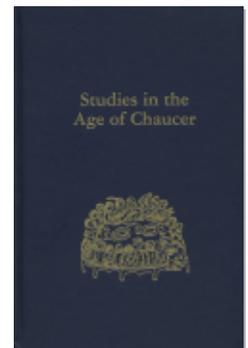Dictators of Venus: Clerical Love Letters and Female
Subjection in *Troilus and Criseyde* and *the Rota Veneris*

Jonathan M. Newman

Dictators of Venus: Clerical Love Letters and Female Subjection in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Rota Veneris*

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Introduction: Pandarus and the Pragmatics of Love

THE CONSCIOUS ATTENTION TO the rhetoric of seduction in *Troilus and Criseyde* puts it in a tradition of erotodidactic literature going back at least as far as Ovid's amatory poetry.[1] Medieval texts such as the *Facetus*, Andreas Capellanus's *De amore*, and parts of the *Roman de la rose* teach an Ovidian rhetoric of seduction described as *praeludia* to physical acts of love.[2] *Troilus and Criseyde* can itself be described as an *ars amandi*, and was treated as such well into the sixteenth century.[3] Unlike its predecessors, *Troilus and Criseyde* sets this erotodidactic tradition in a more serious fictional world by personifying that tradition in the voluble Pan-

[1] Written in Rome around 2 CE, the *Ars amatoria* is a playful handbook of seduction written in elegiac couplets. Learned, complex, and sophisticated, it offers its reader a cynical and pragmatic take on the conduct of love affairs among urban Roman men and women in the Augustan age.

[2] Andreas Capellanus, *De amore* (*On Love*, ed. and trans. P. G. Walsh [London: Duckworth, 1982]), 1.5.543. All citations and translations of *De amore* (unless otherwise noted) are from Walsh's edition, hereafter abbreviated to *DA*, and cited by book, section, and paragraph number.

[3] Martin Camargo, *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1991), 85. See also Seth Lerer, who views its reception as an art of love in concert with its reception as a conduct and strategy guide for courtiers, in *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII: Literary Culture and the Arts of Deceit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

darus against the backdrop of the Trojan War. As the point of entry for Ovidian erotics into the narrative, Pandarus operates ''in a naturalistic world where speech is action,'' fashioning the love-discourse between Troilus and Criseyde.[4] He takes Troilus's desire and Criseyde's resistance and gives them an Ovidian script.[5] The script also gives Pandarus the part of ''go-between'' played in the style of the Ovidian *praeceptor amoris*, a role that medieval clerics reformulated in terms of a third role, the master of rhetoric.[6]

Throughout the central and later Middle Ages, a master of rhetoric was a master of letter-writing. Letters are central to *Troilus and Criseyde* as they were to the literary, political, and cultural activity of the later Middle Ages.[7] Pandarus exercises coercive power through his three congruent roles: Ovidian seduction-teacher; comic go-between; and *dictator*, the professional letter-writer and master of the *ars dictaminis*.[8]

[4] Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 145; John Fyler argues the obverse—that Pandarus's mediation between language and reality would dissolve the real world into the artifice of poetry. John M. Fyler, ''The Fabrications of Pandarus,'' *MLQ* 41, no. 2 (1980): 115–30.

[5] Michael A. Calabrese, *Chaucer's Ovidian Arts of Love* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 33–80. For a more recent study on Ovid and Pandarus, see Colin Fewer, ''The Second Nature: *Habitus* as Ideology in the *Ars amatoria* and *Troilus and Criseyde*,'' *Exemplaria* 20, no. 3 (2008): 314–39.

[6] ''Ego sum praeceptor amoris.'' *Ars amatoria*, 1.17; citations and translations of *Ars amatoria* (hereafter abbreviated *Ars*) are from *Ovid: The Art of Love and Other Poems*, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. J. H. Mozley, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929). To Gretchen Mieszkowski, Pandarus is already a composite of two traditions of go-betweens, those who inhabit ''idealized stories concerning emotions and loving relations,'' and those who inhabit ''stories of love and conquest . . . about sex.'' *Medieval Go-Betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 135. On Andreas as a cleric and rhetorician see Albrecht Classen, ''Epistemology at the Courts: The Discussion of Love by Andreas Capellanus and Juan Ruiz,'' *NM* 103, no. 3 (2002): 341–62; Peter Dronke, ''Andreas Capellanus,'' *Journal of Medieval Latin* 4 (1994): 51–63; and Don A. Monson, ''Andreas Capellanus and Reception Theory: The Third Dialogue,'' *M&H* 31 (2005): 1–13. On the figuration of Ovid's *praeceptor* in *Roman de la rose*, see Peter Allen, *The Art of Love: Amatory Fiction from Ovid to the "Romance of the Rose"* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 80–109.

[7] Studies connecting letter-writing in *Troilus and Criseyde* to formal epistolary practice in the Middle Ages have been few but valuable: John McKinnell, ''Letters as a Type of the Formal Level in *Troilus and Criseyde*,'' in *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Mary Salu (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), 73–89; Martin Camargo, ''Where's the Brief?: The *ars dictaminis* and Reading/Writing between the Lines,'' *Disputatio: An International Transdisciplinary Journal of the Late Middle Ages* 1 (1996): 1–17, and Camargo more extensively in *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle*; Lerer, *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII*.

[8] Kathleen A. Bishop discusses the background of the go-between role in Latin comedy in ''The Influence of Plautus and Elegiac Comedy on Chaucer's Fabliaux,'' *ChauR*

Martin Camargo describes the extensive mediation performed by the scribe in the process of both composing and receiving letters:

Since the style and structure of medieval letters were highly conventional, a large part of their composition was . . . typically entrusted to a trained professional, who might but need not also serve as scribe. The "author" would first summarize what the letter should say; then the secretary or notary would reshape this oral précis so that the desired message was arranged in the standard sequence of clearly articulated parts . . . a similar process occurred when the letter reached its destination. The private reading of a written text was not the normal mode of reception for medieval letters. More typically, the letter would have been read in public, by the bearer if he were literate, or by some other mediator. And in many cases the bearer was expected to elaborate on the letter's contents, to respond to questions about them, or to supplement them with confidential information delivered (orally) in private.[9]

Pandarus performs all of these mediating tasks as he generates and shapes communication between Troilus and Criseyde.[10] As scribe and *dictator*, Pandarus uses his learned formulas to provide form, content, and motive to their letters. The roles played by Troilus and Criseyde are intersected by two authoritative clerical discourses: the art of love and the art of letter-writing.

These two protocols are also combined in the *De amore* of Andreas Capellanus (c. 1190), perhaps the most famous instance of medieval erotodidacticism. Andreas anticipates Pandarus in combining the Ovidian love tutor with the medieval social role of the clerical courtier. *De amore*'s scholastic prose is quite different from the urbane elegiacs of the *Ars amatoria*. Ovid's use of the term *praeceptor* smacks of ironic self-aggrandizement, but Andreas plays his pedagogical role straight, declaring honesty of character (*morum probitate*) and eloquence central to winning love—two attributes, of course, that fall squarely within clerical domains of expertise.[11] The *De amore* also reflects clerical expertise in the

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35, no. 3 (2001): 294–317. On the *dictator* as a stable social and professional role in the Middle Ages, see Ronald Witt, "Medieval 'ars dictaminis' and the Beginnings of Humanism: A New Construction of the Problem," *RenQ* 35, no. 1 (1982): 1–35.

[9] Camargo, "Where's the Brief?," 4.

[10] "It is Pandarus who advises Troilus to write Criseyde a letter, and Pandarus's elaborate directions regarding its contents suggest that he is dictating its words to Troilus rather than vice versa"; ibid., 12.

[11] For detailed comparison of the two texts, see Chapter 2 of Allen, *The Art of Love*, 59–78; John Scattergood, "The Unequal Scales of Love: Love and Social Class in Andreas Capellanus's *De amore* and Some Later Texts," in *Writings on Love in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Helen Cooney (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 63–79 (65).

ars dictaminis: its "didactic preface [is] modeled after a letter to a student," and the individual speeches in its specimen dialogues are constructed in the dictaminal order.[12] Its model dialogues are grouped by social class in a way that reflects the organization of *artes dictandi*.[13] It features two fully elaborated letters in the dictaminal style.[14] The marks of the *ars dictaminis* on *De amore* are unsurprising; both issue from the great increase in education, textual production, and bureaucratic complexity in full swing at the turn of the thirteenth century. The *ars dictaminis* touched on all these developments; by playing the Ovidian *praeceptor amoris*, Andreas got the chance to demonstrate his facility with *dictamen* and other clerical discourses such as disputation.

The Ovid of the *Ars* and the *Remedia amoris* was thus reimagined by medieval clerics as one of them. Andreas's adaptation of the *Ars*'s cynical attitude to the intellectual methods and textual procedures of his own day contributes to the medieval conception of Ovid as the clerk of Venus; Pandarus belongs to this tradition.[15] An emblematic if lesser-

[12] Monson, "Andreas Capellanus and Reception Theory," 4; Classen, "Epistemology at the Courts," 359; Antonio Cortijo-Ocaña, "Introducción," in *Boncompagno: "El tratado del amor carnal"; o, "Rueda de Venus." Motivos literarios en la tradición sentimental y celestinesca (ss. XIII–XV)*, ed. with Spanish translation Cortijo-Ocaña (Pamplona: Ediciones de Universidad de Navarra, 2002), 24.

[13] Treatises on *ars dictaminis* talked so extensively about the alignment of social and linguistic order that Giles Constable describes them as constituting a first-order descriptive sociology in "The Structure of Medieval Society according to the *Dictatores* of the Twelfth Century," in *Law, Church, and Society: Essays in Honor of Stephan Kuttner*, ed. Kenneth Pennington and Robert Somerville (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 253–67.

[14] In a metafictional moment, the *homo nobilior* and *mulier nobilis* first appeal to the authority of Andreas the chaplain, and then refer their disputation to the judgment of the countess of Champagne (*DA*, 1.6.389–94). Their letter and the countess's response meet all the formal requirements of the dictaminal letter, and also show the dramatic potential of letters in comparison to the abstract pseudo-philosophical dialogues of *DA*, 1.6.

