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Susan Schibanoff

Chaucer and "Stewart's" Pandarus and the Critics



Recent critical views of Chaucer's Pandarus may differ in details, but in one sense they are quite uniform: they largely agree that this late addition to the *dramatis personae* of the Troy story is an ambiguous and complex character whose motivations are often obscure. He is both a "devotee of courtly love and a practical realist," a self-contradictory mixture of farce and idealism, a character who hides behind different masks and plays different roles in the poem, and, in general, one who invites both our sympathy and our condemnation.¹ With few exceptions,² it is difficult to find a critic of the last decade or so willing to see Chaucer's Pandarus simply and exclusively as the reprehensible bawd, as did Jusserand and Root over a half-century ago;³ it would no doubt be equally difficult to find one who would agree that Pandarus is unqualifiedly the "virtuous uncle" of Criseyde and noble "friend" of Troilus, as Eugene E. Slaughter argued at mid-century.⁴ Much of the newer "mixed" view of Pandarus probably results from Muscatine's examination of his "dualism"--his courtliness and realism--from increasing attention to the modes of irony in Chaucer's *Troilus*, to the role of the Narrator, and to the poem's evocation of a double reaction, part sympathetic, part judging, on the audience's part.⁵ Whatever the causes of the new view of Pandarus, it seems unlikely that we will abandon it soon and return to seeing the go-between as either solely

the hypocritical pimp or the kindly uncle.

In order to embrace this new view fully, however, we need to come to grips with what seems to be in contradiction of it--the response of more contemporaneous audiences of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to Chaucer's Pandarus. The literary and linguistic facts are well-known enough to need only brief summary here. Pandarus did not appear as a character in the Troy story until its third major medieval version in 1336, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*,⁶ but as early as 1440 his personal name had degenerated into a common noun.⁷ By about 1507, his name was so inextricably combined with the idea of bawdry that Skelton felt certain it would always be: "He is named Troylus baud,/ Of that name he is sure,/ Whyles the world shall dure."⁸ Skelton was probably correct in his prediction, for Pandarus' name is still with us as noun and verb, while both Criseyde's and Troilus' names enjoyed, or suffered, only temporary currency.⁹ In literature, the situation was similar. As Hyder E. Rollins notes, Pandarus "quickly developed into a low comedy figure," at times even a clown.¹⁰ The impetus behind both these linguistic and literary developments probably lies in the negative response of early audiences of *Troilus and Criseyde* to Chaucer's Pandarus.¹¹ Less important here, however, than the negative aspect of the response is the fact that it is one-sided and unqualified. It would seem that Chaucer's early readers did not see or appreciate the dualism, the ambiguity, and complexity in Pandarus that recent modern critics do. For most of them, it would seem he is the bawd, clear and simple.

It is no wonder, then, that modern critics who promote our appreciation of the ambivalent nature of Chaucer's Pandarus have remained largely silent on the issue of early views of the go-between. The linguistic development of "Pandarus," the Shakespearean treatment of the figure, and Rollins' early summation have all suggested that the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are not happy hunting grounds for those recent critics who seek the justification of precedence for their views. Seemingly consistent with this trend is Caroline F. E. Spurgeon's note on a sixteenth-century Scottish poem by "Stewart" which features Pandarus. Summarizing the second part of this poem, Spurgeon notes only that Pandarus "launches into a tirade against women,"¹² implying that, like his contemporaries, Stewart must have seen the go-between as an uncomplicated and unsavory character, one capable of delivering such a tirade. On closer examination, however, Stewart's "ffurth ouer the mold at morrow as I ment"¹³ presents Pandarus in nowhere near so negative a light, and its ending is not as uncomplicated as Spurgeon's note suggests. In fact, Stewart's treatment of the Chaucerian figure anticipates and provides

some precedence for modern critical recognition of the subtleties and complexities of this enigmatic character.

