THE PRECEPTS OF CLASSICAL RHETORIC
IN THE LETTERS OF GEOFFREY CHAUCER'S
TROYLUS & CRISEYDE

In the Middle Ages the art of Rhetoric was one of the main instruments to establish any kind of formal literary discourse through traslations and learned study. This *praeceptum,* that began in Ancient Greece, was transmitted to Rome, and later on to Medieval Europe. Rhetoric, then was the means witty orators transferred their experience to future generations giving direct suggestions of daily behaviour and daily speech. Corax from Syracuse is thought to have been the inventor of this art, that Tysias, later developed and spread (Murphy, 1974: 17). But it was Aristotle who gave the most important definition of Rhetoric. In his *Ars Rhetorica* he outlines the basis features stating them as the ability to discover every possible mean of persuasion:

> (Aristotelis.   *Ars*   *Rhetorica*.   A.2)
> "Εστω δη η ʽρητορικη δύναμισ περι εκαστον του θεωρησαι το εν δεχόμενον πιθανόν.

Aristotle says there are three types of rhetorical discourses: "deliberative", "judicial", and what he calls "ʼεπιδεικτικόν", whose aim is the praise and censorship. The latter is the most important for our discussion. In reference to this, the Greek author gives some characteristics of it. He points out that the target of those who praise or censure is Beauty and Shame. Apart from that, those above mentioned don't mind whether something convenient or harmful has been fulfilled, but frequently eulogize the person who has made something beautiful, even if rejecting its usefulness, as Achilles was praised since he helped Patrocle, though knowing that he, who could keep alive, was about to die, because it turns out that this death was more attractive and life less convenient (Aristóteles, *Retórica*: 195-6)

The characteristics of this type of discourse can be applied to a specific one which is an authentically medieval invention, the *Ars Dictaminis*, that is, the Epistolary Art. The fact of sending oral messages from one person to another appears from the very first testimonies of Western civilization. At the age of Homer's *Iliad* Greeks had developed intricate models of representation by ambassadors, legates and other messengers who transmitted the ideas from whom they were sent. This oral practice included written documents which were verbally read to the addressee. In spite of it, tradition insists on the fact language was essentially oral, and, again, Aristotle *(Liber de Interpretatione*: 49) holds that ″spoken words are symbols of mental experiences, while written words are symbols of spoken ones ″

Εστι μεν οûν τα ᾽εν τη φωνη των ᾽εν τη ψυχη παθηματων συμβο λα, και τα γραφόμενα των ᾽εν τη φωνη.

In the Ancient World any rhetorical doctrine about writing appeared. But, here, it is important to remember that most of the future analysts who tried to discuss about writing as a rhetorical art based their researches on one book, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, attributed to Cicero, which establishes the six parts of a spoken discourse: *exordium*, *narratio*, *divisio*, *confirmatio*, *confutatio*, and *conclusio* (Cicerón, *Retórica a Herenio*: 31). These analysts we are going to focus on lived from 11th century to 14th century, so this fact confirms the increase of rhetorical studies in Medieval Age (Murphy, 1974: 202-3).

The first Medieval rhetorician appeared in the 4th century BC, C. Julius Victor wrote *Ars Rhetorica*, and added three appendices: *De Exercitation*, *De Sermocinatione*, and *De Epistolis* In the second one, he defends that regular rhetorical theory does not include the *sermo*, that is, the informal discourse, and in the third one, he distinguishes two types of letters: the official ones *(negotiales),* and the familiar ones *(familiares).* The official letters contain a serious language as the one which appears in discourses; the familiar letters do not include this kind of language, so they are short and clear. Besides, these letters must be adapted to the occasion, in order to console or do the most appropiate thing for the situation. (Murphy, 1974: 203-4).

