigh out of my wit I breyde" (Book V, 1262), etc. Their use cannot always be determined by clear-cut differences in meaning, except for the *mad-frenetik-furie* group, quite often the terms 'fool', 'mad', 'nyce' are used interchangeably. There is a number of proverbs about fools in the text: "But alday failleth thing that fooles wenden" (Book I, 217); "I shal byjaped ben a thousand tyme/ More than that fol of whos folie men ryme" (Book I, 531-32); "As don these foles that hire sorwes eche/With sorve, whan thei han mysaventure" (Book I, 705-06). They definitely add colour

⁴ HARPER 1999 12-15. He states that it is possible that Chaucer encountered court fools during his travels in Italy.

⁵ ZIMBARDO 1984, 333-335.

and hue, but are not always understandable. Sometimes it seems impossible to trace the origin and meaning of the proverb, not even the context helps in the uncoding: “Or was bold, to synge a fool a masse” (Book III, 88).

Fools are mentioned in the text from the very beginning to the end. The most occurrences, 20 examples can be found in Book IV; in Book I and in Book III there are 19; in Book II 16; then they are diminishing, in Book V they appear only 8 times. (not to count the paraphrased expressions). All the main characters apply the term or its synonyms, Pandarus proves to be the main user of the notion. Even Diomedes quotes a proverb in his very first inner monologue: “*He is a fool that wol foryete hymselfe*” (Book V, 97-98).

What can be folie or why can one be a fool? Naturally, as the genre of courtly romance requires, love, the denial of love, lamenting the loss of love and jealousy begin the list. Sometimes the meaning is somewhat blurred, as in Book I, lines 545-47: “Al was for nought, she herde not his pleynte,/And whan that he bythought on that folie,/ A thousand fold his wo gan multiplie”, where folie can mean Troilus’ state of love, and also the fact that Criseyde does not know about his sufferings, and most likely both. Then more interesting instances follow: the foolish company of women who came to console Criseyde; believing in dreams and fearing auguries (although they proved to be true), etc.

A more intriguing question is what appears as stereotyped, and what not, in Chaucer’s treatment of fools. A long tradition of romance literature, based on the antique heritage of classical poetry, which were widely read, determined the terms and rules of courtly love, with Andreas Capellanus’s work, *De arte amandi*.⁶ Here a significant role is given to such cases when Love and Reason are at war. Reason does not follow Love’s command, the loss of reason by Love follows, that is when Love makes one a fool. Saunders maps some of the examples of the French romance literature,⁷ then turns to Chaucer:

Love is repeatedly portrayed in terms of paradox, ambiguity, duality in Chaucer’s writing. (...) Such dualities, whether bittersweet or tragicomic, are

⁶E. Talbot Donaldson attacked the concept of courtly love by asserting that the idea itself is a coinage of scholars too eager to construct their own system of codes. TALBOT DONALDSON 1965, 65-83.

⁷“In his (Chrétien de Troyes) *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, love madness, rather than reason underpins high chivalric achievements, and Chrétien plays with this pattern in different ways in both *Le Chevalier au Lion* (Yvain) and *Erec et Enide*, while Cligés offers a rather more satirical perspective. She also treats the case of Marie de France who, mainly in her *Les Deux Amants* explores the complex balance of reason and passion in love: “Marie memorably characterizes great love as lacking in moderation through its very nature, but is not unequivocal in her celebration of such emotion.” SAUNDERS 2006. 134-156, 138.

characteristic of Chaucer's polyphony, lightness of touch and unwillingness to offer closure, but they also reflect the complicated, multi-faceted quality of attitudes to love in the medieval period.⁸

In the same way, the references to the fool in Chaucer, even if they belong to the "fooled by love" category, present a more complex image than the stereotypical cases of the mad for love, maddened by love, mad with jealousy, fooled by love, maddened by the loss of the lover issues in the majority of contemporary courtly romances.

The question of addressing

The most striking cases in which Chaucer's use of the 'fool' definitely differs from the stereotyped solutions are those of address. Only once is the fool used in a direct address form outside *Troilus and Criseyde* in Chaucer's works, and apart from these (comma) very few examples seem to exist in major literary works of the period where such a form of address can be found. Therefore the surprisingly frequent use of this uncommon form of address in *Troilus* gains real significance.