[15] Ovid's own poetry is steeped in the learning of his day, making this appropriation more possible. Alessandro Schiesaro, "Ovid and the Professional Discourses of Scholarship, Religion, and Rhetoric," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip R. Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 62–78. Based on a passage in *Troilus and Criseyde* in which Criseyde rails against those who view jealousy as the essence of love (*TC*, III.1023–29), Dronke suggests that Chaucer read Capellanus: "The perverse thesis—jealousy is love—is unusual enough in this categorical form for me to think that Chaucer had Andreas in mind; and Criseyde (or Chaucer through her) sees straight to the dishonest, equivocal, even ugly quality that lurks within Andreas's view"; "Andreas Capellanus," 62. At the very least, Pandarus, who is attempting to deploy this view of jealousy as love in the course of Criseyde's seduction, is Chaucer's characterization of a cynical tradition of clerical love-discourse that includes *De amore*. All Chaucerian references are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

known specimen of this tradition of clerical erotodidacticism is the *Tractatus amoris carnalis Rota Veneris nuncupatus* (or *Rota Veneris*) written by the thirteenth-century Tuscan rhetoric master Boncompagno da Signa.[16] This text is ostensibly an instruction manual for writers of love letters, and its combination of erotodidactic literature with the textual protocols of clerical work culture provides an unexplored perspective on the moral dimensions of love narrative in *Troilus and Criseyde*. It specifically sheds light on how Criseyde is constructed as the love-object and hidden subject of the erotodidactic tradition.

Epistolary Erotodidacticism and the *Rota Veneris* of Boncompagno da Signa

Boncompagno da Signa's *Rota Veneris* presents itself to the reader as a letter-writing handbook, offering precepts and models, but unlike other *artes dictandi*, treats love letters exclusively.[17] These letters form narrative sequences, so the *Rota*'s *dictator* is also a narrator who resembles Pandarus (and the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*) in several ways this essay will explore. The love affairs composed by Boncompagno escape His control and generate consequences that Ovidian erotics cannot anticipate. The *Rota Veneris* and *Troilus and Criseyde* both prompt their readers to meditate on the capacity of the love letter to generate voices—textual subjects—that overpower the controlling desire of the *dictator* or *praeceptor*. Both Boncompagno and Pandarus implicate Chaucer's narrator in a tradition of writing about love that represents women as objectives. Reading these texts together suggests an authorial ambivalence— Chaucer simultaneously rejects and adopts the role of Ovidian cleric— that complicates too pat an understanding of *Troilus and Criseyde* as illustrating, through Troilus's double sorrow, a double flight from

[16] Based on *De amore*'s stylistic features, internal references, textual history, and references to it in other texts, Dronke argues that "Andreas the chaplain" is a literary persona, the court of Marie de Champagne is a fictional setting, and the actual context of production and reception was among arts students at Paris in the 1230s. If this is true, that would mean that *De amore* was written after the *Rota Veneris* of Boncompagno da Signa. Dronke, "Andreas Capellanus," 56.

[17] Camargo offers the following distinctions in terminology when discussing the field of the medieval *ars dictaminis*: *dictamen* refers to prose composition; *ars dictaminis* is the discipline that cultivates the study of prose composition; *ars dictandi* is a specific work treating the *ars dictaminis*; a *dictator* is a teacher of the *ars dictaminis*, a clerical functionary in charge of composing letters, or both. Martin Camargo, *Ars dictaminis, ars dictandi* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), 17–19.

earthly to heavenly love, from the narrow perspective of Ovid to the wider perspective of Boethius.[18]

A brief look at Boncompagno's career will give a more precise idea of what I mean by "clerical." He was born in 1170 in the village of Signa outside Florence; was educated in grammar, rhetoric, and law at Florence and then Bologna; and joined the faculty at Bologna around 1190 as its first doctor of the *ars dictaminis*.[19] Bologna had long been a center for the study of *dictamen*; at least ten *artes dictandi* came out of Bologna in the first half of the twelfth century.[20] After the 1150s, the *ars dictaminis* came to France, Germany, and England, and "the literary classicism of late twelfth-century France left its marks in the elaborate style of French letters and dictaminal practice."[21] In Bologna, however, it remained "a practical art, 'the business program in the medieval university,'" flourishing alongside the notarial arts.[22] Boncompagno and other Italian *dictatores* did not enter religious orders; to speak of his discourse and training as "clerical" is to indicate the word's technical rather than religious aspect.[23] Technical prowess elevated Boncompagno to prominence in Bologna. He claims he was popular with students, but not so much with colleagues, who falsely accused him of fraud (out of envy, naturally) in order to drive him from Bologna at the height of his career.[24] After a

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[18] See Calabrese, *Chaucer's Ovidian Arts of Love*, 71–80.

[19] Josef Purkart, "Boncompagno of Signa and the Rhetoric of Love," in *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric*, ed. James Murphy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 320.

[20] Robert L. Benson, "Protohumanism and Narrative Technique in Early Thirteenth-Century Italian 'Ars dictaminis,'" in *Boccaccio: Secoli di vita. Atti del Congresso Internazionale Boccaccio 1975, Università di California, Los Angeles, 17–19 ottobre 1975*, ed. Marga Cottino-Jones and Edward F. Tuttle (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), 32.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid. The cited text is Louis J. Paetow, *The Arts Course at Medieval Universities, with Special Reference to Grammar and Rhetoric* (Urbana-Champaign: University Press of Illinois, 1910), 67. In a similar vein, Witt remarks that "the close alliance between rhetoric and the notarial art brought into being the *dictator*, who either taught the technique of writing prose or, himself the product of such a discipline, had a career as a chancery official where he utilized those skills"; "Medieval 'ars dictaminis,'" 25.

[23] On *clericus* as denoting a professional competence rather than a pastoral role, see M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), 179. The *dictator* of medieval Italy was often a civic functionary presiding over the production and disposition of documents whose elaborate formal requirements necessitated a class of experts. Witt, "Medieval 'ars dictaminis,'" 4–6. Legal deeds, for example, were technically letters, and shared certain compulsory features with letters expressing diplomatic overtures, anathema, affection, requests for money, spiritual counsel, or intellectual exchange; Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), 20–25; 31–38.

[24] Josef Purkart, "Introduction," in Boncompagno da Signa, *Rota Veneris: A Facsimile Reproduction of the Strasburg Incunabulum*, trans. Purkart (Delmar, N.Y.: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1975), 14.

period (1204–15) serving at the court of Wolfger of Erla, patriarch of Aquileia, Boncompagno returned to Bologna where he long remained.[25] He later applied to work in the papal curia, but was rejected and died alone and poor in a Florentine hospital in 1240 at the age of seventy.[26]

Boncompagno was a preeminent master of the *ars dictaminis* at a time when the practice and teaching of that art were undergoing a "rapid and massive change," a "proto-humanistic" moment that combined renewed interest in rhetoric for its own sake, an active civic culture, and a self-regarding community of scholars competing for prestige and lucrative posts.[27] Rather than a flash of accidental precocity anticipating actual (as opposed to "proto-") humanism, the rhetorical culture of Boncompagno's Tuscany consolidated the preceding century's achievements in producing, organizing, and interpreting texts, and also transformed these achievements into the basis of a competitive culture of performance. Men trained at elite institutions in Paris, Orléans, and Bologna identified with a burgeoning transnational work culture, confident in and proud of their professional expertise.[28] Boncompagno earned celebrity among such men by the virtuosity of his fifteen works, including *artes dictandi*, Ciceronian meditations on friendship and old age, and a history of the siege of Ancona in 1172.[29] His most popular work, the *Rhetorica antiqua sive Boncompagnus*, survives in eighteen known manuscripts, followed by the *Rota Veneris*, which survives in eight manuscripts and an incunabulum printed in Strasburg around 1473.[30]

The *Rota Veneris*, an amatory adaptation of the dictaminal treatise, is a learned *jeu d'esprit* produced for and by this clerical work culture, and demonstrates that culture's fascination with its own intellectual meth-

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[25] Wolfger "was not only known as a generous supporter, host, and patron of *ioculatores*, *histriones*, *mimi*, and *cantores*, but also held a most important office as emissary and negotiator used by the Empire and Papacy." He is also a documented patron and benefactor of Walther von der Vogelweide; ibid., 26.

[26] Purkart, "Boncompagno of Signa and the Rhetoric of Love," 320. Perhaps his professional troubles had to do with his personality—the Franciscan chronicler Salimbene described him as a *ioculator* and as the greatest trickster of the Florentines; Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS 32 (Hanover: Hahn, 1913), 77: "more Florentinorum trufator maximus." Cited in Purkart, "Introduction," 28.

[27] Benson, "Protohumanism," 35.

[28] See John D. Cotts, *The Clerical Dilemma: Peter of Blois and Literate Culture in the Twelfth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), esp. 4–12.

[29] Purkart, "Introduction," 12–13.

[30] This incunabulum is available in facsimile with English translation by Josef Purkart. See note 24.

ods. At a little over 5,000 words, it is relatively short. Its incunabular printing takes up eighteen pages and some manuscript versions fill only three folios.[31] Though brief, it is dense and intricate, at once *ars amandi*, *ars dictandi*, and dream-vision. It begins with the narrator wandering in a *locus amoenus*; Venus appears (whom the narrator first mistakes for a virgin!) to ask him why he has not written a book of "salutaciones et delectabilia dictamina . . . que viderentur ad usum amancium pertinere" ("salutations and delightful prose . . . which might seem to pertain to the use of lovers").[32] Boncompagno assents, providing advice for writing love letters with examples linked in several narrative sequences. Near the end, Venus returns to bless his efforts and commend them to all women; he in turn briefly holds forth on the gestural vocabulary of lovers and concludes with a disclaimer: the Fathers of the Church taught the faithful to read the Canticle for the edification of the spirit rather than the lasciviousness of the flesh (*RV*, 16.7).[33]

After Venus's initial appearance, Boncompagno describes salutations and exordia suitable to achieve *captatio benevolentiae* in love letters.[34] The *ars dictaminis* was preoccupied with this goal; the precise arrangement of formulaic salutations by rank of sender and recipient in *artes dictandi* was designed to achieve this.[35] Boncompagno, on the other hand, writes, "Ceterum si vellem secundum uniuscumque vitam et conditionem genera ponere narrationum, primo deficeret tempus quam sermo" (*RV*, 3.1)

[31] Cortijo-Ocaña, "Introducción," 62–65.

[32] Boncompagno da Signa, *Rota Veneris*, 1.1. Citations of the Latin text of the *Rota Veneris* (hereafter abbreviated *RV* and cited parenthetically) are by section and page number according to the edition in *El tratado del amor carnal*, ed. Cortijo-Ocaña. The MGH edition by Friedrich Baethgen is available online at *Medieval Diplomatic and the 'ars dictandi,'* ed. Stephen M. Wight, available at http://scrineum.unipv.it/wight/index.htm (accessed July 30, 2014). English translations, unless otherwise noted, are from Josef Purkart's 1975 translation (see note 24).

