

# Chaucer's Haunted Aesthetics: Mimesis and Trauma in *Troilus and Criseyde*

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Lo here, the forme of olde clekis speche  
 In poetrie, if ye hire bokes seche.  
*Troilus and Criseyde* (V.1854–55)<sup>1</sup>

**T**he writing of history does not easily cope with trauma.<sup>2</sup> However sophisticated its method, historical narration can yearn toward mimesis, and the claims made by the writing of history are made in realist mode, replete with the details of everyday life.<sup>3</sup> Trauma, by contrast, can never be rendered simply; even when understood in mimetic terms, trauma remains filled with unspeakable things and fraught with desire. History's realism, at its best when grounded in a sense of the "regimes of truth" and the fictions that haunt the archive, can only ever allude to the traumatic utterance in the fantasy of a voice once silenced now heard, an experience belatedly recovered.<sup>4</sup>

Those recoveries are never straightforward. Dominick LaCapra argues that particular historical traumas—the holocaust, slavery, apartheid—require our most deft representational skills in distinguishing “loss” (the cultural assignment of trauma to certain bodies, regions, peoples) from “lack” (the traumatic structure that prompts our very ability to desire) (“Trauma” 696–97). Yet, as a representational endeavor, the process will necessarily be fraught. As Ruth Leys demonstrates, theories of trauma persistently founder on questions of mimesis; longstanding debates among trauma theorists over the *mimetic* or *antimimetic* character of traumatic recovery—the question of whether and how trauma can be remembered, and the use of hypnotic suggestion to prompt those memories—make the theoretics of trauma intractably messy

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(30–35). And if mimesis poses problems for the psychodynamics of memory, it also, if in a different way, raises issues of representation as a compensatory linguistic artifact. At least since Gayatri Spivak insisted that “The subaltern cannot speak,” cautioning us against collapsing representation as portrait with representation as spokesperson, *Vertretung* with *Darstellung*<sup>5</sup> (308), we have been marked with the knowledge of the doubtful nature of our representational aims, however politically compassionate.

On the side of history, there seems no end in sight to the insidious framing of traumatic events for a particular kind of public consumption. Recent history has made us more sensitive than ever to the instability of such representations, as in the appropriation of experiences of trauma—those of the families of victims of 9/11, for example—by media outlets interested in ginning up public support for war or for their own ratings. Whatever their purchase on mimesis, trauma’s formal properties have not prevented the circulation of representations of unspeakable events for determined, even overdetermined, agendas. There is much at stake in the *form* that those representations take: if the frames through which we approach the traumatic event seem invisible—if our access to the voice of the victim appears unmediated—we are less able to assess the uses made of them.

Trauma theory has been and continues to be important to critical work in every period of literary study. This essay argues that the subtle literary strategies of one fourteenth-century poem can help to address a blockage about representation current in that theory. Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* meditates upon trauma by rendering visible the formal properties of its representation. I will argue here that Chaucer’s poetics—his use of trope, ambiguity, and voicing—direct us to the *mobility* of trauma in culture, an issue crucial to the complex politics of traumatic witness. I am not, of course, the first to engage Chaucer’s interest in chivalry’s traumatic arts. L. O. Aranye Fradenburg brilliantly reads Chaucer’s fragmentary allusions to Ovid’s violent tale of Tereus, Philomela, and Procne as insinuating the possibility of Criseyde’s rape, thereby transforming our understanding of the way that trauma and its repetitions cut through Chaucer’s story of Troy. Pressing on the multiplicity of wounds in the poem, Fradenburg emphasizes the ways that traumatic sacrifice—whether demanded by the state or by the lover, by Troy or by Troilus—remains a painful act, its violence unalloyed regardless of whether the victim in any way “consented” to his or her suffering. Her analysis of the poem’s engagement with sacrificial pleasure, the drives and desires that lead to trauma in the first place, reminds us that cultural imperatives like sacrifice or duty play a role in capturing our desire *for* wounding and victimization (*Sacrifice* 218–28).<sup>6</sup>

In showing how a war culture regularly pursues—rather than tries to avoid—its own traumatic victimization, Fradenburg’s work complicates our understanding of the ways and means whereby trauma claims its victims. I wish to develop the implications of her insight further, analyzing Chaucer’s literary strategies so as to reconsider

the liabilities of traumatic representation. For Chaucer's poem cuts across two poles currently structuring the debate on such representation: on the one hand, his narrative ambiguities counter the somewhat naïve realism regarding psychic life and history legible in the work of Ruth Leys; on the other, the poet's subtle rendering of the inarticulateness of voice and desire also troubles the critique of such realism, a critique identified here with the work of Cathy Caruth. If these theorists disagree as to the representational politics of traumatic testimony, they nonetheless share a fixation with the expressive "voice" of the suffering individual, and remain optimistic about the political and cultural gains whenever a victimized subject expresses the suffering wrought by wounding. Chaucer's poem, instead, renders trauma a feature of both linguistic arts and personal pain, a matter sited in suffering individuals but not only there, offering a view of the complicated and ambivalent circulation of such wounds both in culture and for it. The analysis that follows is thus in great sympathy with Lauren Berlant's critique of the "generic conventions of self-expressivity" that converge on "pop banality and therapeutic cliché" ("Trauma" 41).<sup>7</sup> Chaucer's poem unravels what it means that the voice from the wound can rarely if ever serve as a reliable compensatory solution to any traumatic event.

In *Troilus and Criseyde* such wounds are beautifully wrought; the roles of victim and victimizer, moreover, are ambiguously rendered throughout. These gorgeous ambiguities have proved troubling for critics wishing to assess the poem's historical and political stakes. Lee Patterson influentially argued that the poem's equivocal rendering of two kinds of historical meaning (Boethianism—the version of history that compensates for suffering with the consolations of philosophy—and Thebaness—the version of history that emphasizes tragic repetitions) points to the *lack* of historical meaning, suggesting that, for Chaucer, "history teaches us that history teaches us nothing" (84–164). Patterson's thoughtful commentary on history is compelling, but we should pause to note that his formulation (his repetition of "history teaches"; his final predicate "nothing") recalls the formal properties of traumatic memory: there, too, repetition converges on a failure of recuperation. As in certain strains of trauma theory, equivocation, ambiguity, and indeterminacy converge on the futility and impossibility of either meaning or truth.

Ultimately Chaucer's poem offers literary equivocation as a means to track the circulation of trauma in culture. Far from avoiding either ethics or politics, this poem deploys its literary features so as to make legible both the repetitive traumas on which particular cultures rely, and the traumatic rhythms upon which realist history depends but about which it can rarely speak forthrightly. Chaucer's poem thus points to the promise of the literary as a frail representational mode—indeed, as powerful on account of its very frailty. As such, the *Troilus* helps us move beyond the limits of the problem of mimesis within trauma theory.