The first case occurs when Troilus turns to himself, realising he fell in love: "O fool, now artow in the snare,/ That whilom japedest at loves peyne" (Book I, 507-08). Then Pandarus addresses Troilus when they first meet and Troilus confesses that he is in sorrow because of love: "How hastow thus unkindely and longe/ Hid this fro me, thow fol?" (Book I, 617-18). Strong formulations follow: "Swych is delit of foles to bywepe/Hire wo, but seken bote they ne kepe./Now knowe I that the reson in thee failleth." (Book I, 763-765). A little later Pandarus mentions his friend's "foolish wilfulness", which Troilus realises himself "and thoughte anon what folie he was inne" (821). The list could be continued with many examples.

Criseyde also joins them when, in Book II, she meets her uncle and Pandarus asks her to be merry and dance: "Be ye mad?" (Book II, 113), and adds the line also quoted above: "3e ben so wilde". Pandarus does not remain indebted to her, either, with a kind way of characterization: "Discrecioun out of youre hed is gon" (Book III, 894). The text of all the Books of the *Troilus* abounds in further cases of denominations and self-characterisations of similar kind.

Several questions must be asked: Why are there so many examples? Was this form of address customary? Did it depend on the degree of intimacy of the relationship between the addressor and addressee? The scarcity of examples outside the *Troilus* does not allow satisfying answers. Then, what could be the reason of

⁸ SAUNDERS 2006. 136.

Chaucer's use? A more thorough and complex scrutiny of the mechanisms of characterisation Chaucer built up would promise some results, which will follow in the next chapter. First, however, another interesting phenomenon will be examined, that is, a case of presumable contemporary imitation of this impertinence.

The surprising forms of addressing with 'fool' in the *Troilus* is only paralleled by John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, a poem similar to *Troilus and Criseyde* in many respects. The *Confessio* was written right after the *Troilus*, which presumably was produced between 1382 and 1386, while Gower began to work on the *Confessio* in 1386 and had finished it by 1390.⁹ Chaucer had in part dedicated his *Troilus* to Gower, (Book V, 1856-1859): "O moral Gower, this book I directe/To the," also he himself persuaded Gower that English was a suitable language for poetry. There is further evidence of their friendship as well, therefore the assumption that Gower read and admired *Troilus* before or while composing the *Confessio* seems plausible. While much ink has been spilled on the influence Gower had on Chaucer when writing the *Canterbury Tales*, mainly in the case of the tale-genre, and traces of Gower's admiration of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* has been detected in the *Confessio*, not as much scholarly attention has been given to the influence *Troilus* might have exerted on the writing of the *Confessio Amantis*, although several similarities are known evident.

Addressing is then one case where this impact is detectable. In other texts even fewer cases can be found: In *Piers Plowman* Conscience says once "Come with me, 3e fooles" (Passus XXIII, 74). In Wycliff¹⁰ it appears only once in a scriptural quotation; in Chaucer himself, in the later *Canterbury Tales* also only one case can be found, namely in the *Prologue of the Miller's Tale*, where the Host addresses the Miller thus, accusing him of being drunk: "Oure Hoost answerde / tel on a deuele wey / Thow art a fool / thy wit is ouercome" (line 3135). In the *Confessio*, however, four cases of direct address are formulated in such terms. Considering the length of the work in comparison with the length of the other texts cited above, the difference in numbers is obvious. The cases are: "Ha fol, how thou art forto wyte," / The king unto his brother seith, (Book 1, 2214); "I make many a wofull mone / Unto miself, and speke so: / "Ha fol, wher was thin herte tho, / Whan thou thi worthi ladi syhe?" (Book 4, 598);

⁹ "Doubtless, to informed observers in the court of Richard II, *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Confessio Amantis* might have appeared to contain various features in common. The *Confessio*, however, may not have been more than a few lines on parchment when *Troilus* was completed — a fact we often forget when we envision the "moral Gower" of Chaucer's dedication." YEAGER 1984, 87-99.

¹⁰ MATTHEW (Ed.) 1880.