"Stewart," as his name is given by the scribe who copied his "ffurth ouer the mold" in the *Bannatyne Manuscript*, a Scottish poetic miscellany prepared sometime before 1568,¹⁴ was probably well-acquainted with Chaucer's works. He may even have been familiar with the "continuation" his fellow Scotsman, Robert Henryson, produced of the Chaucerian poem which evoked most written comment in the several centuries following Chaucer's death--*Troilus and Criseyde*.¹⁵ Composed sometime before 1500, Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* was first printed in 1532 by Thynne, in whose edition it appears as Book VI of Chaucer's poem.¹⁶ Not content with the state of affairs as Chaucer had left them in his *Troilus*, Henryson set out to trace the aftermath of the lovers' experience. He returns Troilus to earth for his brief appearance as the still noble and faithful prince, strikes Criseyde with the retributive disease of leprosy, and makes mention of Calchas and Diomedes. But he gives us not one word on Pandarus. The leprous Cresseid and the jilted Troilus have, of course, no need whatsoever of their former go-between, but we might expect at least to hear his name mentioned. We can only assume that Henryson deleted all reference to Pandarus because he disapproves of him¹⁷ or because he is incurious about his fate. Stewart, however, is curious, and in his "ffurth ouer the mold" he considers the question Henryson neglects--whatever happened to Pandarus? How did the unhappy denouement of the love affair he arranged between his niece and friend affect him later? Did he, like Chaucer's Troilus and Henryson's Cresseid,¹⁸ become the wiser for it, or did he retreat into cynicism, even bitterness, and learn nothing from it?

In constructing his poetic answers to these questions, Stewart somewhat incongruously blended two genres--the courtly *chanson d'aventure* and the popular, anti-feminist lying-song.¹⁹ In the style of the *chanson*, the poem opens with a young man wandering forth over the "mold" one morning. He comes across a man who identifies himself as the Pandarus who "sumtyme servit the gud knyght troyelus"; of this reputed authority on the ways of women and love, the young man asks "quhen ladeis to thair luvaries salbe leill." In the style of the anti-feminist lying-song, Pandarus answers this question with a series of ironic *impossibilia*:

In all Egipt quhen non Is fundin peure
 And in to rome Ar fund no wrangus Air
 Quhen þat no woman desyris to be fair
 And quhen the law / leiffis no man to appeill
 Than ladyis to thair luvaris salbe leill

Quhen þat no fische is fundin in the flude
 And malt and meill Ar maid withottin millis
 and quhen the bak aboundis In to blude
 Moir than the hair that rynnis to the hillis
 And quhen that wemen ʒarnis not thair willis
 And mvssil schellis gevis moir money than meill
 Than ladeis to thair luvaris salbe leill

Quhen firn flurichis and beiris gude frute
 and gud reid wyne growis On the roddyne treis
 And on the hadder browis the hassill nvte
 hony and walx Ar maid but werk of beis
 And the falcoun Can fang no fowle but fleis
 And quhen the theivis thinkis schame to steill
 Than ladyis to thair luvaris salbe leill.

(31-49)

Stewart's "ffurth ouer the mold" depicts a Pandarus who still counsels young men on the nature of women and love, as he once did with Chaucer's Troilus. But Stewart's Pandarus seems a changed man. It is the young lover who happens upon Pandarus, knows that he can discuss well "questionis of luve," and broaches the subject to him, not, as in Chaucer's poem, Pandarus who comes across a distraught knight and drags from him an explanation of the nature of his woe. Nor does Stewart's Pandarus, once apprised of the lover's question, leap into action with a proposal to become his match-maker, confidant, or go-between. His Pandarus is no longer the optimistic counselor who once advised the love-sick Troilus to "put nat impossible thus [his] cure,/ Syn thyng to come is oft in aventure"²⁰; he is now an older and more cautious man whose ironic *impossibilia* cast the shadows of the lying-song over the landscape of the *chanson*. His speech is still humorous and proverbial, but there can be no doubt that Stewart has transformed Chaucer's incessantly active arranger of love affairs into a more distant, more passive character.

Were Stewart's poem to close with what Spurgeon calls Pandarus' "tirade," his long series of lying-song *impossibilia* satirizing feminine inconstancy, we might also be justified in concluding that Stewart has transformed Chaucer's go-between into a jaded and bitter, albeit facetious, cynic who now distrusts all women. But Stewart's "ffurth ouer the mold" does not end on this clear and negative note; it continues in a fashion very unusual for the lying-song by probing for a literal explanation of the implications of the ironic *impossibilia*.²¹ After Pandarus delivers them, his questioner remarks with dismay that the "tyme may nevir cum/ That thir foir-spokkin thingis may be trew" (50-51). The young man, in other

words, seems to want a less ambiguous statement about the possibilities of woman's constancy, perhaps even a definite prediction concerning his own chances with his lady. Instead of clarifying his previous statement, however, Pandarus chooses to respond in an equally ambiguous mode and then hurries away: ". . . Nay Thay [i.e., the preceding *impossibilia*] salbe all and sum [true]/ seurlly afoir the questioun thow me schew ["certainly before you explain this question to me," or, "before I explain this question to you"]/ Heirfoir my freind As for this tyme adew/ heir to remane Na langer Is me lent" (52-55).²²