## MIMESIS

Despite the fact that trauma studies, as Dorian Stuber puts it, “arises within, and not necessarily against, the linguistic turn” (1), its controversies converge on the issue of mimesis. In her genealogy of the field, Ruth Leys describes an oscillation between what she calls the mimetic and antimimetic paradigms, two divergent positions on whether and how representation might relieve trauma or consign one to relive it (31–34).<sup>8</sup> Leys employs the term *mimesis* in a distinct sense, one opposed to its conventional literary usage. Here, mimesis refers *not* to a linguistic representation of reality (as those influenced by Aristotle or Erich Auerbach might assume), but to a victim’s embodied reenactment of the traumatic event. Mimetic approaches to trauma allude to René Girard’s theory of *mimetic identification*, whereby imitation signifies a collapse of the distinction between self and other, an unbinding of subjectivity that leaves the subject vulnerable before the power of the other. As a figure for the victim’s *inability* to remember and to narrate trauma, mimesis here means embodied reenactment outside language; it evokes, moreover, that vulnerability in hypnosis whereby the victim might mistake hypnotic suggestion *for* real memories.<sup>9</sup> This is why Leys will associate mimesis with so-called “false memory syndrome” and, thus, with “the lie.”

*Antimimetic*, accordingly, refers to a victim’s ability to remember and to narrate the event. This is a counterintuitive association for those of us accustomed to a literary understanding of the mimetic, particularly as *representation* aligns with the antimimetic pole. Ultimately even representation depends upon a rather narrow notion of verisimilitude here, signifying for Leys an accurate account of “traumatic reality,” by which she means the historically specific event. In linking representation with the antimimetic, Leys in effect collapses the understanding of representation as portrait with the understanding of representation as proxy, *Darstellung* with *Vertretung*. Antimimetic narratives of traumatic events can offer reparation only insofar as they substitute for, and thus displace, their opposite, a mimetic reexperience of the traumatic event, whether in a post-traumatic flashback or in traumatic repetition. Leys thus implies the superiority of nonfictional, unambiguous, unequivocal representations of traumatic events, because only such realism has the power to move the victim toward recovery and healing.

Such a view of the superior representational power of nonfiction offers clear claims on historical truth, yet this reliance on a somewhat naïve realism is nowhere to be found in Freud’s writing on the topic. Leys’s categories enact as well as display a set of disputes over the relation of language both to fantasy and to experience, disputes that she never addresses directly. Clearly missing here is mimesis in its literary sense: fictional representation as re-creation, a portrait of reality in all its layering, complications, and context. It is not surprising, therefore, that Leys critiques Cathy

Caruth's work for its literariness, focusing particularly on Caruth's reading of Freud's reference to Tancred from Tasso's sixteenth-century epic romance, *Jerusalem Delivered* (*La Gerusalemme liberata*, c. 1580). As the issues here are both complex and crucial to my larger argument, it will be useful to consider this dispute in some detail.

In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Freud offers the crusader knight Tancred as a poetic example of the complexities of trauma and its repetition.<sup>10</sup> Tancred, horrified at the knowledge that he has mistakenly killed his beloved Clorinda, inadvertently wounds her a second time when he strikes a tree within which her soul is imprisoned. At that moment Clorinda's voice cries out, testifying, Freud writes, that Tancred "has wounded his beloved again" ("Beyond" 22). Caruth situates Clorinda's cry as the voice from the wound, arguing that trauma is "always the story of a wound that cries out," linked "not only to what is known, but to what remains unknown in our very actions and language" (3). Trauma is psychoanalytically mimetic (it is, she writes, the "unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind") while also legible in language, "the moving and sorrowful voice [. . .] paradoxically released through the wound" (2). As both voice and wound, trauma occupies a complex relation to language. This doubleness, moreover, makes empathic witnessing possible: victimizers can, in Caruth's thinking, empathically hear and thus experience the trauma of their victims, just as Tancred was passively traumatized by Clorinda's cry.

Leys argues that in her reading of Tancred, Caruth confuses the antimimetic and mimetic poles, indeed conflating the trauma victim with her victimizer. Such confluences, Leys argues, put at risk the antimimetic clarity that the representation of "traumatic reality" promises (293).<sup>11</sup> Ultimately she insists that Caruth turns from the reality of the traumatic event to phenomenological generality, such that traumatic victimization becomes allegorical and figural rather than focused clearly on the suffering victim. I will eventually suggest that there are some important subtleties in Freud's account that Caruth's rhetoric of voice may obscure, subtleties that Chaucer might help us to see.<sup>12</sup> At this point we should note that their disagreement concerns where we might locate the compensatory "truth" of trauma: in the unambiguous, accurate, expressive witness to a historical event (Leys) or in the mimetic repetitions that express the pain of the suffering subject (Caruth).

Freud's literary reference<sup>13</sup>—and this is significant in Freud's context as well as in the current one—urges upon us the interrelation rather than the disjunction between *historical* event and narrative mimesis, reality and fantasy, form and subject. Tancred is historical figure (living 1072–1112) and romance hero both—he was, in fact, one of the leaders of the First Crusade who eventually came to rule Antioch. Tasso's work follows historical fact—the historical Godfrey of Bouillon figures prominently—and diverges from it, as when he describes imaginary combats between Christians and Muslims (and Tancred and Clorinda) during the Siege of Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> In Freud's example, Tancred's actions are propelled by the war—he kills Clorinda

because he mistakes her for his enemy, a Muslim crusader. Clorinda, in disguise and accidentally outside the gates of Jerusalem just as Solyman, the Turkish leader, shuts them against the Christian Crusaders, is surrounded by enemies. Dressed as a knight, she fights alongside the forces of the Seljuk Turks, displaying all the skill of her male counterparts, even killing one adversary. When Clorinda blends into the press of bodies in hope of escape, Tancred notices the armored figure and, mistaking her for his enemy, fights her hand to hand. While there is much fiction here, the nature of Tasso's description calls to mind the fog of war: "the fight, the press, the night, the darksome skies"; Clorinda's accidental exclusion outside the city gates; the misrecognition of friend for foe; the attempted escape that results in death. Tasso emphasizes the real force of the blows between them: "Their blows were neither false nor feigned found, / The night, their rage would let them use no art, / Their swords together clash with dreadful sound" (12.55). Nor is Tancred at first horrified by his work. When light dawns and he can see the carnage, he "waxe[s] proud with the sight" of "his foe's outstreaming blood and gaping wounds." Tasso provides this commentary: "Oh, vanity of man's unstable mind . . . / Why jo'est thou, wretch? Oh what shall be thy gain? / [ . . . ] / Thine eyes shall shed, in case thou be not slain / For every drop of blood a sea of tears" (12.58–59).