“For evere whan I thenke among / How al is on miself along, / I seie, "O fol of alle foles, / Thou farst as he betwen tuo stoles” (Book 4, 625); and finally: “Cesar ansuerde and seide, "O blinde, / Thou art a fol, it is wel sene / Upon thiself:” (Book 7, 2474). In the first instance it is the king who addresses his brother, in the two following ones the characters speak to themselves, and in the last one Caesar is defining his subject as “thou art a fol.”

In *Troilus*, the forms are more courageous, more incongruous with the situations in which they are uttered, where the relations between addressers-addressees account for the choice of such terms even less than in the case of the *Confessio*. The relation of the king or Caesar and their subjects (even if this is the brother of the king in the first case) presupposes a more permissible liberality on the part of the addresser, the King, than the relation between two friends, where, as in the case of Pandarus and Troilus, the addressee has a much higher rank in society than his addressor. As for Criseyde, asking her famous question “Be ye mad?” to Pandarus, the situation is even more awkward. There is a triple subordination here in relation to Criseyde: she is the niece, the younger and (*the*) less learned one, the woman. However, the similarities between the two works bear real comparison.

The uncommonly frequent appearance of the form 'nyce' meaning 'fool' is the other example which supports the supposition that Chaucer's *Troilus* had a direct influence on the *Confessio*. 'Nyce' appears only nine times in the *Canterbury Tales*, three of which are rhyming pairs as 'vice-nyce', and two are duplicates “lewed and nyce”; in *The Parliament of Devils*¹¹ only three cases are present, from which two are duplicates “fool and nyce”; in Hoccleve's works¹² it appears only twice, both in duplicates: “lewed and nyce”, and “not so nyce ne so madde”. The extensive usage of duplicates, that is when the meaning of the word is reinforced by a synonym, seems to suggest that the signification of 'nyce' was not yet fixed and clear. However, in *Troilus* we have 20 examples of 'nyce', outnumbering even the use of the word 'fool' (of which there are only 16 cases), although that was the accepted and commonly used term for the concept. The majority of the appearances of 'nyce' betray a self-assured usage as very few duplicates are to be found and only rarely is it present as if called to rhyme with 'vice.' The *Confessio* closely follows its forerunner with 15 examples, (of which only 4 are rhyming pairs with vice), also here 'nyce' coming before the version 'fol', which appears in less cases, 14 times. Consequently, this singular word-choice of 'nyce' instead of a variety of possibilities as fool, wood, mad, frenetik,

¹¹ FURNIVALL (Ed.) 1895.

¹² FURNIVALL (Ed.) 1925.

in rage, etc.; as well as the appearance of a similar insolence of the characters in their way of treating each other present small, but convincing evidence that Chaucer's style and rhetorics had of some kind of impact on the *Confessio*.

Characterization

The manifold use of the 'fool' defines to a great extent the formation of the characters, being one major means of identification and self-identification, an essential element of creating or deconstructing self-esteem. The heroes characterize themselves and each other along such terms, too: I, or you, have or do not have wit, are fool or not. The same happens even with the minor protagonists, as Diomedes, who defines himself in such terms: "Now am I not a fool..." (Book V, 786); also Cassandra is accused by Troilus to be "Fool of fantasie" (Book V, 1523).

Troilus is extensively characterized by his use of 'fool' and 'foolishness' and also by how he and others consider him in this aspect. The excesses of his personality are thus also well mirrored. In Book I, Pandarus accuses Troilus of himself being the cause of all his troubles, as he accused the deity of Love and all the lovers of being fools, what is more, using really strong and ironical terms: "Seynt Idiot, lord of these foles alle!/Of nycete ben verray Goddes apes" (Book I, 910, 913). Later Troilus calls even the sun a fool: "And ek the sonne, Titan, gan he chide,/And seyde, "O fool, wel may men the dispise" (Book III, 1464-65). In his very first appearance his haughty pride is formulated along these lines: "He wolde smyle and holden it folye" (Book I, 194), that is, he condemns love and the lovers: "O veray fooles, nyce and blynde be ðe;" (Book I, 202). After his 'conversion' to the company of lovers, Troilus despises the other group of people: "And whoso seith that forto loue is vice,/...He outhur is enuyous or nyce", (Book II, 855-57); then again later on: "Thei callen loue a woodnesse or folie" (Book III, 1382), and continues: "To techen hem that they ben in the vice,/And loueres nought, al-though they holde hem nyce," (Book III, 1392-93) with the same excessive vehemence he himself branded lovers as fools before.

