MEMORY'S HISTORY AND THE HISTORY OF CRISEYDE: CHAUCER'S *TROILUS**

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ABSTRACT

This essay seeks to explore the relationship between memory and history in Chaucer's late fourteenth-century romance, the *Troilus*. In order to clarify some important historical differences between the medieval and the postmodern, the essay begins with an analysis of Christopher Nolan's film *Memento* (2000), drawing on the work of French cultural historian Pierre Nora. If we are now (according to Nora) obsessed with memory, vernacular writers in the later middle ages were concerned to intervene in the medieval tradition whereby memory is kept alive through authoritative textual tradition. I argue that Chaucer's poem participates in this rethinking of vernacularity, but in terms that do not simply reproduce Criseyde (the focus of the poem's anxious memorialisation) as a figure of loss or of textual/feminine undecidability.

KEY WORDS: Memory, Chaucer, *Troilus*, authority, vernacularity, history, past.

RESUMEN

Este artículo intenta explorar la relación entre la memoria y la historia en el romance chauceriano de finales del siglo XIV, el *Troilus.* Para aclarar algunas diferencias entre lo medieval y lo postmoderno, el estudio empieza con un análisis de la película de Christopher Nolan, *Memento* (2000), basándose en la obra del historiador cultural francés Pierre Nora. Si, siguiendo a Nora, actualmente nos hallamos obsesionados con la memoria, los escritores en lengua vernácula de finales de la Edad Media se esforzaron por intervenir en la tradición por la cual la memoria se mantiene viva mediante la tradición de la *auctoritas*. Yo sostengo que el poema de Chaucer participa en esta nueva dimensión de lo vernáculo, pero en términos que no se limitan a reproducir la figura de Criseyde (foco de la memorización ansiosa del poema) como signo de la pérdida o de una falta de decisión textual/femenina.

PALABRAS CLAVE: memoria, Chaucer, *Troilus*, autoridad, lengua vernácula, historia, pasado.

"The commandment of the hour is thus 'Thou shalt remember'."
Pierre NORA[1]

"Those who fail to re-read are obliged to read the same story everywhere."
Roland BARTHES[2]

We have history, argues French cultural historian Pierre Nora, because we no longer have memory. But we are haunted by this loss. Christopher Nolan's film *Memento* (2000) bears witness to our current obsession with the precariousness of memory, and especially with memory's precious relationship with identity.[3] Its protagonist, Leonard Shelby, has lost his short-term memory.[4] Mentally traumatised by his unsuccessful attempt to rescue his wife from being raped and murdered, he is unable to make any new memories. But revenge furnishes his urgent personal injunction to remember: he must find and kill his wife's murderer. Leonard is not amnesiac: he knows who he is, and he remembers events up to and including the murder. But his perceptual consciousness is limited to the immediate moment: once an event has happened, it is instantly forgotten. Lacking any mechanisms for recording or accessing new memorial archives, he is forced to use a variety of prosthetics for memory: Polaroid photographs of key witnesses; scribbled annotations ("Teddy: Don't believe his lies"; "Natalie: she will help you because of her loss"); tattoos in mirror-writing and lapidary fonts on his body ("John G. raped and murdered your wife"). The bizarre corporeal inscriptions, the reminders sellotaped to the mirror ("Shave"), the cumbersome file of murder-investigation documents that he has constantly to consult, are surreal projections of how memory might look if we had to exteriorise it and were not able to store it in an internal filing-system and retrieve it at will. Because of this breakdown in his psychic archive, Leonard tells himself that he needs a mnemonic "system." He must develop techniques of the arts of memory, as monks were taught in the later Middle Ages, or grammar-school boys in the Renaissance: hence the architectural mnemonic that he literally constructs on the noticeboard in his motel room in order to impress the "facts" upon his mind.

But Leonard's prosthetic devices cannot in fact re-member. They record only discrete and disconnected moments of objective reality. Detached from the signifying chain that gives them meaning, his memories of events are no longer intelligible to him, no longer able to structure his past, present or future. He is able to write down "the facts" but he has no means of knowing if he is interpreting them accurately. Before the traumatic accident Leonard was a loss adjuster for an insurance company. Now, ironically, he has to adjust to his own double loss: that of his

* I would like to thank Stephen Jaeger for allowing me to see his unpublished paper, "The Anxieties of History and the Rashness of Critical Theory: A Defense of Cultural History."

[1] Pierre NORA, "General Introduction: Between Memory and History," *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, vol. 1, *Conflicts and Divisions*, ed. Pierre Nora et al. European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism (New York: Columbia UP, 1996) 1-20, 10.