In citing Tasso's poem, Freud blends traumatic events (the confusions of battle; the Crusades) with internal states of agitation (Tancred's desire for Clorinda; his thrill in victory). Tellingly, in the context of Freud's work on war neuroses, Tancred stands both as war hero and as exemplum of "man's unstable mind." Canto 12 ends with Tancred's agitation transformed to shame and guilt, as daylight reveals that he has killed Clorinda, whom he loved. Such an oscillation between hate and love—the Muslim adversary turns out to be the desired Muslim lover—resonates with Freud's comments about the ambivalence of war in his 1915 "Thoughts for the Times of War and Death." While Tancred's killing of Clorinda is, as Freud remarks, unintentional, the context of the battlefield renders it ambivalently so. Tancred intentionally dealt a lethal blow; he intended a victim, just not Clorinda.

When Clorinda's voice reemerges, she refers to all those recently killed; the trauma of a particular couple converges on a community of war dead, as "every pagan Lord or Christian peer" (13.21) haunts the woods. Furthermore, Clorinda not only voices personal wounding, as Caruth would have it, but rebukes Tancred's guilty act: "Cruel, is't not enough thy foes to kill, / But in their graves wilt thou torment them still?" (13.42). This quote echoes moments from works by Tasso's literary influences: Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Inferno*, and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. Such intertextual repetitions, suggesting as they do a long and repetitive history of wartime trauma, might be one reason that Freud turns here to literature. The ineluctable recurrence of war remains central to Freud's writing during this period.

This intermingling of historical war and magical fantasy, the subject and the larger group, guilt and compulsion, renders trauma as neither simply mimetic (re-enacted) nor antimimetic (narrativized) but as somehow both. What Leys reads as a vacillation in Freud's work seems here a paradoxical twinning: trauma configured both inside and outside human language, volition, subjectivity, and conscious desire. Both traumatic event and traumatic repetition are embedded here, and though the two are related, they are not identical. Clorinda (antimimetically) narrates the traumatic event, while Tancred (mimetically) repeats his guilty act "passively" despite the fact that it has come to horrify him. But if Freud, as Caruth argues, suggests that Tancred and Clorinda *together* embody trauma, this does not necessarily mean, as she concludes, that Tancred "catches" Clorinda's victimization once he hears her voice. Instead, the two simultaneously emblemize and split between them the embodied, imitative, mimetic response to trauma (Tancred) and the diegetic, narrativized, antimimetic response (Clorinda) that Leys disentangles.<sup>15</sup>

The ambiguity of the Tancred-Clorinda episode emphatically links traumatic representation to the complexities of narrative form and the persistence of its repetitions.<sup>16</sup> Realistic chronicles of traumatic events are crucial and necessary, but Freud's work everywhere suggests that they are not sufficient, in part because they are unable to cope with the complicated and ambivalent circulation of trauma both in culture and for it.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Tancred's "passive" guilt in Freud's example troubles or at least complicates Caruth's suggestion that perpetrators of traumatic events might share in the experience of traumatic suffering by virtue of their acts of witness before their victims.<sup>18</sup> Leys would object to this point on the grounds that this is a confused use of mimetic identification, the latter requiring a failure of representation (the antimimetic mode); she would further object that blurring the boundary between victim and witness is troubling, especially when the witness is also the victimizer. Where Caruth sees ethical possibilities in that victimizers serve as witnesses to their victims, Leys sees the appropriation of "real" suffering as the perpetrator's alibi. Both are certainly possible. Indeed, sometimes it may be hard to tell the difference between the two.<sup>19</sup>

*Troilus and Criseyde* is obsessed with precisely these ambiguities and difficulties. Chaucer's layered, allusive, equivocal representation of trauma reconsiders the means by which trauma moves in and through culture. In this reading, the collapse between victim and witness/perpetrator not only serves the polyvocality of poetic fiction, but also comes to show the problems of conceiving of trauma as a voice from the wound. Chaucer's poem makes clear that the metaphor of voice can never satisfy as a recuperative mechanism. Voicing raises its own problems of epistemology, of representation, indeed, of history; and it is as implicated in imitating, in hiding, and in wounding as it is in testimony.

Chaucer's story of Troy is a particularly apt case to consider because, like Tasso's epic, the *Troilus* cross-cuts history with fantasy: Troy was important to Freud precisely as a legendary past—a "myth" that was, thanks to Heinrich Schliemann, belatedly authenticated as history.<sup>20</sup> But before turning directly to Chaucer's poem, we should remember the poet's difficult context. Dated to the mid 1380s, *Troilus and Criseyde* was written during a tormented period for the English, both domestically and abroad. The long war with France was going badly, and throughout the 1380s the English feared invasion from the continent. Scottish forces had, moreover, joined with the French against the English and were threatening from the north. The aftermath of the plague left economic matters unsettled; Richard II's reign was fractious, and the Great Rising of 1381, which Chaucer likely witnessed, led to a period of bitter struggle between the king and his magnates. Chaucer's own situation was affected by this struggle: a number of his close contemporaries lost their lives in the wake of the Merciless Parliament of 1386, an event at which Chaucer was present. By the latter half of the 1380s, Chaucer would lose both his employment in the Customs House and his London home. Patterson writes that Chaucer's "presence in the Parliament of 1386, and its effect upon his career, showed him to have been deeply, and unhappily, involved in the factionalized political world of the mid-1380's." He concludes that it is possible that "the writing of *Troilus and Criseyde* was [itself] an act that carried with it important, even dangerous, political consequences" (161).<sup>21</sup>

But if Chaucer feared his own victimization, he was also, allegedly, a victimizer. In the case involving Cecily Chaumpaigne, the poet was accused of "raptus," a legal term that could refer to both rape and abduction absent sexual assault, an accusation from which Chaucer would escape serious legal consequences.<sup>22</sup> Critics have debated the exact nature of the "event," and the best work on the topic raises the problem that the legal record poses for women's history, especially given the complex nature and use of women's legal testimony or complaint during the period.<sup>23</sup> Testimony and its reliability remain an issue of significance for "realistic" representations of such events today, one that resonates in the hard cases of feminist and critical legal studies.<sup>24</sup>

Given the multiple ways trauma resonates throughout Chaucer's context—given, too, the poet's own position as potentially both victim and victimizer—it should come as no surprise that this poem engages simultaneously the trauma of wartime politics and sexual traffic. Christopher Cannon reads *Criseyde* as Chaucer's "most sustained attempt to represent the complexities of [medieval English women's] lives," one that "curves inexorably toward the representational issues" of the rights of women for redress and complaint under medieval English law ("Rights" 177).<sup>25</sup> Dramatizing the difficulties and mobility of language and voice requires the poet's most deft representational layering.