The identification of Troilus whether he is or is not a fool is constantly changing throughout the poem. At first, the Narrator characterizes Troilus as being a fool himself, in a foolish world: "O blynde world, O blynde entencioun!/How often falleth al the effect contraire/Of surquidrie and foul presumpcioun!" (Book I, 211-13), and "This Troilus is clomben on the staire/And litel weneth that he moot descenden/But alday faileth thing that fooles wenden." (Book I, 215-17). In the question of Troilus being foolish or wise when falling in love, Chaucer does not take a stand at the beginning, but leaves the matter in its dubious state:

“By nyght or day, for wisdom or folye,/His herte, which that is his brestes eye,/Was ay on hire,” (Book I, 452-54). Troilus identifies himself as being fool to be so much in love: “O fool, now artow in the snare” (Book I, 507), and continues his woos mentioning his foolishness on two more occasions in the same monologue. Pandarus calls Troilus outspokenly a fool on their first meeting: How hastow thus vnkyndely and longe/Hid this fro me, thow fol?” (Book I, 617), and goes on reproaching him for his “vnskillful oppynyoun” (790), and “foolish wilfulness” (793). Pandarus tells Troilus continuously off for being foolish: “Thi nyce fare” (532), and “Now is nat this a nyce vanitee?” (536); later he tries to manipulate Troilus by threatening that Criseyde will also hold him as foolish: “Peraunter she myghte holde the for nyce/ To late hir go thus to the Greekis oost” (Book IV, 598-599.) He even describes Troilus to Criseyde as being mad with love for her: “That, but he ben Al fully wood by this, / he sodeynly mot falle in-to woodnesse” (Book III, 793-794).

However, Troilus tries hard and continuously to alter his friend’s opinion of him: “But herke, Pandare, o word, for I nolde /That thow in me wendest so gret folie,” (Book I, 1031); and later on again: “But here, with al min herte, I the biseche/That nevere in me thow deme swich folie;” and: As I shal seyn: ...I am nought wood, al if I lewed be!/It is nought so, that woot I wel, pardee!” (Book III, 393-399). As a sign of his hesitant nature, in Book III he characterizes himself again as being a fool for love.

Troilus tries to persuade Criseyde to flee with him, by warning of folly repeatedly in two subsequent strophes: “And thynk that folie is, whan man chese,/ For accident his substaunce ay to lese” (Book IV, 1504-05), and “Thus mene I: that it were a gret folie, /To putte that sikernes in jupertie” (Book IV, 1511-12). In Book IV, when describing his sorrow, the expression ‘wood’ outweighs all other forms, with the synonyms ‘furie’ and ‘rage.’¹³ Then, alterningly, he tries to persuade himself not to grieve by considering his sorrow foolishness: “Conforte hym self and sein it was folie/So causeles swich drede forto drye” (Book V, 263-64). Thus, Troilus’ personality, his excesses, his stormy outbursts as well as his naiveté are all reflected by his relation to and tackling of ‘folie’.

The character of Criseyde is very complex,¹⁴ Saunders even claims that “She

¹³ “While Chaucer uses a familiar set of images, the physicality of his descriptions is extraordinary, particularly in Books IV and V, when Troilus is literally unmade by love. His suffering is characterized by swoons, frenetic madness, nightmares, (...) until finally he wastes away to a shadow of his former self.” SAUNDERS 2006, 140.

¹⁴ For the history of criticism about Criseyde’s character, see E. Talbot Donaldson “Criseyde and her Narrator” in Donaldson. *Speaking of Chaucer*. pp. 65-83; and “Briseis, Briseida, Criseyde, Cresseid: Progress of a Heroine.” in Edward Vasta and Zacharias P. Thundy. Eds.