[33] Purkart, "Boncompagno of Signa and the Rhetoric of Love," 320. The brevity of this animadversion suggests a subtle mockery of such self-exculpating clauses as those found in *De amore*. As Alfred Karnein states, the *Rota Veneris*, like *De amore*, may have its origins in a serious clerical struggle against courtly and chivalric ideas about women and erotic love, but it does not follow that these texts endorse rigoristic views of sexuality; "Andreas, Boncompagno, und andere," in *Mittelalterbilder aus neuer Perspektive: Diskussionsanstösse in der Dichtung und Strategien des Erzählens. Kolloquium Würzburg, 1984*, ed. Rudolf Behrens and Ernstpeter Ruhe (Munich: W. Fink, 1985), 31–42. John P. Hermann discusses the apposition of Boncompagno's treatment of gestures to the ambivalent significations of the lovers' gesture in *Troilus and Criseyde*; "Gesture and Seduction in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *SAC*, 7 (1985): 107–35.

[34] I call the narrator Boncompagno; he is addressed by Venus as a writer of rhetorical handbooks, and names himself author at the work's conclusion (*RV*, 16.7).

[35] Camargo, *Ars dictaminis, Ars dictandi*, 22.

("If I wished to enumerate the varieties of content in accordance with each and everyone's life and condition, time would run out before I would run out of words"). He instead organizes models according to two temporalities, *ante* and *post factum*, before and after seduction (*RV*, 3.3). The section on letters written *ante factum* begins with a comprehensive list of appropriate metaphors for compliments (*RV*, 4). These are put to use in the first series, narrating a love affair that culminates in a lady's inviting her lover to meet secretly in a walled garden through the maneuvering of a go-between (*RV*, 7.3). This narrative combines elements of elegiac comedy, romance, and fabliau.[36] Its rich imagery and elaborate codes belong to romance, but an Ovidian (and comic) naturalism undercuts the lovers' sublime words, as does the dictator's wry commentary: "Consueverunt autem amantes ad maiorem delectationem dicere se vidisse per somnium quod fecerunt" (*RV*, 7.4) ("Lovers, moreover, have, to their greatest delight, been wont to say that they have witnessed in a dream what they have done").[37] In their *post factum* exchange of letters, playfully exultant in tone, the man writes that he had a dream about entering the lady's chamber; she invites him to visit again so she can help him to interpret it (*RV*, 7.5, 7.6). This playful conclusion gives way to a series of contingent possibilities—distance, parental prohibition, relegation to a convent, etc.—that frustrate and defy lovers (*RV*, 8.1–14.2). This arc of contingencies descends through various catastrophes to bottom out with satiric portraits of grotesque lovers (*RV*, 14.2).[38]

In the next section, I will examine those elements of clerical Ovidianism found in the *Rota* that also inform Chaucer's portrayal of Pandarus. Both refract the Ovidian rhetoric of seduction through dictaminal practice, and thus make that practice an instrument for female subjection, and make its intellectual techniques continuous with violence. The *Rota* and *Troilus* share these features with other medieval erotodidactic

[36] Cortijo-Ocaña, "Introducción," 15–24.

[37] *RV*, 7.4. In *De amore*, the women are often the stewards of Ovid's naturalistic frankness. In one *demande d'amour* (1.6.538) a man is asked whether he would prefer a woman's lower or upper half if he had to choose. He high-mindedly claims he would take the upper part, for it is a woman's discourse that elevates a man. The woman tells him he is a mistaken fool; no man would take any interest in a woman's upper half if not for the lower.

[38] These fall under two chapter headings: "Suasio pro muliere propter abundanciam diviciarum" and "Dissuasio contra virum propter senectutem." The prose under these headings integrates traditional satirical topoi with rhetorical school exercises; on the lineage of these portraits, see Cortijo-Ocaña, "Introducción," 26–27.

texts—Marilynn Desmond has argued that eroticized violence is an elementary part of Ovidian erotics—but the two have in common a trait they uniquely share, a narrative chaos generated by the ontology of the letter as a material form, and by resistance to the clerical *dictator*'s control that the material form gives to female voices and women's self-narration.[39]

Clerical Work Culture, Masculine Performance, and Female Subjection

Boncompagno enmeshes erotic discourse with the intellectual procedures of his professional life. He explains that the occupations of lovers—except knights, who are permitted the love of women—should be concealed in love letters because it would seem *ineptum* if the dignity of any cleric or the office of any merchant should be revealed by a woman.[40] A term of art like *ineptum* serves as both stylistic and social judgment; if the sender is revealed, his social identity is spoiled. Metonymically, the letter is described as spoiled—"epistola deluderetur."[41] This entails the equally regrettable outcome that his efforts at seduction go to waste. Boncompagno's solution is not chastity, but that the cleric or civic official conduct love affairs in secret and communicate with lovers by code:

Nec etiam ipsi debent, cum scribunt mulieribus alicuius lascivie causa, suas dignitates vel officia nominare, quia male cum antecedenti concordaret illatum et sic per consequens epistola deluderetur. Clerici autem, qui frequenter super nature incudem feriunt cum malleo repercussorio nec valent motus renum de facili refrenare, ponant in salutacionibus aliqua *occulta signa*, que *propria nomina sibi sub ymagine* representent.

(*RV*, 2.3; emphasis added)

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[39] Marilynn Desmond, *Ovid's Art and the Wife of Bath: The Ethics of Erotic Violence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), esp. chapters 2 and 3.

[40] "Sed videtur michi, quod omnia officia preter miliciam sunt in salutacionibus tacenda, quia hoc ineptum videretur, si alicuius clerici dignitas vel negociatoris officium a muliere aliqua diceretur" (*RV*, 2.3). (But it seems to me that all official designations—except that of knight—ought to be omitted from the salutation, because it would seem inappropriate were the dignified rank of some cleric or the official business of the suitor to be mentioned by some woman.) The translation here is altered from Purkart's.

[41] Ami warns of this outcome if the lover's desire should be disclosed to Malebouche. Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, and Armand Strubel, *Le roman de la rose* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1992), 7277ff.

[Nor, indeed, ought they, in writing to women for some lascivious reason, make mention of their dignified ranks or official duties, for this sort of thing would ill agree with what has preceded, and thus, consequently, the letter would be spoiled. The clerics, however, who repeatedly pound upon the anvil of nature with a rebounding hammer and cannot easily curb the movements of their loins, should put other, hidden signs in their salutations to represent, in symbols, their real names.}

The replacement of names and titles by secret codes recalls the *senhal* of Occitan love lyric, but here, in a secretarial rather than courtly world, the motive for secrecy is to protect the man's reputation. This motive is more cynical than protecting the lady's honor, and suggests that political ambitions and seductive play occupy the same sphere of experience. Secrecy in love letters, moreover, benefits from the advanced intellectual techniques of manipulating and deciphering ''occulta signa'' and ''propria nomina . . . sub ymagine.'' These terms put the erudite language of allegoresis to the practical service of concealing an illicit love affair. Conversely, secret love affairs offer clerics an occasion to perform their expertise. From the integumentary reading practices of advanced arts masters to the strategic privacy of diplomats and merchants, the cleric finds in the game of seduction a low-stakes arena for the demonstration of his professional skills.[42] Furthermore, by omitting the titles and marks of status that emphasize hierarchy in the *ars dictaminis* and inscribe it into the dictaminal letter, the writer of love letters signals that this is a specialized form of discourse with its own hierarchy, one that makes the *dictator*, as *praeceptor*, master rather than servant. The art of love is a literary game, to be sure, but not one walled off in a garden of poetic fantasy; it belongs to clerical work culture as a game of textual self-performance whose players can demonstrate their prowess to peers and colleagues, those who can appreciate clever manipulations of shared formulae. This game contributed in many ways to the institutional self-regard and social identity of clerical administrators, a group of men often eccentric both to lay courts and Church institutions.

[42] Andreas Capellanus plays on the verbal relation between *secreta* and *secretarius*: "Similiter si visitationis inter se amantes utantur epistolis, propriorum nominum etiam scriptione abstineant . . . sed et mutuas sibi invicem missas epistolas proprio non debent insignire sigillo, nisi forte habuerint *secreta* sigilla quae nulli nisi sibi sint *secretarius* manifesta (*DA*, 2.7.21; emphasis added). ("Likewise if lovers keep in touch by letter, they should refrain from writing their own names . . . nor should they stamp letters sent to each other with their own seals, unless they have secret ones known to none except themselves and their confidants.")

Boncompagno's treatment of the art of love combines the specialized language of literature with the working language of his dictaminal profession. Analytical philosophers distinguish between *object language*, which refers to the extralinguistic world, and *metalanguage*, which refers to linguistic codes themselves. John Lucy distinguishes a third category, *metacommunicative* discourse, that takes relationships between people as its object.[43] The *ars dictaminis* is a metacommunicative discourse, treating language as the embodiment of relationships between people. It thus lends itself to the verbal game of love that is one of the enduring medieval legacies of Ovid's amatory poetry. Boncompagno goes beyond the mixing of language and human relationships to conflate lovers' desirous language with their desiring and desired bodies. His performance does not so much tease out the implicit carnality of clerical discourse as it assimilates acts of love to dictaminal textuality. Boncompagno brags to his reader what they can achieve with his instruction: "Inprimis namque taliter potest amator *exordiri*, *narrare* atque *petere* illam quam desiderat habere" (*RV*, 3.3; emphasis added) (And so from the outset, the lover in this way can *undertake*, *narrate/describe*, and *pursue* her whom he desires to have).[44] *Exordiri*, *narrare*, and *petere* are the names of the three parts of a letter's body turned into verbs, and therefore characterized as actions rather than things.[45] These actions do not take as their object the body of a text but the body of the woman, "illam quam desiderat habere." Seduction is an act of composition demanding the mediating skills of the *dictator*. The technical metalanguage of the *dictator* is transformed into an erotic object language, the professional competence of the cleric into the erotic competence of the lover. In reference to the letters of Abelard and Héloïse, Desmond argues that "the prescriptive tradition of the *ars dictaminis* provided a rhetorical script for the power relations of amatory discourse."[46] Similarly, the compositional control of the *dictator* becomes sexual dominance in the

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[43] Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1972), 178. Cited in John Lucy, "Reflexive Language and the Human Disciplines," in *Reflexive Language: Reported Speech and Metapragmatics*, ed. Lucy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 15.

[44] My own translation.

[45] The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* offers meanings for *petere* that range across domains of law, courtship, and conquest: beg, beseech, request; strive for, seek; fall upon, attack; demand, exact, require, sue.