## CHAUCER'S WOUNDED VOICINGS

Critics of *Troilus and Criseyde* have long emphasized the poet's admiration for Ovid by way of this poem's comic preoccupation with the *Ars Amatoria* tradition. In these readings, Chaucer's poetry partakes not only of Ovid's concern with love, but of Ovid's skepticism, his use of comic irony, and, as John Fyler puts it, "the conflicting—and unresolved—claims of authorities, and of authority and experience" (21). Chaucer's Ovidian tendencies converge upon his fondness for equivocation and the troubling ambiguities of his narrative art.<sup>26</sup>

That grimmer preoccupations also emerge by way of Ovid is now a critical commonplace. Fradenburg argues that Chaucer's references—explicit and oblique—to the tale of Procne and her sister Philomela, transformed in Ovid's hands to swallow and nightingale, encode trauma at its most unspeakable ("Our owen wo" 98–101). Ovid's story, moreover, has become emblematic for the literary itself: Tereus's double violation of his sister-in-law Philomela—raping her and cutting out her tongue to silence her testimony—comes to be known only after Philomela weaves the story in cloth, thus displacing testimony and voice onto textile as text. Chaucer's allusions to Ovid's story register the impossible ambiguities of voice and wound. But what does it mean that Chaucer joins ambiguity with subtle references to this particular traumatic scene?

The poem, I am arguing, suggests the limitations of voice as a metaphor for recuperative testimony to traumatic events. Throughout, the poet makes tragically clear the complications shaped by traumatic voicing, alluding not only to the referential problematics of trauma, but to cultural productions that insist upon the recurring impossibility of the traumatic utterance as such.<sup>27</sup> For one thing Philomela, Ovid's nightingale, offers a different account of the double wound than the one that Caruth, à la Freud, describes. Unlike the cry of Clorinda heard at the moment of her second wounding, Philomela's second wound—whereby Tereus, her rapist, cuts out her tongue—evokes not testimony but silence. Unlike Tancred's unintentional act, Tereus's second wounding of Philomela is designed to ensure not that the rape be forgotten—indeed, the cut sears its memory in flesh a second time—but that it remain unspeakable. Throughout this cultural impossibility is twinned, but never conflated, with the structural attributes of desire, and with the ways that the past haunts the present. And it is here, by way of equivocation, ambiguity, and troping, that Chaucer helps us reconsider trauma and its representation as a literary act.

At the level of plot, certain traumatic events are not at all ambiguous. Criseyde, a widow, is well aware what her father Calkas's abandonment means for her: at the poem's opening, her position in Troy is an especially precarious one. We see her beg Hector for protection from those who, in response to Calkas's defection to the Greeks, threaten to kill and burn her. After her assignation with Troilus, when the

Greeks offer the Trojan hero Antenor, their prisoner of war, in exchange for Criseyde, readers witness the people clamor against her. In a scene that some link to the Merciless Parliament of 1386, the Trojans exchange Criseyde for their imprisoned hero, despite Hector's argument that references what Gayle Rubin calls the "traffic in women": "we usen here no wommen for to selle" (IV.182).<sup>28</sup> As Carolyn Dinshaw and others point out, the traffic in women—Paris's love for Menelaus's Helen—causes the war in the first place. Classical accounts similarly equivocate on the question of Helen's consent and desire: was she abducted by Paris, or was she his willing co-conspirator? Criseyde's unwilling transfer to the Greeks eventuates in her "sliding" heart: Troilus learns that he has lost her to Diomedes when he sees the Greek warrior wearing a token belonging to his former lover. Horrified by her apparent infidelity, Troilus's mad rush into battle results ultimately in his death. Throughout, we are reminded of the state of fear that the war and its politics produce. We are reminded, too, of the difficulty of Criseyde's self-presentation, particularly in her remarks that "no good word" will ever be spoken of her: "Thise bokes wol me shende" (V.1060). Criseyde—daughter of a traitor who left Troy on the strength of a prophecy to escape the trauma of the city's demise—remains throughout a focus for all these difficulties.

Early in Book II the poet assigns the first reference to Ovid's story not to Criseyde, but to her uncle Pandarus, the go-between who will facilitate Troilus's sexual conquest (to say nothing of his own). Pandarus "half in a slomberyng" awakes to the swallow's lamentation, her sorrowful lay recounting "how Tereus gan forth hire suster take":

That Pandarus, for al his wise speche,  
 Felt ek his part of loves shotes keene,  
 .....  
 So shop it that hym fil that day a teene  
 In love, for which in wo to bedde he wente,  
 And made, er it was day, ful many a wente.  
 The swalowe Proigne, with a sorowful lay,  
 Whan morwen com, gan make hire waymentyng  
 Whi she forshapen was; and evere lay  
 Pandare abedde, half in a slomberyng,  
 Til she so neigh hym made hire cheteryng  
 How Tereus gan forth hire suster take,  
 That with the noyse of hire he gan awake,  
 And gan to calle, and dresse hym up to ryse,  
 Remembryng hym his erand was to done  
 From Troilus, and ek his grete emprise. (II.57–71)

The swallow's "waymentyng" registers a polyvocal figuration of lamentation, one referring not only to her own traumatic history, but to the unheard cry of her

sister's absent tongue. The displaced voice from the wound seems multiply wrought: from Philomela and Procne, but also from Pandarus himself, whose "teene" [grief] in love converges on Procne's song, the noise of which awakes the groggy sleeper to the "grete emprise" that lies before him. Procne's cry is itself ambivalently described—it is mournful lament ("hire waymenting," l.65) and poignant song ("a sorrowful lay," l.64), trivial annoyance ("cheterynge," l.68) and, as far as Pandarus is concerned, startling noise ("with the noyse of hire he gan awake," l.70). This multiple equivocation lies directly between Pandarus's lovesick past and his future acts.

Readers have sometimes seen comic irony in the juxtaposition of Procne's song with Pandarus's bedtime self-pity, the sleeper's grandiose self-indulgence at having felt "his part of loves shotes keene" (l.58) in high contrast to Procne's "sorrowful lay." Yet since this is the only direct account of Philomela's violation in the poem—the most explicit rendering of Tereus's actions—any comic irony remains burdened by a post-traumatic edge. The juxtaposition can, that is, emphasize rather than undercut the traumatic afterlife of Pandarus's pain. Locating Procne's song as go-between for Pandarus's past and Troilus's future marks only one part of Chaucer's subtle complications of memory. The reflexive use of the Middle English (ME) verb *remembren*—Pandarus is "remembryng hym his erand was to done"—doubles recollection of the past with future plan, especially since, according to the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED), the reflexive form can mean both to "cast the mind back" and to call to mind a task or plan.<sup>29</sup> Chaucer's reflexive formulation evokes the doubleness of past and future: Pandarus's past haunts what is to come.