represents the central enigma.”¹⁵ She is first depicted as being “out of her wit for sorwe and fere” (Book I, 110). Criseyde considers a surprising variety of things to be folly. These form the major events of her life described in the romance, for example, first, to put into jeopardy her free state of a widow, then not to consider the high birth of Troilus. Balancing whether she should accept Troilus’ love or not, a main argument of hers is this: “And ek I knowe, of longe tyme agon,/His thewes goode, and that he is nat nyce” (Book II, 722.23). Her hesitations and sudden changes of opinion are also well mirrored by her changing opinions as to what is foolish and what not. In Book IV, for example, she also lies in sorrow: “Ther as she lay in torment and in rage” (Book IV, 811), then, abruptly, a little later she persuades Troilus not to be sad about their separation, as sadness is foolish in that case: “And seketh nought how holpen forto be/It nys but folie and encesse of peyne” (Book IV, 1256-57). She encourages herself with in the same terms: “But certes, I am naught so nyce a wight/that I ne kan ymaginen a way/to come ageyn that day that I haue hight” (Book IV, 1625-1627.)

Although she is described as a fine, nice, educated lady, Criseyde’s rhetoric can similarly be characterised by the use of a surprisingly high number of utterances which may pass for swearing, most of them containing references to the loss or sustinance of her wit. In Book III she confirms her faithfulness in such terms, and in Book VI, she even swears by it: “As wood as Athhamante do me dwelle/Eternalich in Stix, the put of helle” (Book IV, 1539-40), and later she repeats her vow, with similar variations: “And while that God my wit wol me conserve,/ I shal so don” (1665-1666). The romance figure of the immaculate lady is rendered much more complex by Chaucer using this device, adding a really queer note to her personality, which is described already as ambiguous by a variety of other methods as well.

Norm Classen provides a very expressive characterization of Chaucer's love for ambiguities, to present a multi-faceted reality:

“The pattern of the opening stanza does not suggest that Chaucer negates straightforward statements, rather, (...) he suggests that concepts do not resolve into singularities. He discloses additional possibilities, deepens the

Chaucerian Problems and Perspectives: Essays presented to Paul E. Beichner C. S. C. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979, 3-12. From among influential later studies see Priscilla Martin. *Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives and Amazons*. Iowa City: University of Iowa: Press, 1990.; Jill Mann, *Geoffry Chaucer. Feminist Readings*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, etc.

¹⁵ SAUNDERS 2006, 139.

sense of a range of additional meanings and brings them into proximity with one another. The desire to provide guidance confronts and perhaps sublimates the reality of doubling, of intrication.”¹⁶

Chaucer’s characterisation of his heroes by their manoeuvring with folly has a stylistically grotesque content. The impertinence of their way of addressing by calling each other fools serves this same aim, enriching the characters with new, more bizarre traits, rendering them emphasizedly down-to-earth.

This ambiguity is the most expressed in the person of Pandarus. He is the one who bears the main artistic weight of what Chaucer could attain by his game with ‘fools’ and ‘foolishness’ in the *Troilus*. His complex and ambiguous character leaves space for a similarly complex and intricate construction of a new treatment of the configuration of fools, the wise, and their combinations.

Pandarus is first of all qualified by his rhetorical art. He is the Great Speaker, the man of words and persuasion, which tends to turn into manipulation. In Book II, lines 57-60, his first characterization can be found formulated along these same lines: “That Pandarus, for al his wise speche,/ffelt ek his parte of loues shotes keene,/That koude he neuere so wel of louyng preche,/It made his hewe a-day ful ofte greene.”

Chaucer’s love for ambiguities also gains space in his treatment of the counterpoints wise versus fool. Although these are rather stereotyped in contemporary texts, in *Troilus* they gain new forms and content. Pandarus is the person who displays his rhetorical art by playing around with these in new and effective ways. In other texts, a great majority of cases are those, where the mentioning of fools appears in relation to vices and virtues, (vice being foolishness, virtue wisdom), in general in proverbial form, or taken from authoritative texts or wisdom-literature, as e.g. Salamon’s (in a great number in the *Canterbury Tales*). The fools versus the wise setting is also recurrent. Pandarus elevates this dichotomy to semantically stylistically intrinsic and complex formulations, as he uses it as a main means of persuasion. Pandarus manipulates both *Troilus* and *Criseyde*. He asks *Troilus* not to boast, complimenting him: “syn ye be wys,” (Book III, 266); and goes on in the same way: “ze ben to wys to doon so gret folie/ To putte his lif al nyght in iupertie” (Book III, 867-68). Somewhat later, Pandarus encourages him to write the letter to *Criseyde*: “Thou art wys ynough” (Book III, 1221). He even uses his forceful argument for both characters: “and ye ben both wise” (Book III, 942), and also “syn ye be wise and bothe of oon assent” (Book IV, 932-33). This line also contains a strong element of moral