[46] Desmond, *Ovid's Art and the Wife of Bath*, 62.

ars amandi, but this power is limited if not illusory, for the rhetorical view of love in the *Rota Veneris* and in *Troilus and Criseyde* is contradicted by a narrative view of love. Narrative comprehends, as rhetoric cannot, the chaotic chain of contingencies that love generates.

This narrative chaos is an inevitable result of Boncompagno's combination of *ars amandi* with *ars dictandi*, and it anticipates the complexities generated by Chaucer's combined treatment of these two authoritative discourses in *Troilus and Criseyde*. As didactic genres, the *ars dictandi* and *ars amandi* both offer examples to imitate—in the one, specimen letters, and in the other, illustrative dialogues. Both are narrative fragments that invite extension and completion by the reader, and both in concert shaped the medieval conception of love letters. Though often criticized by modern critics as formulaic and utilitarian, the *ars dictaminis* had a literary potential that was cultivated by medieval practitioners. In the Orléans school of the twelfth century, model letters took on a fictional, sometimes fantastical character.[47] Boncompagno criticizes the Orléans school at times, but was the first Italian *dictator* "to construct more elaborate fictions in the letters" and make them a "display of literary virtuosity."[48] This virtuosity was elaborated in the creation of "epistolary sequences, ranging in length from two letters to seven or eight."[49] There are classical antecedents to the epistolary sequence as narrative genre, most famously Ovid's *Heroides*, already imitated by Baudri of Bourgueil and Abelard and Héloïse. Robert Benson nevertheless claims for Boncompagno a distinct place as "the inventor of the epistolary novella as a genre within the literary tradition of the Latin West, and . . . its first fully successful practitioner."[50] The *Rota* is a conspicuous example of this success. Its epistolary sequences provide a narrative frame for rhetorical exempla that in turn dramatize the narratives; the overall effect is a lightness and charm that, like Ovid's poetry, does not compensate for but results from its didactic flavor.

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[47] These probably derived from the *suasoriae* and *controversiae* of rhetoric schools, exercises in composing fictitious speeches on mythological and historical themes. On these, see James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 38–40. Cortijo-Ocaña suggests that these exercises inform the dialogism of both Latin and vernacular medieval literature from the eleventh century onward; "Introducción," 12.

[48] Benson, "Protohumanism," 35–36.

[49] Ibid., 41.

[50] Ibid.

Boncompagno begins his didactic program by demonstrating complimentary metaphors in a florid love letter.[51] The list of compliments in the first letter's exordium may seem excessive, but in more utilitarian *artes dictandi*, such lists function as template menus, offering options for the user to select. But this list also comes at the beginning of a narrative sequence, which makes the list's exhaustiveness feel excessive, one of several didactic elements that disrupts the capacity of readers to be absorbed into the fiction. Even more disruptive is the *dictator*'s own self-interruption to discuss the appropriate variations when writing to virgins, married women, nuns, widows, peasants, etc. (*RV*, 2.3). Despite these interruptions and changes of direction, the narrative advances, for each letter is itself a narrative event, a material token of linked bodily acts of composition, transmission, and reception.

A letter of response makes the narrative less fragmentary and more involving. The next letter features the desired woman's response; she tells him to go away and stop bothering her:

In epistole tue serie fatigasti pro nichilo, credens per quedam adulatoria verba et pulchritudinis mee commendacionem benivolenciam captare. Sed nichil est quod credis et semina mandas arene.

(*RV*, 5.2)

[In your series of letters you have worn yourself for nothing, believing you could capture my goodwill through some flattering words and complimenting my beauty. But what you believe is to no end, and you commit your seeds to sand.][52]

Her rejection is unsurprising. The entire erotodidactic tradition is predicated on the notion that men pursue and women resist.[53] Seduction is

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[51] "Manus longe, digiti exiles, nodi coequales et ungule sicut cristallum resplendentes totius stature augmentabant decorem. Verum quia primo deficeret commendator quam pulcritudinis immensitas, stilum verto ad sapientie vestre magnitudinem" (*RV*, 4). ("Your long hands, your slender fingers, your well-shaped knuckles, and your nails, resplendent as crystal, enhanced the seemliness of your whole figure. But in truth, since he who praises is more likely to be lacking than is the immensity of beauty he is praising, I shall turn my pen towards the magnitude of your wisdom.")

[52] The translation is my own. The woman's rejoinder that he is wasting his effort echoes a constant refrain of the female interlocutors in *De amore* as well.

[53] For a discussion of this resistance in Roman erotic elegy, see Susannah Giulia Brower, "Gender, Power, and Persona in the Poetry of Baudri of Bourgueil," Ph.D. diss. (University of Toronto, 2011), 32–34, available at https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/31697/1/Brower_Susannah_G_201111_PhD_thesis.pdf (accessed May 13, 2014).

pursuit and evasion, conquest and resistance, and these ruling meta-
phors cast the lover in traditionally masculine roles like soldier or
hunter.[54] In the *Rota*'s first narrative sequence, the man's success is inev-
itable because it is an axiom of erotodidactic writing that a woman's
refusal is a dissembling ploy in a game. Boncompagno says as much:

Preterea sciendum est quod unaqueque mulier, cuiuscumque sit ordinis vel con-
dicionis, negat inprimis quod facere peroptat. Unde si aliquo modo mittenti
rescribere velit, intelligas ipsam concedere velle, licet hoc neget verbis.

<div align="right">(RV, 5.1)</div>

[Furthermore, it should be known that any woman whatsoever, of whatever
station or condition she may be, refuses at first what she actually wishes to do.
Hence, if she is willing to write back to the sender in any way at all, you should
understand that she herself is willing to yield, although she denies it with her
words.]

The *dictator* assures his reader that the very fact that she responds (even
if with mockery) means that she has ratified the process of her own
seduction: "Hac siquidem epistola perpendere poterit amans, quo suum
procul dubio desiderium adimplebit" (*RV*, 5.3) ("From this type of let-
ter, the lover will be able to discern that his desire shall doubtless be
fulfilled"). As the lover responds with increasingly elaborate rhetoric,
she rejects him with increasing vehemence. She declares herself stunned
by his insolence but finally relents and arranges a rendezvous, demon-
strating that the force of her engagement, be it positive or negative,
discloses the truth of her reciprocated desire. This idea is at least as old
as the *Ars amatoria*, in which Ovid declares that if a woman even so
much as reads a love letter, she confirms her reciprocal desire:

> Legerit, et nolit rescribere? Cogere noli:
>   Tu modo blanditias fac legat usque tuas.
> Quae voluit legisse, volet rescribere lectis:
>   Per numeros venient ista gradusque suos.
> Forsitan et primo veniet tibi littera tristis,
>   Quaeque roget, ne se sollicitare velis.

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[54]*Ars*, 1.38, 1.45; *DA*, Praef.2, 1.6.312. Desmond discusses the performative mascu-
linity of these roles in terms of imperial and colonial politics. See *Ovid's Art and the Wife
of Bath*, 37.

> Quod rogat illa, timet; quod non rogat, optat, ut instes;
> Insequere, et voti postmodo compos eris.
>
> (*Ars*, 1.479–86)

[Suppose she has read, but will not write back: compel her not; only see that she is ever reading your flatteries. She who has consented to read will consent to answer what she has read; that will come by its own stages and degrees. Perhaps even an angry letter will first come to you, asking you to be pleased not to vex her. What she asks, she fears; what she does not ask, she desires— that you will continue; press on, then, and soon you will have gained your wish.]

The same idea can be found in another medieval erotodidactic text, the *Facetus*, an anonymous poem that is part *ars amandi* and part conduct manual. This work's narrator assures the reader that any lady's rejection is temporary and insincere.[55]

In romance and lyric, this faux-resistance is idealized as *daunger*, an attitude or pose central to the "olde daunce" of love and courtship, but in the twenty-first century we view this idea—that no means yes—as the logic of rape. The *Ars amatoria* affirms this judgment with an extended digression describing the rape of the Sabine women as paradigmatic of courtship (1.101–34).[56] Elsewhere in the same work, Ovid directly justifies physical coercion on the premise that women enjoy it: "Vim licet appelles: grata est vis ista puellis: / Quod iuvat, in vitae saepe dedisse volunt" (1.673) ("You may use force; women like you to use it; they often wish to give unwillingly what they like to give"). Clearly, the *praeceptor amoris* is the lover's friend, not the lady's; his claims about feminine psychology support his friend's sexual conquest. As author, he can demonstrate by narrative exemplum that his view of women's sexual desire is accurate, that his techniques are effective, that in fact, no means yes. The woman represented in the *Facetus* yields with pleasure to the lover's persistence. The lover persists not in the hope that she will change her mind, but in the assumption that she already wants him but must make him prove his desire.

> Forsitan illa sagax sic verba superba loquetur,
> Ut quod mente cupit per sua verba tegat:

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[55] "The *Facetus*; or, The Art of Courtly Living," ed. and trans. Alison Elliot Goddard, *Allegorica* 2 (1977): 27–57, lines 183–84.

[56] "[T]he rape of the Sabines programmatically points to the violence of the *ars* professed by the *praeceptor*." Desmond, *Ovid's Art and the Wife of Bath*, 51.

"Stulta petis, juvenis, frustra laudas mea membra;
  Si sum pulcra satis, cur tibi cura fuit?
Vade, recede cito, ganeam me forte putasti,
  Et nunquam facias tu michi verba magis."
Tunc dicat juvenis: "Cur me, dulcissima rerum,
  Morte perire facis? Hoc tibi crimen erit.
Munera magna peto, tamen hec sunt digna favore;
  Si me forsan amas, nil tibi quippe nocet."
Inquiet illa quidem: "Fateor non horreo quemquam
  Teque libenter amo, nil michi plura petas."[57]

[Perhaps the clever girl may respond with a haughty speech to conceal her heart's desire with her words: "Young man, you're seeking something silly. In vain you praise my figure; perhaps I am passing fair—what concern is that of yours? Go away, go quickly—perhaps you think me a strumpet—and never speak to me again!"

Then let the youth reply, "Why, sweetest creature, do you condemn me to death? This crime will be yours. I am seeking a great reward, but nevertheless these things are worthy of favor. If you should chance to love me, no harm would come of it."

Then she will answer him, "I admit that I do not fear anyone, and I willingly love you; now seek nothing more!"]

Once again, the lover's verbal persistence is continuous with the use of physical force to overcome her resistance, force that the narrator thoroughly eroticizes.[58] The author of the *Facetus*, like Ovid, presumes to speak the woman's mind. In the fictional world of erotodidactic texts, women's roles are pre-scripted; the writing of their responses, moreover, is an erotic act in itself.