The remembered wound speaks here, but it is not a figure for remediation. That is, unless we complicate what we mean by remedy. Pandarus's dreamy state suggests his own stakes in the project upon which he will shortly embark. The scene evokes issues of repetition raised in Freud's account, providing a brief snapshot of a wound poised to recur. Pandarus will deflect his wounding onto Troilus (and, not coincidentally, Criseyde); yet this is not only repetition, but also redirection. The earlier wounding is relived by passing it on, duplicating the event not on his own flesh but on the flesh of another. Leys's mimetic structure doubles on itself: traumatic repetition converges on the collapse between subject and other. The wound swerves, moving toward its next victim.

The psychoanalytic debate examined in the previous section has given us two possibilities for trauma and its aftermath, but neither of them works particularly well to explain this instance. Leys emphasizes the singularity of the traumatic event, the importance of its availability to straightforward narrative; Caruth emphasizes that trauma can be shared, suggesting a mimetic effect when the witness "catches" trauma from the victim. If Leys's account overlooks the ways that wounds might be passed along, Caruth's seems to flatten the dynamic by which such passing occurs.

Chaucer's description of Pandarus suggests a third view: woundings that repeat are not "caught" passively by witnesses so much as regularly passed along. This passing of the wound constitutes a version of embodied repetition as redirection. And such mobility, Chaucer shows, can be rendered in language, though not as a realistic account of a single traumatic event.

The movement of suffering redirected—this swerve—calls to mind literary representation, specifically the Greek origin of the term *trope* (*trópos*) as, literally, a turn. When Chaucer situates his first reference to Philomela amid Pandarus's once and future act, he both deploys the trope as trauma—birdsong from a mutilated tongue—and displays trauma in tropic mode, as Pandarus's past turns toward Troilus and Criseyde. Ovid's birds can be read as metaphor and metonymy in literary as well as in psychoanalytic terms: they condense various aspects of voicing, violence, expression, and aesthetics, and they displace the earlier event from Pandarus's past. This polyvalence may help us to understand Freud's interest in the literary and fictional: intertextual citations make legible the haunting of earlier upon later times; but the literary can also raise—through the use of trope, metaphor, metonymy—the rhythms of trauma, a semiotics able to trace, if not to recover completely, the multiple echoes of wounds. Literary examples combine metaphorical condensation and metonymic displacement, strategies of representation crucial both to poetry and, in Freud's account, to the dream-work.

In the poem before us, Pandarus's dream state emerges as both anterior and interior to the traumatic events that will transpire. His undetermined "teene" silently prompts much of the victimization that is to come, including the possibility of Criseyde's rape. Procne's song—somehow both lamentation and twittering—sits at the center, now also a figure for the haunted psychodynamics of trauma whereby some voices fraught with wounding also work to pass the wound along. Nearly 900 lines later, the reference to Ovid recurs when "a nyghtyngale, upon a cedre grene" (II.918) lulls Criseyde to her own momentous dream state: Criseyde's heart, violently rent from her by the eagle's talons, is replaced with the eagle's in a description that sutures desire with violence:

And as she slep, anonright tho hire mette  
How that an egle, fethered whit as bon,  
Under hire brest his longe clawes sette,  
And out hire herte he rente, and that anon,  
And dide his herte into hire brest to gon—  
Of which she nought agroos, ne nothyng smerte—  
And forth he fleigh, with herte left for herte. (2.925–31)

Critics have noted the troubling nature of this passage, its combination of gruesome violation—the bloody breast ripped open—with an image of equality, of mutual

exchange—of “herte left for herte.” They have noted, too, the image of pain—the eagle’s long claws set in flesh—alongside the assertion that Criseyde was neither frightened nor hurt.

I am interested in the use of both equivocation and allusion here. Framed by allusion to the nightingale’s song, the dream figures as an artifact of Philomela’s violation and violence transformed. The narrator both raises the possibility of trauma, of rape, of silencing, and defensively closes it down. The image remains powerfully chilling. Intertextual repetitions—situated in between wakefulness and sleeping—again suggest trauma’s complicated address: the suggestibility of dream state, the complicated way that desire entwines with memory. Criseyde’s dream shows her earlier ambivalence about Troilus to be moving toward resolution; but especially given this oblique reference to Ovid, how are we to disentangle her newly found desire from Pandarus’s suggestive promptings to her throughout Book II? Furthermore, the figuration of birdsong as the voice of trauma raises the stakes on the pleasures of its hearing, unsettling the surety that we ever want to let voices like Philomela’s go. For who will remember, enraptured by the nightingale in “ful loude song” (II.920), that it encrypts her mutilated tongue? What does it mean that the voice from this wound can, now transformed, sing so beautifully?

These moments allude to problems with voice as a metaphor for the wound. In the context of the larger poem, Pandarus’s dream state raises the possibility that voicing the wound might continue rather than repair the fact of wounding. Voicing trauma can, under certain circumstances, offer a rhythm of wounding, a refrain of misery, as one means of its remediation. Pandarus, victimizer as well as go-between, passes the wound along, remedying the isolation of his suffering by producing the suffering of another. But Chaucer’s delicate representation of trauma as transformed birdsong for Criseyde and Pandarus both—the subtleties of his representation as lamentation, annoyance, fear, desire, and pain—suggests that one corollary to the poignancy of the wounded cry is its aestheticization. We hear it because it haunts, moves, chills us: we are made sensitive by it as much as for it.

The poet continues to display both of these properties, and as the poem progresses, the implications become more acute, particularly with reference to the voice and desire of Criseyde. In Book III, during the consummation scene, the obscurity of Criseyde’s voice emerges when Chaucer’s narrator, crucially, compares the lovers to a tree entwined with honeysuckle. It is now Criseyde’s own voice likened to the nightingale’s:

And as aboute a tree, with many a twist  
Bytrent and writh the swote wodebynde,  
Gan ech of hem in armes other wynde.