The sense of Pandarus' answer is clear enough: all his earlier mentioned *impossibilia* will never come to pass, and, by implication, ladies will never be true to their lovers in Pandarus' opinion. But the mode in which Pandarus chooses to deliver this opinion is curiously indirect and ambiguous, far removed from his blunt statement at the end of Chaucer's *Troilus* that he hates his faithless niece Criseyde and his promise that he "wol hate hire evermore" (V, 1732-1733) for her treachery in love. Does this ambiguous mode of expression reflect Pandarus' detached and sage acceptance of the mutable and weak ways of human nature, akin to the vision of the world Chaucer's Troilus achieves in the eighth sphere, or does it reflect Pandarus' clever but cynical pessimism about all women, not just his niece, Criseyde? Stewart does not tell us how to read Pandarus' enigmatically stated final lines, and his poem closes at once without any clarification of the ambiguity he has created in his presentation of this character. In short, we cannot tell whether Stewart's Pandarus is sage or cynic, philosophic or misogynistic.

Nor can we be totally certain that Stewart intended the ambiguities of Pandarus in his "ffurth ouer the mold," that they in some way reflect his own response to Chaucer's character, or even that he knew Chaucer's Pandarus through first-hand reading. The name and general nature of Chaucer's go-between must certainly have been familiar to many sixteenth-century poets who had never laid eyes on *Troilus and Criseyde*. Stewart's use of the modes of irony and ambiguity in Pandarus' speech does, however, seem significant, especially in light of the fact that many of his contemporaries were viewing the Chaucerian figure with more literal eyes. His brief notice that he writes about a post-Chaucerian Pandarus, who once served the knight, Troilus, seems calculated to give his "ffurth ouer the mold" the flavor of a continuation poem, one that will allow its audience a glimpse of what happened to Chaucer's go-between after Troilus no longer required his services. His combination of genres, and his new twist to the lying-song, while perhaps mechanical, are evidence that

Stewart searched out some novel techniques to present his Pandarus in a way that imitates Chaucer's, intentionally or not. That Stewart's "ffurth ouer the mold" falls far short of what we now see as Chaucer's masterfully ambiguous depiction of Pandarus is perhaps less important than that it seems to try to copy it. Our new views of Pandarus may not be so new after all, and further precedence for them probably exists in the literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

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NOTES

1. See Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley, 1964), p. 138; Charles S. Rutherford, "Pandarus as Lover: 'A Joly Wo' or 'Loves Shote Keene'?", *AnM*, XIII (1972), 5; and Robert G. Cook, "Chaucer's Pandarus and the Medieval Ideal of Friendship," *JEGP*, LXIX (1970), 424. Other recent discussions of Pandarus' ambiguity may be found in Haldeen Braddy, "Chaucer's Playful Pandarus," *SFQ*, XXXIV (1970), 71-81; and Beryl Rowland, "Pandarus and the Fate of Tantalus," *OL*, XXIV (1969), 3-15.

2. Alan T. Gaylor, "Uncle Pandarus as Lady Philosophy," *PMASAL*, XLVII (1961), 571-595, and John P. McCall, "Five-Book Structure in Chaucer's *Troilus*," *MLQ*, XXIII (1962), 297-308, for instance, argue that there is irony in Chaucer's presentation of Pandarus, but not ambiguity, nor the evocation of the audience's sympathy for him. D. W. Robertson, Jr., "Chaucerian Tragedy," *ELH*, XIX (1952), 1-37, presented a similar view of Pandarus as a "devel" dressed in sheep's clothing, but see Charlotte D'Evelyn, "Pandarus a Devil?," *PMLA*, LXXI (1956), 275-279, and *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. H. Kurath and S. Kuhn (Ann Arbor, 1957), s. v. "devil."

3. See, respectively, *A Literary History of the English People* (London, 1895), I, 302-303, and *The Poetry of Chaucer* (Boston, 1922), p. 120.

4. "Chaucer's Pandarus: Virtuous Uncle and Friend," *JEGP*, XLVIII (1949), 186-195. Thomas Kirby, *Chaucer's "Troilus": A Study in Courtly Love* (1940; repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1958), pp. 177-186, and Sanford B. Meech, *Design in Chaucer's "Troilus"* (Syracuse, 1959), pp. 412-417, provide convenient summaries of earlier critical views of Pandarus.