Female subjection undergirds the masculine performance of rhetorical prowess to which Ovidian erotics gives occasion. The eroticism of Ovid is already suffused in the professional techniques of law and rhetoric: "disce bonas artes" (*Ars*, 1.459), the *praeceptor* teaches, because they are

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[57] *Facetus*, lines 243–54.
[58] "Sic postquam ludens fuerit calefactus uterque, / Vestibus ejectis, crura levare decet. / Vim faciat juvenis, quamvis nimis illa repugnet, / Nam si desistat, mente puella dolet" (ibid., lines 293–96). ("After play such as this both will be warm with passion; having thrown off their clothes, he then should lift her legs. Let the youth employ force although she strenuously resists, for if he should stop, the girl would grieve.")

as useful for wooing a woman as they are for defending a client.[59] Ovid's rhetoricized eros means that the literate cleric's professional competence makes him also a master of love. Ovid cultivates a tongue-in-cheek magisterial pose throughout the *Ars amatoria*; declaring himself the "praeceptor amoris" (1.17) or tutor of love at the beginning, he ends the first and second books of *Ars amatoria* with the tag "NASO MAGISTER ERAT" (2.744, 3.812). *De amore* and the *Facetus* contain even more schoolroom discourse, and that other famous Ovidian *praeceptor*, Ami in the *Roman de la rose*, twice refers to his seduction lore as his "arz et science."[60] Clerical erotodidacticism transforms love into a sphere in which intellectual methods and values, especially textual ones, are paramount; clerical identity is masculinized, and masculinity is clericalized. As Ovid writes, "dabit eloquio victa puella manus" (*Ars*, 1.462)—to eloquence the vanquished girl will give her hand. What these erotodidactic texts elide is the subjectivity and autonomous desire of women. The circumscribed world of their amatory fictions does not require it; in this world, the woman's role is simply to reward the eloquent and persistent lover.

This subject (and subjected) position for women is presupposed by generic constraints, yet Ovid himself, with his characteristic "tension and uncertainties," points in the *Ars* to the inaccessibility and uncontrollability of women's desire in real life.[61] In its treatment of love letters, the *Ars* refers to the myth of Cydippe: "Littera Cydippeu pomo perlata fefellit, / Insciaque est verbis capta puella suis" (1.457–58) ("A letter carried in an apple betrayed Cydippe, and the maid was deceived unawares by her own words"). Acontius writes the words "I swear by the sanctuary of Diana to marry Acontius" on an apple thrown before Cydippe's feet. She picks up the apple, reads it aloud, is overheard, and bound thus to her accidental oath, her utterance no less binding for all its lack of intentionality. This figures how erotodidactic literature writes

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[59] Desmond argues that the *praeceptor* teaches violence as an erotic skill parallel with and analogous to rhetoric; I suggest that erotodidactic writing depends not just on analogy but on continuity between violence and rhetoric, persuasion and threat. *Ovid's Art and the Wife of Bath*, 46.

[60] *Roman de la rose*, lines 8285, 9651.

[61] The *De amore* diverges from this pattern, because the woman's role in that text is to maintain the social order, including class distinctions, which will trump eloquence and virtue alike. See Toril Moi, "Desire in Language: Andreas Capellanus and the Controversy of Courtly Love," in *"What Is a Woman?" and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 408, 411–12.

women. It gives them the words to act as accomplice to their own seduction, and even physical resistance is assimilated to the script. By contrast, Cydippe's lament in the *Heroides* articulates the inner life and self-directed desire of a woman who resists being a love-object.[62] Criseyde also manifests this inner life, as we shall see, precisely in her resistance to being scripted as a love-object by an exchange of letters dictated by Pandarus, the self-styled *praeceptor amoris*.

The opening epistolary sequence of the *Rota Veneris* discloses in a small way the inner life of its represented woman; when the woman describes her correspondent as "credens per quedam adulatoria verba et pulchritudinis mee commendacionem *benivolenciam captare*" (5.2; emphasis added), she reveals her awareness of the part she is given as object and target of rhetorical art. With the phrase "benevolenciam captare," she appropriates the discourse of the *dictator*. She is on to her lover's game, aware of its techniques, and can even play too, quoting Ovid herself: "you cast your seed in the sand."[63] Being a player rather than just an objective in this game undercuts her subjection to some extent, even if the rules put her at a disadvantage, even if her sarcasm is ultimately nothing more than the resistance that makes the game worthwhile for the men to whom it belongs.

To represent a woman's voice, even in dramatizing the process of her seduction, is to generate the possibility of her resisting or reshaping her assigned role, a possibility underscored by the echoes of the *Heroides* in erotodidactic writing beginning with Ovid's own. If coerced to accept this role or overpowered by literal force, she at least voices her knowledge that the process sweeping her along cares about neither her experiences nor hopes. This woman's voice has a bodily presence, a materiality that can resist the *praeceptor*'s fantasies and disrupt his script. As Boncompagno's model letters respond to one another, the epistolary dialogue in the *Rota Veneris* gropes toward being a narrative. However much the *dictator* treats each letter as a diaphanous specimen, a disposable possibility in a forking trail of outcomes, the presence of voices in the durative matter of physical letters urges readers to link letters as chains of events.

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[62] The letters of Acontius and Cydippe are the subject of *Heroides*, 20 and 21. Interestingly, Cydippe's lament closes the *Heroides*, a palinode, perhaps, to the amatory phase of Ovid's poetic career.

[63] "[Q]uid harenae semina mandas?"; *Heroides*, 5.115. Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, ed. and trans. Grant Showerman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963).

These resistant voices are a surplus effect of magisterial performance; the rhetorician's success is precisely the source of his failure, the loss of control that undermines erotodidactic love as a rule-bound imaginary game. Boncompagno's virtuoso epistolary variations in the *Rota Veneris* generate this narrative excess; at a certain point, it becomes absurd to claim that his narrative sequences can be taken as generic models for letter-writers. One letter is from a woman asking her husband to come back from his travels because their family is out of money and their daughters might have to prostitute themselves (14.2).[64] Another is from a nun who has been forced by her father to take the veil and longs for her lover to come climb her convent walls and rescue her (11.3). Each letter is not a formula to adapt, but a petitioning voice evoking a fictional world. The maker of formularies provides a blank as a first person subject—it should belong to the formulary's user, as it clings to the author who is its origin.[65] And yet, even as a textual effect, this voice takes on its own life as a resistant subject, not fully available to author or user, to *praeceptor* or pupil.

Textual Subjects, Presence Effects, and Narrative Contingencies

To write a letter, even a model letter, is to textualize a subject position. To say or write "I" is an act of deixis with a *presence* effect, an assertion of existence and presence before an addressee. "I" is a mark produced as an indexical sign of bodily and social presence. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht describes the Middle Ages as a period in which an aesthetics of *presence* predominates over an aesthetics of *meaning*.[66] The former prioritizes the "materiality" or "mediatic modality . . . of each object of aesthetic experience" over the hermeneutic, "metaphysical" dimension of the "meaning-component"; in medieval culture, Gumbrecht argues, the material medium has more aesthetic effect, more heft, than the immate-

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[64] This passage is in the Cortijo-Ocaña but not the Baethgen edition.

[65] According to Carolyn Dinshaw, Chaucer associates reading with masculine control of the feminine; *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), esp. 28–64. On the tensions of authorial attachment to the generic voice of the formulary, see Ethan Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse: Thomas Hoccleve and the Literature of Late Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 32–36.

[66] Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 31ff.

rial idea it represents.[67] The dominant self-reference in "presence culture" is not the mind but the body.[68] Since letters were understood in the Middle Ages as a proxy for the body, they invoke presence. This is suggested by the quantitative expressions of passion that surround letters in the Middle Ages; in a presence culture, claims Gumbrecht, feeling or affect can be meaningfully intensified through quantitative expression.[69] We see this enumeration in *Il filostrato* and in *Troilus and Criseyde* itself; when Troilus kisses the letter he has written to Criseyde, "a thousand tymes er he lette, / he kiste tho the lettre that he shette" (*TC*, II.1089–90)—it is already an emblem of the body into whose presence it will come.[70] The letter is a proxy for *his* body, which makes it a proxy for *her* body; its contiguity between both their bodies across time is metonymical for their eventual physical union.

Letters reproduce presence because they result from absence and distance. The expression of anguish in love letters and lyrics often touts distance as its cause, as in troubadour lyrics of *amor de lonh*.[71] In the Middle Ages, epistolary correspondence was described as *sermo absentium*, a deficient proxy for face-to-face interaction imposed by the regrettable necessity of distance.[72] Yet the absence that prompts letters generates their presence effect, their durative and sensible materiality necessary for unaltered transmission.[73] The letter becomes a proxy for the writer's body, particularly in the case of love letters, and the medium of parchment—animal skin scraped smooth—must certainly have contributed

[67] Gumbrecht is careful to hedge this categorical statement by pointing out that meaning and presence cultures always exist in tension with each other: "I assume that there are always specific distributions between the meaning-component and the presence-component—which depend on the materiality (i.e. on the mediatic modality) of each object of aesthetic experience." Ibid., 108.

[68] Ibid., 78–79.

[69] "The concept of intensification [as in the Eucharist] makes us understand that it is not unusual, for presence cultures, to quantify what would not be available for quantification in a meaning culture: presence cultures do quantify feelings, for example, or the impression of closeness and absence, or the degrees of approval and resistance." Ibid., 85–86.

[70] *Il filostrato*, II.107, in Geoffrey Chaucer and Giovanni Boccaccio, *"Troilus and Criseyde," with Facing-Page "Il filostrato,"* ed. Stephen A. Barney (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).

[71] See also *DA*, 2.7.14.

[72] Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, 13–14.