[2] Roland BARTHES, *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 15-16.

[3] For a scene-by-scene analysis of *Memento*, see http://www.salon.com.

[4] In the brain, the hippocampus is the seat of processing experiences so that they can be stored as memories. If the hippocampus is damaged and lost, the ability to make and store new memories is also lost: see *New Scientist* 12 March 2003. This would seem to be what Leonard is suffering from.

wife and of his mnemonic faculty. Metonymically, the film fuses the lost capacity for recollection and the lost woman. The death of Leonard's memorial archiving takes place —with a certain cultural predictability— over his wife's dead body. "Memory is treachery" reads one of the tattoos on Leonard's upper arm. *Memento* captures a noirish, nightmarish and solipsistic vision of a world in which memory is, like woman in the western cultural imaginary, ambivalent: infinitely precious and infinitely betraying.

According to Pierre Nora, western society is no longer based on memory. There has been a rift, he argues, in the normal processes by which a culture lives on in collective memorialisation. *Memento* is not of course overtly concerned with collective memory: rather, it understands that rift in terms of strictly individual loss. It affirms Nora's observation that 'the historical transformation of memory has led to a preoccupation with individual psychology'.[5] But it might be more accurate to view memory as yet another of those pieces of property that the self can accrue to itself within the logic of entitlement of possessive individualism. Freud responded to the social disintegrations of the late nineteenth century by making memory central to subjectivity, shifting the sites of memory from the collective to the individual: his notable examples were the Wolf-Man's "primal scene" and the "hysterical" reminiscences of Dora and Anna O.[6] And just as memory has moved further away from the level of a shared history to that of individual psychology, so *Memento* recreates through its diegesis a version of the self's new relationship to history.[7] It is often said that the film runs events backwards, but it would be more accurate to say that it violates linear chronology by running events in a series of backwards loops, so that effects precede causes —or, more accurately, so that events no longer operate according to a straightforward principle of cause-and-effect. Without memory, the film strongly suggests, we cannot build on knowledge, cannot make deductions from experience, do not know where we are from one minute to the next. The film's temporal disruptions simultaneously embody Leonard's schizoid internal time and his appalling predicament: he can no longer use memory to locate himself within history or to interpret "the facts." Without memory he has no key to unlock the

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[5] NORA 10-11.

[6] Sigmund Freud & Joseph Breuer, "On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication" (1893), trans. James & Alix STRACHEY, The Pelican Freud Library, vol. 3*, Studies on Hysteria* (1974; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986) 53-69. For the case history of the "Wolf Man," see Sigmund Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis (The 'Wolf Man')," trans. James STRACHEY, The Pelican Freud Library, Volume 9*: Case Histories II* (1979; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991) 227-366. For Anna O., see Joseph BREUER, "Fraulein Anna O.," trans. James and Alix STRACHEY, The Pelican Freud Library, Volume 3*: Studies on Hysteria* (1974; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986) 73-102. For Dora, see Sigmund FREUD, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ('Dora')," trans. Alix & James STRACHEY, The Pelican Freud Library, Volume 8*: Case Histories I* (1977; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 31-66.

[7] A similar theme is explored (though with considerably less finesse) in *Total Recall* (dir. Paul Verhoeven, 1990): the protagonist, played by Douglas Quaid, is also severed from a personal past.

historical processes that unfold before him. In one unforgettably comic scene Leonard and another man are seen running furiously through a trailer park. We hear Leonard in voice-over asking himself, "What am I doing? Am I chasing him?" The film cuts to the other guy shooting at him. "Oh, oh," says Leonard, quickly reversing direction, "*He's* chasing *me*." Memory, the film suggests in prototypically humanist fashion, is fundamental to the survival of the individual. Memory enables us to escape our own death.