And as the newe abaysed nyghtyngale,  
That stynteth first whan she bygynneth to singe,

Whan that she hereth any herde tale,  
 Or in the hegges any wyght stiryng,  
 And after siker doth hire voice out ryng  
 Right so Criseyde, whan hire drede stente,  
 Opned hire herte and tolde hym hire entente. (3.1230–39)

Fear is gone; Criseyde, twined around her lover, opens her heart and speaks. Yet the description of her voice proceeds by a strange negation: the nightingale, having just begun, stops singing “newe abaysed,” interrupted, startled—the ME term *abaysed* denoting fear as much as surprise—by the “herde tale,” a formulation that collapses the shepherd’s voice with the tales that shepherds tell, presumably like the story of the nightingale’s doppelgänger, Philomela. The narrator recounts the reverse: it is the clarity of Criseyde’s newly unequivocal testimony to her intent—her “ringing” voice, her “open” heart—that he endeavors to describe. Yet in a stanza that ends with such clear proclamation of desire’s voice—the voice of Criseyde’s desire, and the voice of desire desired most by Troilus—reference to the nightingale implies something in excess of pastoral delight, itself a complicated genre. This is, to say the least, a difficult metaphor for Criseyde’s open heart. Earlier references from nature do not reassure: Criseyde, quaking “as an aspes leef” (III.1200), or the image of the lark caught in the claw of the spearhawk. Too, lovers clinging to one another as tree and honeysuckle evokes both beauty and fixity, a serious pastoral scene which, if it does not readily remind us of Tancred and Clorinda, can resonate with another of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the story of Apollo’s love for the unhappy Daphne, transformed to bark and leaves to escape his advances. Certainly the nightingale, as Fradenburg notes, obliquely signals Philomela, voiceless because of trauma, voiceless in the face of it, an image with the aura of the mutilated tongue that, at the very least, calls into question what we can know about Criseyde’s intent or that her voice rings so easily: “the possibility of Criseyde’s rape [. . .] is spoken through intertextual haunting” (*Sacrifice* 226) at a moment when Chaucer “draws attention to the inaudibility at the core of this most valuable poem” (*Sacrifice* 229). To be sure, Chaucer’s narrator insists that alone together, the two are momentarily complete “at Loves reverence,” and that they—Criseyde especially—no longer need fear. Yet his language circles that which it cannot name: Criseyde moments before was “al quyrt from every drede and tene,” an echo of Pandarus’s earlier state; if she has now found a voice, we are not allowed to hear it.

Chaucer’s narrator both recounts a silencing and performs one. The nightingale’s song suddenly cut off, just like Philomela’s tongue, stands in for Criseyde’s “ringing voice,” itself cut out at the moment its clarity is most directly asserted. These cuts undercut our confidence in the narrator’s reliability. The very lyricism of his description, written around the central absence alluded to as the cutting of a tongue, might well make us suspicious: whose desire, after all, is at issue here? Thus, at the

very moment when her voice is most directly linked to the traumatic (non)utterance, it is rendered unavailable to us, less palpable, written over by the narrator's own. Her voice emerges as the voice of trauma under erasure, a voice described but not represented, cited but not quoted, troped by way of its inverse, asserted and absent, occluded but yet crucial to the narrative.

That Chaucer's narrator distances us from Criseyde's voice at the moment that he asserts the greatest possibility of its unequivocal transparency seems especially notable given his interest—both earlier and later in the poem—in elaborating her words. This depiction of the narrator's dependence upon a voice he carefully hides and claims to ventriloquize alongside oblique reference to the mutilated voice of Philomela, anticipates Geoffrey Hartmann's reading of the "voice of the shuttle"—the textual making that compensates for the silences of another. This is a move read by Patricia Joplin as itself an aestheticization of victimization, a collapse of the structural attributes of trauma—what Lacan will call the traumatic kernel of desire—into the differential assignments of loss, mutilation, and violation that cultures assign to particular bodies.

All seem at issue here. The passage in Book III doubles us back on the narrator's own haunted aesthetics, for traumatic temporalities here link desire with the traumatic flashback. The nightingale stops when first she begins to sing, a formulation that signals the collapse of time, the inability to mark the difference between *then* and *now*, that constitutes the time of trauma and passion both: her voice cut off is "new abaysed," a phrase also doubled, legible as either newly startled or startled now, again. Is this a momentary recall of a trauma past or the panicked fear of it anew? It is of course both: the doubled collapse of *now again* with *newly* enacts the traumatic flashback, a repetition of fear that relives the event, in its nearly original, shattering force.

Yet if the passage begins with the doubleness of the traumatic flashback, its lyricism circles a moment of *jouissance*—itself a shattering formally outside language—depicted here in the temporal structure of the narrator's incantatory reverie: five stanzas (1219–53), with movement repetitive and accretive, emphasize both the collapse of time and its duration. With increasing frequency, lines begin as words conjoin in a sequence of forward momentum: "and now," "and as," "and after," "and right as," "and sodenly," "and therwithal." In the first stanza, as in the second, one such line drives us forward ("And now swetnesse semeth more sweete"; "And as aboute a tree, with many a twiste"). In the third stanza, the pace picks up, referencing both the nightingale, startled, silenced, stunned, and the reemergence of her voice ("And as the newe abaysed nyghtyngale"; "And after siker doth hire voice out ryng"). By the fourth, there are four, rapid-fire, all to do with Troilus:

And right as he that seth his deth yshapen  
 And dyen mot, in ought that he may gesse,  
 And sodeynly rescous doth hym escapen,  
 And from his deth is brought in sykernesse,  
 For al this world, in swych present gladnesse  
 Was Troilus, and hath his lady swete.

This carefully crafted, regularly rhythmic libidinal and temporal movement performs its consuming passion as a rhythm of physical power. The nightingale's tongue—a voice, like Criseyde's, both cut off and ringing—occupies its center. Chaucer represents precisely the paradoxical doubleness of trauma we saw in Freud: narrative and shattering, language and body, memory and forgetting. Intertextual haunting produces a site between mimesis as narrative and mimesis as embodied repetition. And that is, precisely, the place of a literariness that, while it may in part work to disarticulate our libidinal attractions to trauma from the cultural productions that pass the wound along, never opposes the two. In suturing the cut-off voice to these coital accretions, Chaucer shows his narrator's account of desire to be fundamental to structures that aestheticize voices and wounding.

Chaucer's display of his narrator's use of Criseyde's cut-off voice, however and crucially, offers us something that direct quotation, with its illusion of presence, cannot. It makes us suspicious, conflicted, drawing attention to the narrator's aestheticizing act. Chaucer's poem thus suggests that the poignant rhetorical beauty of trauma makes it especially effective in organizing the pleasure of the text and of the group: the mobility of specific trauma for collective trope can give detail, depth, and substance to fantasy, offering a particular historical iteration able to activate, if also to accentuate, the traumatic structure that constitutes (from a Lacanian point of view) the very substance of desire. Yet that attribute can also and nonetheless prove enabling for an ethical sensibility that seeks to register history's dangerous memory, its preoccupation with what Vance Smith has called its "processes of forgetting" (162). The polyvocality of Chaucer's literary representation, that is, puts voices under erasure poignantly on display. With regard to the recuperative promise of the voice from the wound, this may not seem like much. But it is not nothing.