The next important analyst was Albericus from Montecassino, with his *Dictaminum Radii*. It is distributed in nine sections. He remembers that a discourse has got four parts: *exordium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio* and *conclusio*,

following Saint Isidore from Sevilla's *Etymologiae*. He insists on the importance of *exordium* and uses the word "reader" *(lectorem)* instead of "listener" *(auditor)*. Albericus is the first to point out the *captatio benevolentiae*, that is, to get the good will of the addressee. So the *Dictaminum Radii* concerns with the beginning of the writings and the *colores* or features of it. Other analysts, as Adalbertus Samaritan or Huge from Bologna also regards the importance of "exordium" and "salutatio". About 1135 an anonymous treaty, *Rationes Dictandi*, analyzes the five parts of the discourse *(salutatio, benevolentiae captatio, narratio, petitio, conclusio)*.

Other authors discuss the parts of the treatise, but they do not bring anything new to the theory exposed by the first analysts and, obviously, by Cicero. Maybe the last important author was Lawrence from Aquileia, with his *Practica sive Usus Dictaminis*, written about 1300, in which he presents seven descriptions in order to determine the nature of the letter:

> (Murphy, 1974: 267). I. Ad Pontificem.
>
> II. Ad cardinales, patriarchas, archiepiscopos, abbates, patres, matres, avos, avunculos, amitas, matertas, novercas et magnos prelatos.
>
> III. Ad imperatores, reges, principes, duces, comites, marchiones, potestates, milites, barones, castellanos et alios quoscumque magnos laicos.
>
> IV. Ad minores quoscumque tam clericos quam laicos.
>
> V. Ad archdiacones, presbyteres, priores, magistres, monachos et omnes alios huiusmodi.
>
> VI. Ad amicos, fratres, cognatos, germanos, mercatores, notarios.
>
> VII. Ad soldanos, haereticos, proditores, excommunicatores, falsos infidelos.

Summarizing all this information, we can conclude that the movement of *dictamen* intended to apply the Ciceronian rhetoric to a concrete problem of composition: the writing of letters. Although the theory of *colores* or features was included in this discussion, finally the more used stylistic doctrine in the "Ars Dictaminis" was the *cursus*, based on the appearance of clauses (Murphy, 1974: 273-4). So, with all this, our intention has been to show the

first problem to focus on *Troylus & Cryseide*'s letters. The second part of this paper will be to search for an appropiate ideology of the mentioned ones.

To the above purpose we must seek almost obligatorily to the most clear example of letters, close intentionally to Chaucer's ones: Ovid's *Heroides*. This work is a collection of twenty-one love letters, conceived by Ovid as *epistulae*, so the epistolary genre is always recognisible. The *Heroides* submit, practically without any exception, to the rhetorical precepts. Most of them include an initial greeting with the name of the sender (*institulatio* or *superscriptio*) and of the adressee (*adscriptio*) with a χαι′ρειν or *salutem*. In some occasions, the letter begins with a complaint or a reproach, and finishes with a closing formula (*subscriptio*) (Moya del Baño, 1986: VII-IX).

The *Heroides* have been treated and discussed as a pure rhetorical exercise or, on the other hand, as lacking in these features. Anyway, there have been opinions in favour of the influence of *suasoria* or rhetorical exercise of persuasion, especiallly in letters 1-15. The structure of any one of this group can help us to discover this feature. For example, (Oppel, 1968: 12) Phaedra's letter to Hippolitus (Heroide 4) includes a *suasoria* in verses 85-164, in which she points out several arguments on behalf of he returns love (Pérez Vega, 1994: 15).

> (Ovid, *Heroides IV*, 52-5, v. v. 129-41)
> Nec, quia privigno videar coitura noverca,
> terruerint animos nomina vana tuos.
> ista vetus pietas, aevo moritura futuro,
> rustica Saturno regna tenente fuit.
> Iuppiter esse pium statuit, quodeumque iuvaret,
> et fas omne facit fratre marita soror.
> illa coit firma generis iunctura catena,
> inposuit nodos cui Venus ipsa suos.
> nec labor est celare, licet peccemus, amorem.
> cognato poterit nomine culpa tegi.
> viderit amplexos aliquis, laudabimur ambo;
> dicar privigno fida noverca meo.