Chaucer's *Troilus*, completed in the mid 1380s, is also about the anxieties of memory —specifically, the memory of Criseyde— but it does not make the radical separation between history and memory that Nora claims to be typical of current occidental ways of thinking. This does not mean that medieval writers conflated history and memory. But they conceived of their relationship differently. As Chaucer reminds us in a key passage in the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, memory is kept alive through the textual tradition of *auctoritas*: "if that olde bokes weren aweye, / Yloren were of remembrance the keye." (G25-6) In this mnemic model "history" does not archive the traces of "memory." Instead "remembrance" is something to be unlocked using ancient texts: the knowledge enshrined in authoritative writings from the past provides the key to reading memory in the present. Despite ostentatiously parading the deliciously mendacious "Lollius" as one of the sources for his romance, Chaucer makes the *Troilus* his most sustained meditation on the question of the relationship between public memory and historiography: of how to read the past, of how to do justice to the past and to the memory of a particular woman. I began this essay with an analysis of a twentieth-century film in order to point to the very large gap that exists between the cultural place of memory now and then. But by coming at Chaucer's poem by way of twentieth-century thinking about the problematic of memory I hope to keep in mind the question of historical difference, especially where notions of public or collective memory are concerned. Chaucer's poem is of course very different from Nolan's film (although both share a view of the feminine as seductive and threatening), but I believe that both arise out of specific cultural moments when the question of memory is especially compelling.

In Chaucer's long and passionate narrative poem Criseyde functions as a kind of test-case for an ethics of reading the past, since the Chaucerian narrator's troubled investment in the retelling of Trojan history is bound up with the ethical question of how to represent the memory of Criseyde for his late fourteenth-century audience. Constrained to follow "the storie," he nevertheless holds back from blaming her outright for such tragic events as the transfer of her sexual favours from Troilus to Diomede: "Men seyn —I not— that she yaf hym hire herte." (5.1050) But several feminist critics have found the narrator foundering in his project: over-explaining, closing gaps, and nervously seeking to impose authoritative masculine control upon the errant and ambiguous feminine.[8]

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[8] Carolyn DINSHAW, "Reading Like a Man," *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989) 28-64.

But if the narrator cannot intervene successfully to change the collective memory of Criseyde, then perhaps we as readers can take a lesson from some other, more recent, models of memory. Chaucer's poem is not a "reflex of real events" but a representation of a popular (hi)story: like memory itself, it offers an experience that John Frow would describe as "always reconstructed rather than recalled."[9] Psychoanalysis, narratology and philosophy, like writing, have had much to say about the complex relationship between construction and recollection. These disciplines have knocked loose the apparently obvious connection between the time of an "event" and its meaning, pointing for example to the odd temporal structure of the phenomenon that Freud names *Nachträglichkeit* (belatedness; the ascription of meaning to an event after it has happened and in the light of later knowledge that decisively revises its so-called "original" meaning). I will argue that the *Troilus* offers a commentary, spoken by Criseyde herself, on the very impossibility of reconstructing an originary moment (arguably, what *Memento* tries to represent through Leonard's search for the "true" killer whose memory he has repressed or failed to record). Instead she points to an event that is situated, in Ned Lukacher's words, "in the differential space between historical memory and imaginative reconstruction."[10] So rather than viewing Criseyde (yet again) as the embodiment of textual undecidability or as the lost maternal origin, I argue that the poem articulates through her speech a radical rethinking of the relationship between events and their memorialisation, and hence a different way of interpreting collective memory and the cultural past.

My title deliberately alludes to Pierre Nora's essay, "Between Memory and History," which introduces the first volume of his monumental symbolic history of France, *Realms of Memory*.[11] Nora grapples with the question of how to do history in a world in which, in his words, "Things tumble with increasing rapidity into an irretrievable past,"[12] in which there is an ever-widening rift between memory and history. Cut off from a past that they were once linked to through collective memory, modern societies turn to history, he argues, in order to "organize a past they are condemned to forget because they are driven by change."[13] In this schema, history

[9] John Frow, *Time and Commodity Culture: Essays in Cultural Theory and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) 234.

[10] Ned Lukacher, "Introduction," *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 19-44, 24.

[11] Nora, "General Introduction: Between Memory and History." Nora's analysis is to some extent echoed by the medievalist Gabrielle M. Spiegel when she observes that "the simultaneity of the desire for history and the recognition of its irreparable loss is an irony that seems to me to be the very figure of history in the late twentieth century": *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997) xxi. See also Henry Home, Lord Kames, *The Elements of Criticism* (1762), with an introduction by Robert Voitle (Hildesheim: George Olms Verlag, 1970), for the view that "the now" ("real presence") and "the remembered" ("remembrance") are at opposite ends of a perceptual axis.

[12] Nora 1.