¹⁶ “Tragedy and Romance in Chaucer’s ‘Litel Bok’ of *Troilus and Criseyde*”, In SAUNDERS 2006, 156-177, 159.

value, the essence of wisdom being virtue, and that of mutual consent, love. It is followed by a less forceful but more practical use of the compliment of wisdom: “Wommen ben wise in short avysemēt” (936), used ironically, which betrays what he really thinks of the real state of affairs.

He also manipulates using the opposite manoeuvre, accusing his ‘victims,’ both Troilus and Criseyde, of being fools, or condemning their foolishness: “Lat be 3oure nyce shame and 3oure folie, ...Lat nycete nat do 3ow both smerte.” (Book II, 1285-87); and again he condemns Criseyde’s “nyce opinioun”, then scolds Troilus: “Lat nought for nyce shame or drede or slouthe” (Book II, 1500); then warns him quite bluntly: “Now thynk nat so, for thow dost gret folie” (Book II, 1510); some lines later again: “Naught oonly this delay comth of folie” (Book III, 879). The list could be extended.

The process of persuasion by the recurrent sequence of “ye be a fool, ye be wise” is sometimes used simultaneously in one strophe or close strophes, visibly not causing any disturbance or perplexity to those addressed by its illogical nature. This may suggest that the logical discrepancy exists to a modern mind, but was of no consequence for the medieval one.

The madness-wisdom duality is thus present in almost all crucial moments, in the great scenes. The expressions appear alone or in a bunch, in one or more consecutive strophes, as an interesting phenomenon. These blocks represent either a game with variations or a probable weakness of the poet to produce new ways of expression, as if loaded by the requirements of so long a work (comma) he could not withstand the mental urge to repeat the same rhyme-constructions.¹⁷ However, real masterpieces of art are produced in the great scenes in series of strophes created with a nicely woven structure of the wise-fool counterpoints. Furthermore the image when Pandarus attempts to present his view of Troilus while trying to attain his goal is artfully rendered in one strophe of intricate twists of being-but seemingly not being wise or foolish, a masterpiece of Pandarus, and naturally, of Chaucer’s art. It is the scene when Pandarus warns Troilus not to boast foolishly with his victory and thus cause harm to Criseyde: “through fals and fooles bost” (Book III, 298):

¹⁷ See for example in Book IV, 353-357: “And Pandare, that ful tendreliche wepte,/In-to the derke chambre, as stille as ston,/Toward the bed gan softly to gon,/So confus that he nyste what to seye --/ffor verray wo his wit was neigh aweye.” This is followed by “The kyng with othere lordes for the beste/Hath made eschaunge of Antenor and 3ow,/That cause is of this sorwe and this vnreste./But how this cas dooth Troilus moleste,/That may non erthely mannes tonge seye;/ffor verray wo his wit is al aweye.” (Book IV, 876-882), etc.

I say nought this for no mistrust of 3ow,
 Ne for no wise men, but for foles nyce,
 And for the harm that in the werld is now,
 As wel for folie ofte as for malice,
 Ffor wel woot I, in wise folk that vice
 No womman drat, if she ben wel auised,
 for wyse ben by foles harm chastised” (Book III, 325);

the end of which is again the manipulative formula of complimenting: “thow art wys, and save alwey hir name” (266).

Pandarus’s inner transformation is also witnessed by and expressed in such terms. After his ambiguous-dubious role as a friend or go-between for Troilus, where his attitude and involvement is not satisfyingly clarified by Chaucer, a moment arrives when Pandarus’s compassion for Troilus seems to become real. After hearing the decision of the City Council to exchange Criseyde for Antenor, Pandarus is described as “Gan neigh wood out of his wit to breyde” (Book IV, 348). Then later, which is even more persuasive of the veracity of his feelings, we read: “And Pandare, that ful tendreliche wepte,/In-to the derke chambre, as stille as ston,/Toward the bed gan softly to gon,/So confus that he nyste what to seye /ffor verray wo his wit was neigh aweye.” (Book IV, 353-357). Pandarus, the great master of speech and rhetoric, becoming silent, loosing the aid of his ready wit, is an image of real dramatic power.