And, should you think of me as a stepdame who would mate with her husband's son, let empty names fright not your soul. Such old-fashioned regard for virtue was rustic even in Saturn's reign, and doomed to die in the age to come. Jove fixed that virtue was to be in whatever brought us pleasure; and naught is wrong before the gods since sister was made wife by brother. That bond of kinship only holds close and firm in which Venus herself has forged the chain. Nor, though we indulge our feelings, would it be difficult to conceal our love for each other. Our fault can be covered under name. Should someone see us embrace, we both shall meet with praise; I shall be called a faithful stepdame to the son of my lord.

When having a look at *Troylus & Criseyde's* letters, we can begin our analysis by checking Pandarus' advices to Troylus in Book II, lines 1023-43. The former remembers the latter that as a premise to his writing:

> (*Troylus & Criseyde*, book II, line 1023)
> [...] thou art wys ynough.

but, then, he suggests him

> (*Troylus & Criseyde*, book II, lines 1024-9)
> I woot thow nylt it dygneliche endite,
> As make it with thise argumentes tough;
> Ne scryvenyssh or craftyly thow it write;
> Biblotte it with thi teris ek a lite;
> And if thow write a goodly word al softe,
> Though it be good, reherce it nought to ofte.

If we take into account the above mentioned features of a discourse appeared in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, in which Cicero warns the orator to dominate certain abilities as *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria* and *pronuntiatio*, we think that Pandarus recommends Troylus not to use a pompous language or style, but a tearful one. Curiously, after mentioning the harpist's comparison with Troylus' possible style, Pandarus points out that

> (*Troylus & Criseyde*, book II, lines 1037-43)
> Ne jompre ek no discordant thyng yferre,
> As thus, to usen termes of phisik

> In loves termes; hold of thi matere
> the forme alwey, and do that it be lik;
> For if a peyntour wolde peynte a pyk
> With asses feet, and hedde it as an ape,
> It cordth naught, so were it but a jape.

so Pandarus confirms that it is essential to use a clear style and that, like Cicero's proclaimed as the orator's concern, he must be able to talk about those themes which have been fixed by morals and laws in order to be used by citizens with the assent of the listeners, and whenever this can be obtained (Alcina, 1991: 31).

When discussing Troylus' letter (book II, lines 1065-92), we can see that Chaucer follows, more or less, the discourse's parts.

> (Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, I, III, 4) Inventio in sex partes orationis consumitur: in exordium, narrationem, divisionem, confirmationem, confutationem, conclusionem. Exordium est principium orationis, per quod anumus auditoris constituitur ad audiendum. Narratio est rerum gestarum aut proinde ut gestarum expositio. Divisio est per quam aperimus quid conveniat, quid in controversia sit, et per quam exponimus quibus de rebus simus acturi. Confirmatio est nostrorum argumentorum expositio cum adseveratione. Confutatio est contrariorum locorum dissolutio. Conclusio est artificiosus orationis terminus.

Invention is used for the six parts of a discourse: the Introduction, Statement of facts, Division, Proof, Refutation and Conclusion. The Introduction is the beginning of the discourse, and by it the hearer's mind is prepared for attention. The Narration of Statement of Facts sets forth the events that have occurred or might have occurred. By means of the Division we make clear what matters are agreed upon and what are contested, and announce what points we intend to take up. Proof is the presentation of our arguments, together with their corroboration. Refutation is the destruction of our adversaries arguments. The Conclusion is the end of the discourse, formed in accordance with the principles of the art.

Lines 1065-1071 conform the *exordium* or beginning, in which we can observe that there is a *captatio benevolentiae* when Troylus says: (*Troylus & Criseyde*, Book II, line 1070) «[…] He gan hym recomaunde unto hire

grace». Lines 1072-1085 include the *narratio* of the letter. This part reflects one of the types in which the *narratio* is divided: the one which is made out of a judicial cause, and we think that this one follows the subdivision based on the people. In this part, we can also guess some elements of *suasoria*, the device used by Ovid in his *Heroides*. Troylus tries to convince Cryseide:

> *(Troylus & Criseyde*, Book II, lines 1075-8)
> And pitousli gan mercy for to crye;
> And after that he seyde - and leigh ful loude -
> Hymself was litel worth, and lasse he koude.