[73] Constable examines some medieval remarks on the untrustworthiness of oral messengers and the preferability of letters (even over speech) in "Medieval Letters and the Letter Collection of Peter the Venerable," in *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, Vol. 2, ed. Giles Constable (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 1–45.

to that sense, as would the wax tablet scratched by the lover's body. This sensual mediation contributes to the intimacy of reading and writing letters. For this reason, Pandarus's offer to sew up Criseyde's first letter to Troilus causes a shock of violation that resembles his remaining in the young lovers' bed-chamber when they consummate their desire. The capacity of the letter to simulate bodily presence was acknowledged in *artes dictandi*; Guido Faba (possibly a student of Boncompagno) writes in the *Summa dictaminis* that the letter "absentes quantumcumque remotos inducit tamquam simul essent presentia corporali" ("unites those absent, no matter how distant from each other, as if they were bodily present together").[74]

The bodily presence reproduced by the letter is one dimension of its presence effect; the other is its deictic invocation of the first- and second-person pronouns, *I* and *you*. The first-person pronoun links the letter's physical form with a speaking subject as the source of the utterance—even, perhaps especially, in writing.[75] This contiguity of a letter with the living voice it reproduced was central to the letter's documentary authority in the Middle Ages.[76] The *salutatio* names the sender and recipient and defines the relationship between them; like the wax seal, it bears the imprint of the author's social and bodily presence, which a presence culture conflates.[77] Boncompagno's first example of a salutation activates both dimensions of the letter's presence effect, materiality and deixis: "Gloriosissime ac preciosissime domine G.—, amice dulcissime, I.— salutem et id ineffabile gaudium mentis, quod aliqua voce vel actu exprimi numquam potest" (*RV*, 2.2) ("To the most glorious and precious mistress G.—, sweetest darling, I.— sends that ineffable joy of the mind which cannot be expressed by any word or deed, voice or gesture"). This model salutation demonstrates how letters not only

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[74] Martin Camargo, "Where's the Brief?," 2, 15. Camargo cites and translates Guido Faba from "Guidonis Fabe *Summa dictaminis*," ed. Augusto Guadenzi, in *Il propugnatore* n.s. 3 (1890), Part 1, 287–388, Part 2, 345–93 (1.296–97). Gumbrecht asserts that "the meaning-dimension will always be dominant when we are reading a text—but literary texts have ways of also bringing the presence-dimension of the typography, of the rhythm of language, and even the smell of paper into play." *Production of Presence*, 108.

[75] Derrida meditates on the capacity of writing relative to speech for manifesting the presence and desire of subjects, in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), esp. 152–54. I thank Peter Travis for bringing this to my attention.

[76] The documentary authority attached to the deictic "I" is still a part of wills and affadavits: "I, ——— , being of sound mind and body . . . ."

[77] The physical imprint is literalized in *TC* when Troilus mixes his tears into the wax (II.1086–88).

replace but surpass bodily expressions of love like voice and gesture. The letter is constantly available to the reader's touch, manipulation, kisses, and rereading. The initial that stands for a name recalls the dictaminal frame; as in a formulary, the "I" and "you" of the document are theoretically available for appropriation by anyone, but the erotic physicality of the love letter resists this appropriation in the *Rota Veneris* as it does in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

The subject positions of the model letters in *Rota Veneris* are presented by Boncompagno as ciphers, filled by the masterful presence of the mediating *dictator* and the desiring will of the manual's user. The deictic naming of "I" and "you," however, creates a sense of presence and positionality that frustrates this will. The shifting formulaic adaptability of "I" and "you" is frustrated by the letter's deictic presence effect, its capacity to "presentify" eroticized bodies, and the narrative contingencies afflicting those bodies. Blank subject positions become resistant subjects as the letters embodying them join as narrative. Initials ("domina G.——") in *Rota Veneris* become not blanks to be filled in, but codes, *occulta signa*, concealing and protecting the *haeccitas*, the unique "thisness" of the entities they summon.[78] In the middle section of the *Rota*'s model letters (11–15), as love is frustrated by various circumstances, epistolary subjects take on an elaborate specificity that defies the pretext that these are generic models for the reader's use. The sequence draws in the reader whom it then confronts with jarring developments—sequences of alternatives, forking pathways of love-narrative introduced by the connective "pone quod" (grant that), a phrase that continuously reasserts the *dictator*'s and the reader's presence: "Grant that she has married another and does not wish to sport further with him" (8.1), or "grant that she should become pregnant before that man marries her" (9.1).

Near the beginning of the *Rota*, Boncompagno writes that "distinguenda sunt amandi tempora et amancium genera" (3.1) ("distinctions must be made among situations for loving and kinds of lovers"). The letters, as formulae, are organized not only according to social roles (in

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[78] J. Allan Mitchell discusses the connection between medieval literature and the medieval idea of *haeccitas* (as found especially in Duns Scotus and interpreted by Heidegger) in *Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), esp. 24–26. The unrepeatability of this *haeccitas* resembles the "ephemerality" of presence, which, according to Gumbrecht (also reading Heidegger), describes the self-concealing or "withdrawing" of presence at the moment of self-disclosure. *Production of Presence*, 78.

the typical dictaminal fashion) but according to *tempora amandi*, times or occasions in the course of love.[79] Colin Fewer has recently described the Ovidian view of love as belonging to a world-order of "radical contingency" where *casus* (chance) rules rather than Virgilian *fata*.[80] Along similar lines, Cortijo-Ocaña describes how Boncompagno insists on the necessity of love, which, as in stoic doctrine, moderates and unites the warring elements of the world; Boncompagno thus calls the work *Rota Veneris*: "Rota Veneris volui nominari, quia cuiuscumque, tamquam in rota orbiculariter volvuntur et pertimescunt omni tempore plurimum, quoniam perfectus amore continuum parit assidue timorem" (1) ("[I] wished to call [it] the Wheel of Venus, for people of whatever kind are bound together by love as if on a wheel, are turned in a circle, fearing the worst at all times, since perfect love always engenders perpetual fear"). Love, like fortune, confronts human desire and moral action with something like pure contingency. As J. Allen Mitchell puts it, "love is ever emergent and under construction, demanding future decisions all the time."[81] To link *tempora amandi* as a succession of situations and decisions is to sew situations together as narrative events; this is precisely what happens when individual letters are linked in a sequence of mutual response.

The *praeceptor amoris* would attempt to impose order on the radical contingency of love by making it an art, for "arte regendus amor" (*Ars*, 1.4) ("love should be ruled by art"). Colin Fewer speaks of Ovidian seduction as a matter of habituation, of bringing the love-object to heel by degrees.[82] Yet habit requires an expectation that situations repeat themselves; to isolate *tempora amandi* from each other is to make them abstracted situations like the hypothetical social contexts of the *ars dictaminis* (e.g., instructions for a priest writing a bishop with a request). The epistolary frame of the *Rota Veneris* links such situations together in causal succession; situations become events, eruptions of unrepeatable novelty that resist categorical abstraction. Events clump together as narrative despite the controlling efforts of the *dictator* to separate them. The reader is prompted to look for and impose connections between letters,

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[79] In this respect, the *Rota Veneris* differs considerably from *De amore*'s illustrative dialogues.

[80] Fewer, "The Second Nature," 322.

[81] Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness*, 56.

[82] Fewer, "The Second Nature," 322; compare to Ovid's description of the effects of love letters: "Per numeros venient ista gradusque suos" (*Ars*, 1.482) ("[Her consent] will come by its own stages and degrees").

even across separate sequences. Virgins therefore become married women, adulteresses, abandoned wives, widows, or nuns, in narrative arcs that linger and dissipate in a chaos of alternating voices; from this chaos emerge desiring and forlorn voices expressing the contingency and eventfulness of love, ''a generous sign discharging ecstatic energy.''[83] Love is experienced through narrative, not rhetoric. But Boncompagno stops short of following his narratives to any lasting or definite culmination—at every point where they threaten to overwhelm the dictaminal frame, he interrupts them, alters the situation, and a new story soon gets under way. Chaucer, to the contrary, introduces his *dictator*, Pandarus, into the flow of events, and makes him witness the consequences of his rhetoric.

The Ovidian Cleric and Female Subjection
in *Troilus and Criseyde*

Like the *Rota Veneris*, *Troilus and Criseyde* is informed by traditions of love narrative, amatory didacticism, and formal letter-writing; Pandarus is another Ovidian *praeceptor amoris* refracted through the clerical social role.[84] Like the narrator of the *Rota Veneris*, he is master of the practical rhetoric of letter-writing and acts as letter-writing secretary and messenger to the lovers.[85] Like Boncompagno, Chaucer encountered erotodidactic literature mediated through a clerical textuality imbued by the discourse of schools and notaries. Pandarus is the condensation of this textual discourse, the *Rota*'s *dictator* made flesh, and his frantic activity prompting and shuttling the letters forms the center of Book II's narra-

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[83] Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness*, 4; this is in fact Mitchell's description of fortune, but it applies equally to love, which was associated with Fortune in the Middle Ages, as demonstrated in Howard Rollin Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature* (1927; repr. New York: Octagon Books, 1967), 95–97.

[84] McKinnell, ''Letters as a Type of the Formal Level.'' R. A. Shoaf notes the resemblance of Pandarus to the ''dictaminist,'' as the combination of poet, rhetorician, and lawyer, in *Dante, Chaucer, and the Currency of the Word: Money, Images, and Reference in Late Medieval Poetry* (Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1983), 116.

[85] This is a role Chaucer himself may have played or at least witnessed closely. ''He must have received a thorough training'' in the *ars dictaminis* to be a diplomat and civil servant, even if, as John McKinnell claims, it was ''usual in England to obtain such training rather from Italian collections of specimen letters than from the *artes dictandi* themselves''; ''Letters as a Type of the Formal Level'', 79 n. 15. On dictaminal treatises in fourteenth-century England and their influence on the fully reported letters of Troilus and Criseyde, see Norman Davis, ''The *Litera Troili* and English Letters,'' *RES* 16, no. 63 (1965): 233–44.

tive action.[86] He speeds the words that speed the lovers; his actions are words and those words become the actions of Troilus and Criseyde. Pandarus is the magisterial voice of the *dictator* incarnated on the same level of representational reality as the lovers, and therefore he is himself mediated by Chaucer's narrator.[87] Chaucer's narrator refers to himself as the servant of the servants of the God of Love (I.15)—a profanation of a specifically epistolary formulation of papal authority that links clerical rank and letter-writing with erotodidacticism.

Love letters are crucial to plot development and characterization in *Troilus and Criseyde*. The love affair begins in Book II, in which Pandarus solicits letters, delivers them, hovers as they are read, and tries to direct their interpretation. First he advises Troilus to assume a style that is natural and spontaneous rather than learned and ornate:

> Towchyng thi lettre, thou art wys ynough.
> I woot thow nyl it dygneliche endite,
> As make it with thise argumentes tough;
> Ne scryvenyssh or craftyly thow it write[.]
>
> (II.1023–26)

This letter-writing advice echoes the *Ars amatoria*:

> Sed lateant vires, nec sis in fronte disertus;
> Effugiant voces verba molesta tuae.
> Quis, nisi mentis inops, tenerae declamat amicae?
> Saepe valens odii littera causa fuit.
>
> (1.463–66)

[But hide your powers, nor put on a learned brow; let your pleading avoid troublesome words. Who, save an idiot, would declaim to a tender sweetheart? Often has a letter been a potent cause of hate.]