The true identity of the Fool

Pandarus, again to serve his manipulations, quotes the case when the fool re-proofs a haughty lady not to forget that she will be soon old and should make good use of her youth. “The Kynges fool is wont to crien loude” (Book II, 400). This fool is quoted as someone who speaks words of wisdom; and his true qualification and name would rather be that of another fool in Hoccleve’s *Regement for Henry V*, that is, he is a fool-sage: “Now stood a fool sage at the kyng byside” (line 3145). In *Confessio Amantis*, the king’s fool appears in *The Tale of the Travelers and the Angel*:

The king therof merveille hadde,
 Whan that a *fol so wisly spak*,
 And of himself fond out the lack
 Withinne his oghne conscience:
 And thus *the foles* evidence,
 Which was of goddes grace enspired,

Makth that good conseil was desired.
 He putte away the vicious
 And tok to him the vertuous... (Book 7, 3998-4006).

The wisdom of the King's fool becomes apparent and causes the king to turn good. In Chaucer's "Tale of Melibee", the fool argues that the grief of the father is a foolish excess, and against his folly he places the wisdom of Salomon.¹⁸ Analysing *The Book of the Duchess*, Zimbaro states: "My argument is, that here Chaucer deliberately assumes the identity of the fool and offers to his lord folly's redemption from soul-destroying grief."¹⁹ The same duo of the fool and the King is rephrased in the *Troilus*, where Chaucer formulates in the preson of Pandarus a new version of the fool-sage. The medieval fool was often "a learned Latinist and skillful improviser of poetry,"²⁰ and Zimbaro even adds that "throughout the tradition there are close links between the court fool and the court poet. A major office of the fool was to engage in witty verbal exchange with his lord."²¹ It is not surprising, then, that Chaucer gives this role to the knowledgeable Pandarus, the Great Rhetorician.²² Pandarus, again with penetrating irony, marks the role of the Fool-sage, which he has conscienciously taken up: "Thus often wise men ben war by foolys./If thow do so, thi wit is wel bewared;/By his contrarie is euery thyng declared." (Book I, 635-637). And also "Though I be nyce, it happeth often so/That oon that excesse doth ful yuele fare/By good counseil kan kepe his frend ther-fro./ I haue my self ek seyn a blynd man goo/Ther as he fel that couthe loken wide;/A fool may ek a wis man ofte gide." (Book I, 625-630) Pandarus assures Troilus: "I woot well that thow wiser art than I/A thousand fold," (Book II, 1002), and falls out of his role only rarely, when the situation requires so: "Why, don this furred cloke vp-on thy sherte,/ And folwe me, for I wol haue the wite" (Book III, 738-39).

He also assumes the same role before strangers, that is before Elene and Deiphebus: "Now loketh Ye—for I wol haue no wite," (Book II, 1648). He plays the fool, who entertrains, even for Criseyde, to help her finally read

¹⁸ See the legend of King Salomon and Marcolf the Fool: "Sometimes Marcolf parodies, or gives a coarse version of, or exposes some flaw in, the King's wisdom, sometimes they both simply cap one another's proverbs." WELSFORD 1935, 35.

¹⁹ ZIMBARO 1984, 329.

²⁰ WELSFORD 1935, 23.

²¹ ZIMBARO 1984 333.

²² D. J. Gifford makes a very interesting observation that in the earliest illuminations the fool is dressed in a long white gown that has associations both with madmen and with scholars. See D. J. Gifford. "Iconographic Notes toward a definition of the Medieval Fool." *The Fool and the Trickster: Studies in Honor of Enid Welford*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979.

Troilus's letter: "Nece, I haue so grete a pyne/ffor loue that euerich other day I faste,/And gan his beste iapes forth to caste,/And made hire so to laughe at his folye,/That she for laughter wende for to dye." (Book II, 1165-69).