Finally, lines 1086-1092 represent the *conclusio* or ending of the letter. Cryseide's answer does not contribute anything to a deep analysis of the letter, though we can guess that it could be divided into the cited parts.

Both lover's letters in book V do bring elements of discussion. In Troylus' letter, lines 1317-1323 include the *exordium*:

> *(Troylus & Criseyde*, book V, 1317-23)
> Right fresshe flour, whos I ben have and shal,
> Withouten part of ellewhere servyse,
> With herte, body, lif, lust, thought, and al,
> I, woful wyght, in everich humble wise
> That tonge telle or herte may devyse,
> As ofte as matere occupieth place,
> Me recomaunde unto youre noble grace.

Lines 1324-1407 can be divided into the first fourty-nine verses, which mean Troylus' pleadings to Cryseide (that is, a *captatio benevolentiae*),

> *(Troylus & Criseyde*, Book V, lines 1338-41)
> Yow first biseche I, that youre eyen clere
> To loke on this defouled ye nat holde;
> And over al this, that ye, my lady deere,
> Wol vouchesauf this lettre to byholde; […]

and they could even represent part of the *narratio*, as he tells her the cause of his letter. The final 35 verses of this group include a clear *suasoria*, then a clear Ovid's influence, when Troylus insists on her coming back to Troy.

> *(Troylus & Criseyde*, Book V, lines 1324-30)
> Liketh yow to witen, swete herte,
> As ye wel knowe, how longe tyme agon
> That ye me lefte in aspre peynes smerte,
> Whan that ye wente, of which yet boote non
> Have I non had, but evere wors bigon
> Fro day to day am I, and so mot dwelle,
> While it yow list, of wele and wo my welle.

At last, lines 1408-21 are the *conclusio* or ending of the letter. On the other hand, Cryseide's letter contains an *exordium* (lines 1590-96),

> *(Troylus & Criseyde*, Book V, lines 1590-6)
> Cupides sone, ensample of goddlyheede,
> O swerd of knyghthod, sours of gentilesse,
> How myght a wight in torment and in drede
> And heleles, yow sende as yet gladnesse?
> I herteles, I sik, I in destresse?
> Syn ye with me, not I with yow, may dele,
> Yow neyther sende ich herte may nor hele.

a short *narratio*, in which she explains the facts (lines 1597-1603),

> *(Troylus & Criseyde*, Book V, lines 1597-1603)
> Youre lettres ful, the papir al ypleynted,
> Conceyved hath myn hertes pietee,
> I have ek seyn with teris al depeynted
> Youre lettre, and how that ye requeren me
> To come ayeyn, which yet ne may nat be;
> But whi, lest that this lettre founden were,
> No mencioun ne make I now, for feere.

and then Cryseide shows the pros and the cons of her coming back, that is a *divisio*, in which there is an enumeration *(enumeratio)* of the causes by which she cannot come back and an exposition (*expositio*) of these ones:

(Troylus & Criseyde, Book V, lines 1604-10)
Grevous to me, God woot, is youre unreste,
Youre haste, and that the goddes ordinaunce
It semeth nat ye take it for the beste.
Nor other thyng nys in youre remembraunce,
As thynketh me, but only youre plesaunce.
But beth nat wroth, and that I yow biseche;
For that I tarie is al for wikked speche.
For I have herd wel moore than I wende,
Touchyng us two, how thynges han ystonde,
Which I shal with dissymeling amende.
And beth nat wroth, I have ek understonde
How ye ne do but holden me in honde.
But now no force. I kan nat in yow gesse
But alle trouthe and alle gentilesse.

Of course, lines 1625-31 mean the *conclusio* of the letter.

As a summary of all this paper, we can conclude that Chaucer reflects in the letters of *Troylus & Cryseyde* some of the precepts of Classical Rhetoric, when using some of the discourse's parts contained first in Cicero's rhetorical works and then in Medieval rhetoricians, and also some elements of Ovid's *Heroides*, specially those related to rhetorical devices, as the mentioned *suasoria*.

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