

**Between homosexuality and incest: ambiguous sexual identity of Pandarus in
Chaucer's «Troilus and Criseyde»**

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Chaucer's epic poem «Troilus and Criseyde» is an outstanding literary legacy, which reflects not only the themes of chivalry, war and betrayal, but also the courtly traditions of the 14th century society. Within the framework of the medieval romance, for a long time there was a universal interpretation of Pandarus' role as an ideal friend and go-between, performing purely pandering functions. However, in modern times, with the development of feminist and queer theories, scholars have begun to pay greater attention to his desires and motivations, lying behind man's actions that are often presented in the indirect way and accompanied by understatement or ambiguity. Pandarus' deep involvement in the affairs of lovers makes it doubtful that his intentions were solely in the inclination to serve courtly love and were not a manifestation of lust and deviant sexual desires. Thus, for example, Wetherbee refers to him as an «appetitive element» in the poem, whose sexual appetite is so comprehensive that it causes both male same-sex dynamics and intra-family seduction (1984. p.75). Therefore, the main objective of the study was to examine how Pandarus' fluid sexual identity balances at the junction of homosociality and homosexuality, with a possible overflow into incest when his behavior threatens heteronormative paradigm of relationships.

In the first part of the work, attention was paid to the connection between the modern understanding of the notions of heterosexual/homosexual relationships and the older universals described by the medieval theologian St. Thomas Aquinas who in his treaty raised the issue of acceptable same-sex relationships, including male-male friendship (1981, p.12). Having outlined the boundaries of friendship in the 11th-14th centuries, the study focuses on the analysis of the development of homosexual relationships between Pandarus and Troilus.

Firstly, it was revealed that a textual void regarding the beloved allows the reader to independently construct the image of Pandarus' mistress either adhering to a heteronormative paradigm, or approaching it from a queer perspective. The latter alternative found further elaboration as it was considered that male friendships, in which one possessed feminine traits, had the greatest potential for the transformation of homosocial into homosexual relationships. In the middle of the first book, Pandarus voices a proverb, thereby endowing himself with authority of «the wise» conventionally possessed by a male in the Middle Ages (Chaucer, 2003, 1:694). In turn, by making a connection between Troilus «mone» and Nyobe «weepe», he feminizes his friend, portraying him as weak and vulnerable (Chaucer, 2003, 1:695-700). In this case his intention to assist Troilus can be interpreted not as an aspiration to fulfill his fraternal obligations, but as a desire to dominate the effeminate friend. Hence, by reducing equal relations between men to vertically hierarchical ones, like those between man and woman in a patriarchal society, Pandarus also gains power over the sexual life of Troilus and the opportunity to supervise and actively participate in it.

In the third book, close relationship between friends has reached its apogee since the verbal manifestation of Pandarus' homosexual desires acquired a physical connotation. It is clear that Pandarus visits a friend not only to convey the news to him, but also to spend a «glade night» with him (Chaucer, 2003, 3:229). In this case, physical proximity cannot exclude the

possible presence of sexual tension between men. In turn, Troilus also fully realizes that he owes Pandarus for his pandering service; he claims that «now for thee/ A thousand tymes on a morwen sterve/...I wol thee serve/ Right as thy slave» (Chaucer, 2003, 3:388-391). With these words, he renounces his rights and transfers himself and his body to the rule of Pandarus agreeing to «wol alwey thyne hestes alle kepe» and «lat ... bothe slepe» (Chaucer, 2003, 3: 419-420). Overall, this demonstrates that pandering in this plot was a strategy as a result of which Criseyde's uncle could realize his sexually deviant intentions.

Thus, when Pandarus' homosexual desires reach climax, implying physical manifestation, only switching to a male-female bonding can restore his heteronormative identity. In this case, Criseyde comes to the fore with her predominant female function as an object to which sexual desire of a man can be directed. However, this immediately implies the possibility of incest. For the first time the encounter of an uncle with a niece is presented at the beginning of the second book where Criseyde becomes a subject of verbal manipulation and psychological pressure. The study showed that these tactics can be considered an attempt to make a woman more receptive to further persuasion in the development of intimate relationships by testing her interest and curiosity. Thus, it was noticed that Criseyde makes a deal with her uncle — she admits that it is he whom she loves «*most and triste*», and in return asks Pandarus to stop speaking in «*fremde manere*» and tell her secret information (Chaucer, 2003, 2:247-249). Meanwhile, the narrator informs us that «*hir uncle anoon hir kiste*» which means that he accepts such terms (Chaucer, 2003, 2:250). In this scene, we observe for the first time how the relationship between Cressida and Pandarus flows from verbal communication into physical interaction that can be considered as psychological incest since disrespect of privacy needs is a manifestation of emotional abuse (Covington, 1991, p. 95).

The scene in book 3 can be marked by a high degree of intimacy between uncle and niece since the heroine agrees «*to pleye*» with her uncle (Chaucer, 2003, 3:1578). Kruger argues that the words «*pleye*» and «*gamen*» were often used by Chaucer in a metaphorical sense to refer to sexual intercourse (1994. p.13). In this case, the phrase «*gan to pleye*» is direct allusion to the act of incest. In turn, it is worth noting that Pandarus' «entente» was fully achieved only after he «*pleye*» with a niece, which allows us to conclude that incest was predominant uncle's desire in this scene (Chaucer, 2003, 3:1582).

Overall, the study revealed that two deviant sexual acts can simultaneously be present in the plot. Besides, a certain similarity in the construction of the climactic scenes in the bedsides of Troilus and Criseyde was found. In both cases Pandarus operates according to the same scheme: 1. Comes to deliver/find out information, 2. Settles down in a close proximity with a potential (naked) lover 3. Gets the rights to further actions 4. Seduces and fulfills his intention. However, if in the first intercourse his desire was to satisfy his sexual needs with a friend, then the second time to restore his heteronormative identity.

References

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