Chaucer's display of voicing throughout the *Troilus* shows that voices from wounds move tropically in many directions at once: they can never adequately compensate for any single traumatic event, yet neither is their testimony secure, a fact that Henryson's *Testament of Criseyde* makes painfully clear. Criseyde's future as a notorious literary object, vilified and aestheticized, emblemizes one way that trauma survives, not always in the hope of a recuperative, ethical future, but as a crime deplored, a befallen state blamed, tendentiously, on its victim. Criseyde's afterlife shows that the mobility of wounded voicings cannot be secured.



## POETIC FRAILTIES

The poem's end founders on the impossibility of either realist recovery or silence. Indeed, the poet's famous inability *to* end suggests that incessant words may be one response to trauma. There are, by critical count, at least four endings in the poem's final 97 lines (V.1772–1869), and the conclusion, by turns erratic, poignant, and earnest, ranges from source to source, from genre to genre, from future to present to past; from the high “holughnesse of the eighth sphere” (1809) to England itself, “this litel spot of erthe that with the se embraced is” (1815–16); from the feet of the classical masters, Virgil, Ovid, Homer, to the “gret diversite” of English, “in wrytyng of oure tonge” (1794), the last of these, perhaps, an unconscious reference to Philomela's suffering. The movement is dizzyingly rapid.

Critics have debated whether this ending is intentional or not; some see a masterful display of control, as the author shows the narrator to have missed the point entirely. But no small part of the literary accomplishment of *Troilus and Criseyde* lies in the fact that the poem evokes this trouble: how can any single voice, any single tongue, prove adequate to this tragedy? The diversities of the English tongue, the multiplicity of genre, all are fragile remedy for such distress. Yet in response, Chaucer nonetheless offers the literary, in all its frailty: “Lo here, the forme of olde clekis speche / In poetrie, if ye hire bokes seche” (V.1854–55). On one hand, the narrator distinguishes the frailties of pagan rites, rendered in the books of “old clerks,” from the devout Christian morality of his and Gower's day. Yet a more haunting reading of these lines—one that takes seriously both the echoes of Ovid's “pagan” books elsewhere in the poem and the difficulties of ending—could hear in these rhythms the frailties that haunt poetic art as such, frailties to which Chaucer's aesthetics direct us.

In the face of the appetites of this “wrecched worlde” (V.1851), poetic language seems as frail as pagan rites. Sending his “little tragedy” forth, Chaucer subordinates his lines to the frailties of art:

Go, litel bok, go litel myn tragedye,  
 Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye,  
 So sende myght to make in som comedye!  
 But litel bok, no makyng thow n'envie,  
 But subgit be to alle poesye  
 And kis the steppes where as thow seest pace  
 Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace. (V.1786–92)

Gesturing to poetic traditions and to form, the narrator turns to the literary, in hopes of consolation and of rest.<sup>30</sup> The envoi resonates with the insufficiency of the literary in the face of its own ambition, the insufficiency of tragedy to compensate securely for the suffering it describes. I read the tone as gentle and mournful, an incantatory refrain moving in the diminution of its own grandiose ambitions. “Little book,” “little

book," "my little tragedy," "go, be subjected to all poetry. Perhaps someday (oh, earnest hope) your maker will be given a comedy to write." At this moment Chaucer casts the comic moments here as a post-traumatic kind of comedy, predicting the same for his *Canterbury Tales*, a work that will itself swing precipitously from the mournful to the raucous. His "little" tragedy not yet finalized, the poet reconstitutes himself in terms of the multiplicity of ancient authors. To be sure, this may well be an act of textual accomplishment that Chaucer denies Criseyde, Philomela, and Procne, the "voice of the shuttle" notwithstanding. Kissing the steps of the ancients, the poet hopes to take his place among a homosocial genealogy of voices not known for their ability to redress—or even reliably to help us to feel—the traumas and victimizations of women, the underclass, the outcast, those abjected both by and for culture. This certainly stands high among the frailties of poesy.<sup>31</sup>

Yet here the multiplicity of the signifier marks the ambiguities and concatenations of language—vertiginous, stuttering—in an aesthetics haunted by multiple traumas, what George Edmondson calls the "traumatic encounter with the neighbor" (5) that constitutes Chaucer's relation to Boccaccio's work; but also Chaucer's rendering of the traumas of war and love, chivalry's traumatic art. In the face of that tragedy, the signifier may not satisfy, but neither will it ever let go. From the literariness of envoi, and tragedy, to the formal, defensive finality of Trinitarian prayer, "Thow oon, and two, and thre, eterne on lyve / [. . .] / Us from visible and invisible foon / defende" (V.1863, 1866).<sup>32</sup> The signifier won't let go. Not even after the poem's final amen.

And this may be why this poem never lets its readers go. If we no longer defer to Chaucer's canon of poets, we remain caught by the affecting equivocations of this particular story of Criseyde. We return in part because this poem shows us the ways in which trauma swerves into trope and a reminder of the frailties of literariness and of language for testimony. But even frail poetic lines still have the power to both move and challenge us. For the multiplicity of Chaucer's voicings, his subtle display of some voices dominating and echoing over others, his use of citation, of voices under erasure, together remind us, too, that trauma can redouble itself even in representations of victimization that claim recuperation and redress.

Such literary acts can urge upon us an ethical sensitivity to the affective power of poetry, and to the troping of trauma that voices promises on which it can never deliver. This is not an account in which the inability to stabilize meaning is only or necessarily a bad thing. Nor is it one in which interpretive mobility will necessarily—indeed, ever—dislodge the traumas of the past. What it means is this: if we cannot recuperate or gloss the voice from the wound *for* history, Chaucer shows us that the aestheticizations of the literary can nonetheless help us to recognize, and to trace, its rhythms.

## NOTES

1. Throughout, citations from *Troilus and Criseyde* are taken from Benson, et al. Line numbers are hereafter noted in the text on first reference.

2. Much written about trauma endeavors to argue *for* the importance of trauma to history. I am deeply indebted to this work. My reference to the *writing* of history signals attention to the formal, narratological aspects of history as text. My essay interrogates the incommensurability of history writing to trauma on the grounds of the formal properties of each. It is, of course, incontrovertible that “history” as that category of past events, traditions, genealogies, is replete with trauma. This is precisely why the writing of history has difficulty coping.

3. See, of course, White.

4. “Regime of truth” is from Foucault’s 1977 interview “Truth and Power,” though my familiarity with it comes from Homi Bhabha’s borrowing; Natalie Zemon Davis inspires with *Fiction in the Archives*; see also de Certeau.