[13] Nora 2.

and memory are effectively opposed, moving apart at an unprecedented rate. Our obsession with this loss is seen on the most banal level in the spate of television programmes of the "I Love 1982" type, and at the higher end of the scale in the various memorialisations of the Holocaust. And we are anxious to archive not only the past but also the present. According to the Digital Preservation Coalition, if we do not archive the important electronic ephemera of email and the internet, we will be faced with an "enormous black hole in Britain's collective memory."[14] But a residual sense of continuity with the past does remain for us, in certain sites or texts: Stonehenge, the *Canterbury Tales*, the Globe Theatre. Each of these is what Nora calls a *lieu de mémoire*: "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community."[15] Chaucer's age had no need of *lieux de mémoire*: in the fourteenth century memory was by and large omnipresent, integrated, ritualistic, and tinged with the sacred: not a property of the individual, but a means of putting the individual and the community in a continuous relation with the past. Nora's own historiographical practice straddles, but does not attempt to join up, that space between memory and history.

As Mary Carruthers has amply demonstrated, Chaucer wrote from within an intensely "memorial culture," in which history (the past) and memory (a phenomenon of the present) were intimately linked.[16] All levels of society were concerned with the transmission of collective values through "remembrance," whether through the learned textual traditions of *auctoritas* or through everyday domestic objects. In a letter to her husband, John Paston I in 1441, the young wife Margaret Paston, urges him to "wear the ring with the image of Saint Margaret that I sent you for a remembrance till ye come home."[17] This ring commemorates both a historical virgin-martyr and Margaret's love for John, linking husband and wife within their community in deeply affective and seemingly transhistorical bonds. Objects behave just like this in the *Troilus*, though they often do so negatively. By giving Diomede "the faire baye stede / The which he ones wan of Troilus; / And ek a broche... that Troilus was" (5.1037-41), Criseyde betrays the bonds of memory that link her to Troilus. Hence the narrator's regretful aside —"and that was litel nede." This brooch reappears as an intrusive memory that recollects and inspires trauma. Troilus sees it on the collar of a tunic that his brother Deiphebus has seized from Diomede, and we learn that Criseyde had given it to Troilus on the day they were separated in "remembraunce of hym and of his sorwe" (5.1663). Troilus laments:

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[14] "Urgent need to save digital heritage, say campaigners": reported in the *Guardian* 28 February 2002, 11.

[15] Nora, "Preface to the English-Language Edition," *The Realms of Memory* xvii.

[16] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990).

[17] Norman Davis, ed., *The Paston Letters: A Selection in Modern Spelling* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 5.

Was ther non other broch yow liste lete
To feffe with youre newe love...
But thilke broch that I, with teris wete,
Yow yaf as for a remembraunce of me? (5.1688-91)

By the end of Book 5, the city of Troy is saturated with the memory of Criseyde: In his anguish Troilus rides up and down the city "and every thyng com hym to remembraunce / As he rood forby places of the town / In which he whilom hadde al his plesaunce" (5.562-4). In this scene, Troilus's private recollection is ironically coterminous with public mnemonic traditions of rhetoric whereby events are recalled spatially through architectural schemata.

The poem explores these intimate links between present and past, between recollection and its representation, showing them to be profoundly social and yet also yearning for some more private and individual conception of memory. From the beginning, remembrance is urged on the poem's audience, both as a pre-condition of literary receptiveness and of an ethical stance towards the lovers' tragic history:

But ye loveres, that bathen in gladnesse,
If any drope of pyte in yow be,
Remembreth yow on passed hevynesse
That ye han felt... (1.22-24)

To remember is to put oneself in the right frame of mind for understanding the text and responding bodily to its piteousness. The tragic love story is not just recollected within the poem but is part of what French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s called "collective memory": Not how the past conditions the present but, in historian Peter Novick's words, "the ways in which present concerns determine what of the past we remember and how we remember it."[18] "Collective memory," Novick glosses, "is not just historical knowledge shared by a group. Indeed, collective memory is in crucial sense ahistorical, even anti-historical. ...Memory... has no sense of the passage of time; it denies the 'pastness' of its objects and insists on their continuing presence. Typically a collective memory, at least a significant collective memory, is understood to express some eternal or essential truth about the group— usually tragic." (3-4). While the notion of "collective memory" prompts some fascinating questions about exactly what "truths" about late medieval culture the poem expresses, the poem engages collective or public memory in surprisingly subtle and complex ways.

[18] Peter NOVICK, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001) (originally published as *The Holocaust in American Life*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999) 3. On Halbwachs, see Lewis A. COSER, ed., *Maurice Halbwachs on Collective Memory* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992).