For Pandarus, as for Ovid's *praeceptor*, love is a game of acquisition, not an ennobling sentiment, so all manners of deception are fair game.[88]

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[86] This activity, and its differences from that of Boccaccio's Pandaro, are described succinctly in Camargo, *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle*, 54.

[87] I suggest that the clownishness of the leaping and japing Pandarus, well described by Charles Muscatine, is mimetic adaptation—an *embodiment*—of the rhetorical excess of the clerical writer of the High Middle Ages. Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 140–42.

[88] On the pervasive deception of the fictional world described in Ovid's *Ars amatoria*, see Allen, *The Art of Love*, 18, 26–28, 34.

The illusory artlessness and self-concealing labor that the *praeceptor* recommends to the letter-writer he also recommends to a woman arranging her hair (*Ars*, 3.133–48). Nevertheless, Troilus's letter is such a conventional and overwrought affair that, unlike in the *Filostrato*, the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* abridges the letter's content through indirect discourse:

> First he gan hire his righte lady calle,
> His hertes lif, his lust, his sorwes leche,
> His blisse, and *ek thise other termes alle*
> *That in swich cas thise loveres alle seche*;
> And in ful wise, as in his speche,
> He gan hym recomaunde unto hire grace;
> To tell al how, it axeth muchel space.
>> (II.1065–71; emphasis added)

Troilus assumes the subject position of *Rota Veneris*'s generic lover. The narrator paraphrases Troilus's first letter with the editorial summary "That in swich cas thise loveres alle seche." If he says things all lovers say, this is still a situation and not yet an event. Following Pandarus's directions, Troilus imbues the seal of the letter with his own bodily fluids, making it an index of his body as well as a symbol of his social identity:

> and with his salte teris gan he bathe
> The ruby in his signet, and it sette
> Upon the wex deliverliche and rathe.
>> (II.1086–88)

But Troilus goes further, kissing this extension of his own body a thousand times, since this incarnation of his desire will be brought into the presence of his lady. As Camargo points out, the "letter becomes a surrogate Troilus, physically present to beg his lady's mercy."[89] The letter-writer, however, manifests not only his own presence in the letter, but that of the recipient, for whom the letter thus becomes a surrogate to him.

> Therwith a thousand tymes er he lette
> He kiste tho the lettre that he shette,

[89] Camargo, *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle*, 56.

> And seyde, "Lettre a blisful destine
> The shapyn is: my lady shal the see!"
> (II.1089–92)

As in the *Rota Veneris*, there is a suggestion of self-gratification about
male textuality as it is depicted here; in fact, Troilus is adoringly kissing
his own words, an act that, as we shall see, mirrors the onanism of the
Ovidian cleric.[90]

Troilus's letter mediates between lover and desired lady precisely as a
body; so does the body of the man who carries that letter, Pandarus.
Embodying the clerical *dictator* and *praeceptor amoris* as a fictional per-
sona, Pandarus manifests the ridiculous elements of that figure, the
"supersubtle trickster and grimacing 'roynish clown'" (as Dronke
describes Andreas Capellanus).[91] He also embodies the role's domineer-
ing, patriarchal elements, which derive from the *praeceptor* persona and
are given culturally authoritative form by association with the stable
institutional discourses of clerical work. This is made disturbingly plain
when Pandarus and his niece are making small talk in the garden; he
suddenly plucks out Troilus's letter, and, like a living paratext providing
an *accessus* to Troilus's intentions, asks her to read it and write back at
once—otherwise, "pleynly for to seyne, / He may not longe liven for
his peyne" (II.1126–27). What follows next recalls the erotodidactic
tradition's premise about seduction—that any response whatsoever to a
lover's plea is a signal of consent. Just as the recipient of the letter in
the *Rota* is fully aware of the conventions her lover is using to "obtain
her goodwill," Criseyde's reaction to Pandarus likewise suggests her full
awareness of the part required of her. She is not pleased:

> Ful dredfully tho gan she stonde stille,
> And took it nought, but al hir humble chere
> Gan for to chaunge, and seyde, "*Scrit ne bille*,
> For love of god, that toucheth swich matere,
> Ne bring me noon; and also, uncle dere,

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[90] Shoaf sees this verbal self-gratification as not exclusive to clerical masculinity:
"Every man loves his own 'engyn' and the 'fantasie' [III.274–75] it affords him. He
need not literally indulge 'solitary sex,' to have always to hand this potential escape from
separateness." R. A. Shoaf, " 'The Monstruosity in Love': Sexual Division in Chaucer and
Shakespeare," in *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde,"* ed. Tison Pugh
and Marcia Smith Marzec (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 183–94 (191).

[91] Dronke, "Andreas Capellanus," 62–63.

> To myn estat have more reward, I preye,
> Than to his lust; what sholde I more seye?"
>   (II.1128–34; emphasis added)

For her, this is not a game but an event that threatens to sweep her in its path without regard for her desires. Her "humble chere," a word combining affect and expression, begins to change under the weight of dread, a word of great affective force.[92] Her reaction, the physical shock described in II.1128–29, bears witness to the potent corporeal presence of the letter. The physical presence of her lover's desire in her hand transforms the *praeceptor*'s abstract situation into an event. The *ars dictandi* and *ars amandi* both have the capacity to constrain roles within their self-contained fictional worlds, but the delivery of the letter transforms that constraining authority into coercive force. Criseyde begins to "chaunge" not from Pandarus's patter but from the physical presence of the letter and the presence effect of the lover's body it evokes.[93]

Criseyde's response, "Scrit ne bille," makes plain her awareness of the coercive nature of this petition and the predetermined position it assigns her: a "bille" is a formal document, a plea, charge, petition, receipt, or contract.[94] The term discloses the dominating power of a lover's petition as codified by the clerical *praeceptor*. The love letter solicited and delivered by Pandarus echoes the erotodidactic texts produced by the apparatus of clerical power for the amusement of clerics.[95] Saying "Scrit ne bille," Criseyde expresses her hope that if she can keep herself out of the textual role dictated to her, if she can refuse the letter, she can maintain her autonomy and security, her "estat." This suggests a provisional limit to the constraining power of discourses—we can sometimes refuse the roles offered us if we see them for what they are. But Pandarus will not have that; he demonstrates that the controlling potential of discourse is

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[92] The contrast with Boccaccio's depiction of the same scene is marked: "Stette Criseida temorosamente / sanza pigliarle; un poco il mansueto / viso cambiò" (*Il filostrato*, 2.110, in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere*, gen. ed. Vittore Branca [Milan: Mondadori, 1964]); where Boccaccio minimizes the affect ("un poco"), Chaucer heightens ("*Ful* dreadfully . . . *al* hir humble chere"; *TC*, 1128–30, emphasis added).

[93] Troilus has a very different reaction to the bodily presence of the letter—arousal (*TC*, II.1331–37). See Lerer, *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII*, 9.

[94] *MED*, s.v. *bille*, available at http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/ (accessed June 7, 2012).

[95] We see a similar dynamic at work in the dialogues of *De amore* when a higher-ranked man is addressing a lower-ranked woman (1.6.166). See Moi, "Desire in Language," 407.

actuated by violence.[96] The fact that the letter is proxy for the lover's body gives an added charge to Pandarus's grabbing Criseyde and thrusting the letter down the front of her garment:[97]

> "But for al that that ever I may deserve,
> Refuse it nought," quod he, and *hente hir faste*,
> And in hir bosom the lettre doun he thraste[.]
> (II.1149–55; emphasis added)

Pandarus then secures the efficacy of this violation of Criseyde's self by daring her to reach into her gown and cast it away where people might see (II.1178). In *De amore*, secrecy is a way to secure a private domain for ladies to engage with lovers on equal or superior terms, protected from the violation of exposure.[98] Here, secrecy is instead enlisted by Criseyde's uncle as a technique to coerce her precisely through the fear of such a violation. Jill Mann points out how Troilus's mildness is achieved "by transferring the coercive elements in the wooing to Pandarus, who manipulates, coaxes, threatens, and deceives with unflagging energy."[99] Physical coercion, rather than a last resort when the rhetoric of seduction fails, is in fact the culmination of that rhetoric. Criseyde, like Cydippe, is compelled to read, and by reading is drawn, like it or not, into a "paynted proces" (II.425) that will yield defeat and dishonor all around.[100]

Criseyde's reaction to the letter itself reflects an effort to remain withdrawn; it is to Troilus's *epistolary style* rather than his message that she responds in order to keep the affair in the realm of textuality (II.1177–79).[101] But Pandarus has arranged for "a carefully controlled dose of

[96] Gumbrecht talks about power being a potential in discourse, whereas violence is "the actualization of power, that is, power as performance or as event." *Production of Presence*, 114.

[97] "Even without bearing in mind the letter's function as stand-in for Troilus, one recognizes in this scene a surrogate rape." Camargo, *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle*, 57.

[98] See *DA*, 2.7.18.

[99] Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 83.

[100] Shoaf discusses the word *proces* as touching on the double aspect of Pandarus as mediator—both artist (painter or poet) and functionary (notary or lawyer). *Dante, Chaucer, and the Currency of the Word*, 116.

[101] We might understand Criseyde's retreat into textuality as a way to appropriate control for herself of the meaning of the process; as Gumbrecht puts it, "there is no emergence of meaning . . . that does not alleviate the weight of presence." *Production of Presence*, 90.

Troilus's physical presence" to ride past her window, drawing her out of the safety of pure textuality and compelling her to write him back.[102] Her letter roundly rejects his advances, announcing that she will love him only as a sister (II.1221–25). Her rejection may be "candour itself" but this is finally irrelevant.[103] When Pandarus returns her letter to Troilus, he glosses it as a "charm" for healing his sickness, and so makes it conform, regardless of her message, to the familiar script of seduction (II.1313–16). Criseyde's conscription is inevitable. The Ovidian notion that a woman's resistance to seduction is but "sweet, reluctant, amorous delay" (in Milton's phrase) informs Pandarus's coercive power.[104] Her role is prescribed by clerical discourses of which Pandarus is master.[105]

Troilus reads her letter over and over again, and, finally, takes the advice proposed by Ovid and elaborated by Boncompagno da Signa; he recognizes that any response from Criseyde, even a seeming refusal, equals her consent to his desire.