5. I borrow the German terms for “representation” from Spivak and am indebted to her analysis.

6. She writes, “In *Troilus and Criseyde* the figure of the wound is not only prominent, but prominently polyvocal” (218). I am, thus, interested in foregrounding Chaucer’s literary oscillations so as to argue for the insights of the literary and equivocal in and for the representation of particular traumatic acts or relations.

7. See also her “Cruel Optimism.”

8. Leys identifies a fundamental ambiguity beginning with Freud, whose work vacillates, she argues, between an “economic” or “mimetic” mode—in which trauma constitutes a powerful excess of excitement “unbinding” the subject, inducing a state of dislocation or dissociation in which narrative memory is impossible—and a “diegetic,” or “antimimetic” mode, in which trauma triggers a binding of memory of the event through narrative, as in the “talking cure.”

9. Murray Schwartz suggests that psychoanalyst Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen was the first to import René Girard’s notion of “mimetic rivalry,” and of imitation as a collapse of intersubjective difference into the field. See pp. 369ff.

10. Freud’s comments on trauma—spread out over a number of essays, including “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920), *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1915), and “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death” (1926)—indicate his interest in the effect of traumatic events on the interiority of subjects, particularly the problem of war neurosis (“shell shock”), an interest motivated by the first World War. As Leys points out (p. 35), Freud complicates standard accounts of shell shock at the time.

11. Thus, “[I]t is only by begging numerous questions about the nature of the death drive that Caruth can incorporate Tancred’s experience” as “assimilable to traumatic neuroses” (293). Stuber argues, however, that Leys’s treatment of Caruth enforces a mimetic/antimimetic oscillation that Caruth shows to be untenable. Similarly, Schwartz argues that Leys enacts the very contradictions she elucidates. Caruth’s literary modes of reading are not, for reasons given above, easily assimilable to the mimetic and antimimetic taxonomy that Leys uses.

12. At moments the debate serves up warmed-over controversies, some interior to psychoanalysis (problems associated with “false memory” syndrome and issues raised by Lacan’s critique of the Anglo-American ego-psychologists), and some external to it (the so-called opposition between materialist and poststructuralist approaches to culture).

13. Leys suggestively notes that a different reading of Freud’s reference to Tasso’s poem might elucidate matters. I attempt such a reading here.

14. On the history of the First Crusade, see Atiyah.

15. Given that “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920) was written only five years after “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,” it is not at all surprising that Freud would call to mind a fictional representation of the compulsions and traumas of war. Nor is it coincidental that he twins the fantastical

with the historical. His writing on the subject regularly concerns—as Jacqueline Rose has shown—the problem of where to locate violence, persecution, trauma, and suffering (89–109).

16. For pragmatic and political reasons—understandable all—LaCapra argues that we must take historical trauma seriously, but never simply confuse or conflate it with the way traumatic desire might be entangled. He suggests that the “empathic unsettlement” of “secondary witnesses” to the narration of traumatic memory might, in distinguishing “absence” from “loss,” help in the working through. LaCapra writes, “deriving historical from structural trauma—is a great temptation for theoretically inclined analysts who tend to see history simply as illustrating or instantiating more basic processes” (725–26). Like Leys, LaCapra implies that disentangling the two is a realist venture: trauma should be realistically rendered (not, he says, in “allusive” or “equivocal” terms). My analysis takes seriously the aesthetics of even such optimistic accounts of representation: they are, after all, intended to move their readers and hearers, a fact that suggests the troubling residue of desire and affect within even the most compassionate linguistic expression.

17. Nor can realistic accounts do justice to the way that historical trauma affects the structure of desire within groups of subjects subjected to them, as is evident, for example, in Hortense Spillers’s brilliant Lacanian analysis of the afterlife of slavery.

18. Witnessing is important to Caruth’s larger ethical concerns, and it is here that she registers profound debts to Girard. For Leys’s critique, see p. 253ff.

19. It is striking in this regard that Leys has little to say about those psychoanalytic theorists offering the fullest account of the blurring of self and other, and of trauma as a structure of subjectivity, namely Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek.

20. Federico notes Freud’s interest in Schliemann’s work at having “dug up” the real foundations of a legendary place, an act that Freud himself associated with analysis: “Similar to the archeology that laid bare [Troy], Freud’s work made visible to the trained scientist [. . .] the mystery of history” (xi). According to Peter Gay, Freud envied Schliemann’s accomplishment “more than any other,” as cited by Federico, x–xi.

21. On the relevant political scene, see also Barnie, especially pp. 30–60; Palmer.

22. The case was first examined by Watts.

23. Delany offered the first condemnatory account taking the charge quite seriously (112–29), while critics such as Pearsall and Benson were more dismissive, on grounds (in the first case) that Chaumpaigne’s accusation was revenge of the spurned lover (137–38), and (in the second) that Chaucer must have been innocent, since Chaumpaigne cleared him of responsibility in a legal quitclaim, dated 1380 (xxi). Cannon (“*Chaumpaigne Release*,” 86–89) offers a powerful analysis of the meaning of *raptus* in the legal milieu at the time of the crafting of the quitclaim.

24. A point definitively made by Felman.

25. See also Cannon, “Chaucer and Rape.” On Criseyde and “the traffic in women,” see Dinshaw; Aers, especially pp. 117–42.

26. On Chaucer’s relationship to Ovid as well as to what Ginsberg calls “the Italian tradition,” see, in addition to Fyler, Ginsberg, Calabrese, and most recently, Desmond. Chaucer’s Ovidian sources include not only the *Amatoria* tradition but the Latin *Metamorphoses* as well as the *Ovide Moralisé*, a fourteenth-century poetic amplification and Christian allegorical commentary on Ovid’s pagan text. These latter two are generally viewed as less important to Chaucer’s art than the former. While I am interested in reconsidering this assumption, such interest lies outside the concerns of the present essay.

27. Narrative elisions in the scene of rape or incest are not unusual. See Higgins and Silver; and for the Chaucer corpus, Scala.

28. For a pertinent reading of the *Troilus* that suggests the ways certain kinds of readers similarly traffic, see Dinshaw, particularly Chapter 1, “Reading Like a Man.”

29. According to the *Middle English Dictionary*: remembre(n) (v.) 1b. Refl.: (b) to remember something, cast the mind back; recall to mind.

30. I owe here an enormous debt to Robert M. Stein for incisive questions and commentary on the implications of my analysis for a reading of the poem's end.

31. Margherita highlights the myriad ways in which history—specifically Cassandra's historical knowledge—are in this poem “disavowed or repressed in the service of poetic continuity” (124).

32. This line is, of course, a quotation and translation of Dante's more confident meditation on beatitude, *Paradiso* (14.29–30). Limitations of space prohibit a more patient explication, but for a reading of Chaucer's citation here, see Ginsberg, pp. 14–15.

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