5. In addition to Muscatine, Morton W. Bloomfield, "Distance and Predestination in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *PMLA*, LXXII (1957), 14-26, and E. Talbot Donaldson, ed., *Chaucer's Poetry: An Anthology for the Modern Reader* (New York, 1958), pp. 966-968, are among those most responsible for turning our attention to these areas.

6. Although Homer, Vergil, and Benoit all mention a character named "Pandarus," Boccaccio seems to be the first to use the name for Troilus and Criseyde's go-between. See R. K. Root, ed., *The Book of Troilus and Criseyde by Geoffrey Chaucer* (1926; repr. Princeton, 1945), p. xxvi.

7. Gretchen Mieszkowski, "The Reputation of Criseyde, 1155-1500," *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, XLIII (1971), 131, notes the use of "pandare" as a common noun in the "Chance of Dice," an anonymous poem which Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900* (Cambridge, 1925), I, 44, dates near 1440.

8. From "Phyllyp Sparowe," in *Works*, ed. A. Dyce (Edinburgh, 1855), I. 85.

9. Spurgeon, *Chaucer Criticism*, notes the use of "Cressida" as a synonym for "mistress" in 1603 (III, 55), and the use of "Troilus" as a personal or Christian name of favorable connotation ca. 1600 (III, 53). On Chaucer's interest in names, see my "Argus and Argyve: Etymology and Characterization in Chaucer's *Troilus*," forthcoming, *Speculum*.

10. "The Troilus-Cressida Story from Chaucer to Shakespeare," *PMLA*, XXXII (1917), 388-389.

11. Or to Boccaccio's Pandaro; Henryson does not include him in his *Testament of Cresseid*.

12. *Chaucer Criticism*, III, 36.

13. Ed. W. Tod Ritchie, *The Bannatyne Manuscript*, Scottish Text Society (Edinburgh, 1928-1934), IV, 40-42. All quotations of Stewart's poem in my text are from this edition.

14. J. T. T. Brown, "The Bannatyne Manuscript: A Sixteenth Century Poetic Miscellany," *Scottish Historical Review*, I (1904), 145-146, implies that this Stewart may be William Stewart (fl. 1499-1501), many of whose poems are preserved by Bannatyne and Maitland.

15. Spurgeon, *Chaucer Criticism*, I, lxxvi-lxxix, notes that, until 1700, there are nearly twice as many references to *Troilus and Criseyde* as to the *Canterbury Tales*.

16. See Alice S. Miskimin, *The Renaissance Chaucer* (New Haven, 1975), p. 208, for an explanation of how Henryson's poem came to be considered the "conclusion" of Chaucer's.

17. Cf. Miskimin, *Chaucer*, p. 213.

18. Florence H. Ridley, "A Plea for the Middle Scots," in Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, Harvard English Studies, V (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), pp. 187-196, offers a convincing discussion of the nature of Cresseid's illumination.

19. For discussion and bibliography of the anti-feminist lying-song, see Francis Lee Utley, *The Crooked Rib: An Analytical Index to the Argument about Women in English and Scots Literature to the End of the Year 1568* (Columbus, Ohio, 1944), pp. 46 and 133-134. His "When Nettles in Winter Bring Forth Roses Red," *PMLA*, LX (1945), 346-355, discusses the manuscript tradition of this most famous and enduring of medieval anti-feminist lying songs. See also Irving Linn, "If All the Sky Were Parchment," *PMLA*, LIII (1938), 963-965, and Rossell Hope Robbins, "The World Upside Down: A Middle English Amphibole," *Anglia*, LXXII (1954), 388-389, concerning the use of *impossibilia* to satirize women.

20. F. N. Robinson, ed., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2d edn. (Boston, 1957), p. 398, ll. 783-784. Subsequent quotations of Chaucer's poem are from this edition.

21. The typical anti-feminist lying-song includes in each stanza a catalogue of impossibilities, followed by a single-line refrain similar to the one Stewart's Pandarus uses. See the examples listed by Utley, *Crooked Rib*, p. 46, and the additional example listed in Rossell Hope Robbins and John L. Cutter, eds., *Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1965), no. 1355. 5.

22. Since Pandarus has earlier (l. 13) addressed the young lover as "my freind," ll. 54-55 are his hasty farewell to the lover rather than the lover's farewell to the audience.