> But finaly, he took al for the beste
> That she hym wroot, for somewhat he byheld
> On which hym thoghte he myghte his herte reste,
> Al covered she the wordes under sheld.
>
> (II.1324–27)

This recalls the elaborate paraphrases for "no means yes" found in the erotodidactic tradition. Furthermore, Troilus's understanding of her very straightforward message as "wordes under sheld" recalls the allegoresis of secrecy, the *occulta signa* prescribed by the *Rota Veneris* (2.3). By imposing an allegorical meaning on her words, Troilus rewrites her intention and purpose. We see fulfilled the promise of the *Rota*'s dictator that his methods will teach the lover to *exordiri*, *narrare*, and *petere* the woman he desires—to compose her as a text. It is customary to distinguish Pandarus's "Ovidian pragmatism" from Troilus's "courtly idealism," but Troilus is tainted by the mediation he consents to use to serve his desire, as is further suggested by Pandarus's remaining in the room when Troilus and Criseyde have sex.[106] According to Carolyn Dinshaw,

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[102] Camargo, *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle*, 55.

[103] McKinnell, "Letters as a Type of the Formal Level," 82.

[104] *Paradise Lost*, IV.311.

[105] Camargo likewise sees parallels with both *Ars amatoria* and Boncompagno's *Rota Veneris*; *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle*, 64.

[106] "[I]t should hardly surprise us that Troilus becomes an exact copy of his friend Pandarus"; Shoaf, "The Monstruosity in Love," 192.

"the narrator, Pandarus, and Troilus are all characterized as readers of feminine texts."[107] I suggest that they are writers too, seeking to make the woman into a text, to rewrite her own self-composition according to a familiar erotodidactic template.[108]

Conclusion: Chaucer as *Praeceptor amoris*

The consequences of Pandarus's game outlive its successful prosecution. To view seduction as a literary game of make-believe, an arena for rhetorical performance, is a kind of moral evasion in which *Troilus and Criseyde* implicates not only Pandarus and Troilus, but the narrator and even Chaucer himself. Calabrese argues in a Robertsonian vein that Chaucer's portrayal of Pandarus reveals the limitations of viewing erotic love as a game; these limitations are thrown into relief by the epic backdrop of doomed Troy and the transcendent realizations of a dying Troilus. This may be so, but I suggest that Pandarus's moral failures show how even earthbound love has its ethical demands.[109] The *Rota Veneris* is the virtuoso performance of a master rhetorician, directed not only toward inducing a listener to believe a certain thing, but also toward showing off, reveling in its own competence. This mode of rhetoric is not intended to be (despite Ovid's and Pandarus's advice) inconspicuous; verbal bravura is as much the intended outcome as persuasion. Boncompagno's performance weaves together multiple kinds of communicative competence: worldly experience in seduction, clerical expertise, and literary cultivation. This combination results in a masculine self-performance that is competitive and self-assertive. At the same time, in its excess, and in the incongruities among the different types of expertise on display, it is a clownish performance. James J. Murphy attaches to Boncompagno da Signa the epithet of "dictaminal buffoon" (if to defend him from it); perhaps he is reading Boncompagno backwards through Pandarus.[110] The Italian *dictator*'s persona is certainly a prototype of Chaucer's Pandarus, another self-performing clerical mediator obsessed with love and full of pedantic ostentation.

To the various psychosexual motives suggested to explain Pandarus's

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[107] Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 29.
[108] "Her love does not arise ex nihilo but seems to entail subjection to a dominant discourse of late medieval culture." Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness*, 42.
[109] Calabrese, *Chaucer's Ovidian Arts of Love*, 42–50.
[110] Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 362.

vicarious participation in his friend's seduction of his niece, let me add one more: he is fundamentally onanistic, but as a pornographer rather than a mere voyeur.[111] The story of seduction that begins in Book II and culminates in Book III, his *proces*, is the expression of his expertise, and he takes his pleasure in seeing his *proces* work, in the act of mediation itself, in the eros of writing. The carnal materiality of letters issues in the carnal love of Troilus and Criseyde. But the story does not end when the *proces* does; the material contingency of life invades the pleasure-garden of erotodidactic love, even as it does in the *Rota Veneris*, and Pandarus, like Boncompagno, can no longer control the story. If performance is understood only as the assumption of responsibility for communicative competence, Pandarus is a successful performer, but Chaucer, a consummate performer himself, suggests that a competence not responsible to its effects is morally inadequate.

Pandarus rejects this moral demand. As in the *Rota Veneris*, the narrative pressure of the letters and the mimetic depth of their represented subjects disrupt the generic formulas of dictaminal and erotodidactic treatises; consequently, as in the *Rota*, external contingencies (the fortunes of war, the machinations of Calkas and Diomede) disrupt the simple love plot. Unlike Boncompagno, however, Pandarus cannot wipe the slate clean and start a new story; he is not in charge of the fictional world in which he lives. In Mitchell's words, "fidelity to the event . . . remains always limited and compromised by generic understanding."[112] Pandarus is more beholden to his generic understanding than to the people overtaken by events. Loyal finally to the male desire on which his erotodidactic discourse depends, he would regard the resistant female subject as an aberration to be annihilated. He says to Troilus:

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[111] See Sarah Stanbury, "The Voyeur and the Private Life in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *SAC* 13 (1991): 141–58; A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 120–40. Shoaf points out the sexually self-gratifying character of Pandarus's ability as a fantasist in "The Monstruosity in Love," 191.

[112] Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness*, 22; I am using performance here in the sense used by the linguistic anthropologists Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs as described by John Lucy: "performance . . . is a reflexive mode of communication which consists of the assumption of responsibility for displaying communicative competence, that is, for speaking well in socially appropriate ways. Recognition that one is assuming responsibility in this way is keyed or indicated by a confluence of signals in the verbal forms themselves rather than by the presence of a simple diagnostic mark." Lucy, "Reflexive Language and the Human Disciplines," 21, describing Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 59–88.

> "If I dide aught that myghte liken the,
> It is me lief; and of this tresoun now,
> God woot that it a sorwe is unto me!
> And dredeles, for hertes ese of yow,
> Right fayn I wolde amende it, wiste I how.
> And fro this world, almyghty God I preye
> Delivere hire soon! I kan namore seye."
>
> (V.1737–43)

Pandarus's clerical mastery of the conventional discourses of love does not give him the knowledge to control events as they progress. Criseyde cannot be dictated, so he wills her destruction, and beyond this, he can say no more. In marked contrast to his previously bumptious and noisy performance, the narrator—for it is no longer Pandarus's narrative—leaves him for good, still and silent at last.

The discourse of Pandarus, like that of *Rota*'s dictator, is an art of seduction overwhelmed by the narratives its precepts generate. Pandarus, however, is only one learned mediator at work in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Another is the narrator, and the final one is Chaucer, who in relating the process of seduction, undertakes an ethical reevaluation of the literary role of the mediating cleric, the man whose mastery of textual, literary, and social discourse makes him likewise the master of love and seduction. If, as Lee Patterson wrote, the tales of Melibee and Thopas represent Chaucer's attempt to slough off two superannuated authorial roles, we might see Pandarus as another such role.[113] Once an innovative and culturally transformative figure, the learned *ioculator* and clerical *praeceptor amoris* is now domesticated and constricting, an inadequate cliché of literary authority.

Though he was a governmental administrator under Richard II, Chaucer does not identify his extraliterary role as clerk in the manner of his contemporaries Gower and Hoccleve, referring to himself by that term in only the highly artificial context of his invocation to Venus ("Whos clerc I am") in the proem to Book III of *Troilus and Criseyde*.[114] By calling himself a clerk of Venus, however, he does identify himself with Ovid,

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[113] Lee Patterson, " 'What Man Artow?': Authorial Self-Definition in *The Tale of Sir Thopas* and *The Tale of Melibee*," *SAC* 11 (1989): 117–75.

[114] This is a central topic of Andrew James Johnston, *Clerkes and Courtiers: Chaucer, Later Middle English Literature and the State Formation Process* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2001).

who is called "Venus own clerke" in *The House of Fame* (1487). While rejecting the role of the clerical-courtier as a dictaminal buffoon might have served the social jockeying of a shopkeeper's grandson at court, Chaucer the storyteller also had a compelling reason to reject it—fidelity to the *haeccitas*, the specificity and unrepeatability of the textual persons his narrative summoned, and out of honor for their material resistance. The fiction of the *Rota Veneris* is governed by the conceit that it is an instruction manual, and this fiction underlies Pandarus's self-delusion, revealed when set in the larger frame of *Troilus and Criseyde*. The final sidelining of Pandarus is not just a matter of *caritas* triumphing over *cupiditas*, Boethius over Ovid; it manifests Chaucer's changing moral and aesthetic conception of the role of a writer as a mediator.

As for letters, Chaucer gives the last one to Criseyde, writing Troilus from the Greek camp:

> Yet preye ich yow, on yvel ye ne take
> That it is short which that I to yow write;
> I dar nat, ther I am, wel lettres make,
> Ne nevere yet ne koude I wel indite.
> Ek gret effect men write in place lite;
> Th'entente is al, nat the lettres space.
> And fareth now wel. God have yow in his grace!
> La Vostre C.
> (V.1625–31)

Her letter ends with a letter that rejects the capability of letters to communicate. The signature initial belongs once more to her, aligns once more the indexical mark of the body with the symbol of her inviolable inner self. This, her "entente," is an uninterpretable mystery to Troilus, because he has run out of scripts to conform the letter to his desires:

> This Troilus this lettre thoughte al straunge
> Whan he it saugh, and sorwfullich he sighte;
> Hym thoughte it like a kalendes of chaunge.
> (V.1632–34)

This "chaunge" was set in motion when Pandarus urged on Criseyde the first letter, when all her "humble chere / Gan for to chaunge" (II.1130), but Criseyde no longer belongs to Pandarus's composition.

She concludes the poem's final letter with the letter C, recalling the formulaic blanks of the *Rota*'s model salutations: shall we supply Criseyde? Chaunge? Chaucer? The letter is another cipher, an *occulta signa*, unmediatable, concealing an "entente" that was never expressed because it was never asked for—not by Pandarus, not by Troilus. And not by Chaucer either, though he diffidently acknowledges this oversight, claiming that his sources do not tell him Criseyde's thoughts (III.575). In truth, Chaucer, like Boncompagno and Pandarus, is as constrained by the Ovidian script as his characters. The love story depends on the narrator's playing Pandarus, on Chaucer's acting as mediating *dictator*; he can displace the role onto Pandarus and then, for its moral error, sideline and silence his proxy author-in-the-text. But he cannot fully absolve himself from Pandarus. In the *Ars amatoria*, "the masculinities elicited in heterosexual performance are mocked for their excess" by Ovid's narrator, just as Pandaric masculinity is mocked in *Troilus and Criseyde* by the narrator.[115] But even if the *praeceptor*'s erotic writing of female subjection is bracketed by irony—by Ovid, Boncompagno, and Chaucer alike—all three authors indulge themselves no less in its pleasure.

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[115] Desmond, *Ovid's Art and the Wife of Bath*, 44.