The dichotomy of the fool-sage is present everywhere in the great games of persuasion of Pandarus, using the configuration of the King and his foolish/wise counselor, where Troilus is the King, (he was in fact the son of the king), himself the fool/sage, but Chaucer, as Pandarus's character is really ambiguous, subverts the typical and traditional setting and image here as well. The Fool, (Pandarus), notwithstanding his real qualities as an eloquent and witty rhetorician, and success in his manipulations, is in reality not *that* sage (wise), and the King, (that is Troilus), is not *that* foolish, as he deserves real empathy experiencing real sufferings. What is more, Troilus will acquire genuine, divine wisdom in Heaven, but not due to his Fool-sage's intervention, rather against it. Thus Chaucer succeeded again in applying a new twist to the stereotyped figure of the King/Fool, deepening and enriching the depiction of a genuinely ambiguous reality.

Thus ambiguity permeates the whole poem, and is a quality Fortuna, who shapes the destiny of humans, plays with making them partake in both poles of felicity-unhappiness. Zimbaro, writing about the role Fortuna plays in *The Book of the Duchess*, states: "The fool does this by refusing to recognise the lines of demarcation which reason has set. If, he argues, as philosophy proposes, the game of life is a game of chess with Fortune, then all of life has no more validity than a game."²³ In the *Troilus* as well, Fortuna is The Great Deceiver, making humans mistake the true nature of their moments in life, thus fooling them: "...ythonked be Fortune,/ That semeth trewest whan she wol bygyle/ And kan to fooles so hire song entune" (Book IV, 2-4), here Chaucer identifies all living creatures as fools. The Narrator, or Chaucer, expresses the same view in the passages inserted into the text again and again: "O nyce world, lo thy discrecioun!" (Book IV, 206).

Chaucer openly writes about how he perceived and intended his *Troilus* to vacillate constantly between Game and Earnest: "That is to seye, for the am I bicomen,/ Bitwixen game and ernest, swich a meene" (Book III, 253-54). It seems that in the inner textual structure, the insolence of the forms of addressing, the extensive use of understatements, the manoeuvres with fool and folly all serve the hidden mockery Chaucer intends to build up behind the appearance of the seriousness of the scenes. The genre itself is thus conscientiously re-formed in such a way that *Troilus* is simultaneously a real tragic romance and its own

²³ ZIMBARDO 1984, 341.

parody.²⁴ “The pattern of retreat into self-parody”²⁵ recurs throughout the oeuvre of Chaucer. In *Troilus*, a nice example can be found in the Proheme to Book II, where the speech of old times is defined as “nyce and straunge”: “3e knowe ek that in fourme of speche is chaunge/With-inne a thousand 3eer, and wordes tho/That hadden pris now wonder nyce and straunge/Us thenketh hem, and 3et thei spake hem so,/And spedde as wel in loue as men now do,/Ek forto wynnen loue in sondry ages,/In sondry londes, sondry ben vsages.” (Book II, 22-28). Chaucer here seems to plead, in a subtle way, for the acceptance of his text, admitting, and asking for understanding and forbearance for his “nyce” words and “straunge” depiction of love.

Conclusions

Considering the multiple layering of register and signification this artfully written poem displays, the frequent occurrence of the “fool” or “folie” strenghtens this complexity by its stylistic force, in certain scenes also referring to other possibilities of decoding the meaning of the lines: that is, to the possibility of mockery, of understatement. In the stereotyped scenes of the pain of love it serves the stylistic form of exaggeration. However, forms of address such as “Thou fool” mainly help Chaucer’s rewriting of the traditional pathos of the genre, of the Tragedy, the same way as he re-forms the image of the poet himself in *The Legend of Good Women* when the heavy weight of the poet burdens the majestic eagle to the point of complaining, thus pulling the elevated scene-together with the elevated eagle- down to earth. Fools and folly enable Chaucer to create a unique, real complexity in characterization and depiction. The presence of folly weaves through the whole structure of the work, at times displayed at length in newly formed expositions of the scenes of love, at times peering through the fabric of the text, just as the King’s jester, who is not taken seriously, is allowed to whisper or cry out about the unutterable state of things, here the unutterable opinions of the characters of the poem, or maybe of Chaucer himself.

²⁴ On game and earnest of Chaucer Dieter Mehl states: “Chaucer’s narrative technique is playfully experimental rather than neatly consistent, alerting the reader to the possibility of subversive irony and teasing him into imaginative mental cooperation.” MEHL 1986, 224.

²⁵ WALLACE 1986, 19-39.

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