For many readers in the late fourteenth century, Criseyde embodies the commonplace of women's "natural" duplicity, a duplicity that is famously conflated in the Middle Ages with the slipperiness of textuality. But in Chaucer's poem, the question of how to represent Criseyde is not only bound up with the essential doubleness of language and of signifying processes but with how to represent the "truth" of the past. Criseyde *will* betray Troilus. The narrator wrestles with having to reproduce a story of female lack of fidelity. In the proem to Book 4, for example, he is unwilling to condemn Criseyde outright, declaring that he will recount "how Criseyde Troilus forsook— / Or at the leeste, how that she was unkynde" (4.15-16). That qualifying remark not only damns Criseyde for her womanly double nature but also problematically suggests that the narrator himself is half in love with her. On the other hand, it opens up an important space of doubt about the project of history-writing. When the full extent of her betrayal is clear in Book 5, the narrator urges the women in his audience not to be angry with him for narrating her guilt, because it is part of a live tradition of collective memory whose meaning cannot easily be shifted: "ye may hire gilt in other bokes se" (5.1776).

After the poem takes its inexorably tragic turn in Book 4, the audience is increasingly aware of the doubled time of the narrative: that it points outwards to the cultural *histoire* —the historical event of betrayal— and inwards to the Chaucerian *récit*: the reworking of that event. The narrator becomes ever more anxious to open up a gap between *histoire* and *récit*, between the event and its reconstruction: "if I myghte excuse hire any wise, / For she so sory was for hire untrouthe, / Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe" (5.1097-9). But, bizarrely, the narrator seems to stack the odds against her at the end of Book 4, when Criseyde first dismisses Troilus's plan that they elope:

For thilke day that I for cherisynge	holding dear (my father)
Or drede of fader, or for other wight,	
Or for estat, delit, or for weddynge,	marriage
Be fals to yow, my Troilus, my knight,	
Saturnes doughter, Juno, thorugh hire myght,	
As wood as Athamante do me dwelle	Athamas (driven mad by Juno) let me live
Eternalich in Stix, the put of helle!	pit
And this on every god celestial	
I swere it yow...	
And Attropos my thred of lif tobreste	may Atropos break
If I be fals! Now trowe me if yow leste!	believe me if it pleases you
And thow, Symois, that as an arwe clere	a river
Thorugh Troie rennest downward to the se,	sea
Ber witnesse of this word that seyd is here:	
That thilke day that ich untrewe be	on that same day
To Troilus, myn owene herte fre,	noble
That thow retourne bakward to thi welle,	source
And I with body and soule synke in helle! (4.1534-1554)	

In the light of what Chaucer's audience already knows intertextually about Criseyde —that she *will* be unfaithful to *Troilus*— it seems a cruel irony to make Criseyde pronounce out of her own mouth the very words that will damn her. In repudiating her textual history she calls attention to the hellish punishments that will await her in her textual afterlife. The speech does not appear in Chaucer's immediate source, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*. Why provide it at this juncture?

Criseyde's final statement —"And I with body and soule synke in helle!"— consciously echoes the poem's description of the fate of another tragic historical figure, the Greek seer Amphiaraus —Chaucer's Amphiorax— who features in the Statian history of the siege of Thebes that Criseyde was hearing read at the beginning of Book 2:

> This romaunce is of Thebes that we rede;
> And we han herd how that kyng Layus deyde
> Thorough Edippus his sone, and al that dede;
> And here we stynten at thise lettres rede —
> How the bisshop, as the book kan telle,
> Amphiorax, fil thorugh the ground to helle. (2.100-5)

The parallel between Amphiaraus's fate and Criseyde's imagined fate is part of the Theban subtext of Chaucer's poem. As Catherine Sanok argues, not only does "Amphiaraus's catabasis traces Criseyde's own vulnerability to the contingencies of war," but by putting the reference in Criseyde's mouth Chaucer gives "the women of his poem the most pronounced historical consciousness," a consciousness figured by their association with the *Thebaid* and one that evokes, in Sanok's words, "the poignancy of human suffering."[19] But it is possible to read Criseyde's self-accusations in less humanist terms —not as evidence of "human suffering" but as a deliberate playing with temporal structures that stage for the reader or audience the problematic relationship between recollection and reconstruction. The effect of Criseyde's speech is one of *mise-en-abyme*, an infinite regress, as we see Criseyde refer simultaneously backwards and forwards within the poem, as well as invoking the time frames of other narratives, notably that of Statius' Latin epic. At this point in the poem Criseyde struggles to stand outside her own text: to evade the inevitability of her story and history. This abyssal moment is also seen in the passage in Book 5 when Criseyde utters her own epitaph, lamenting that no good words will ever be spoken of her, that books will defame her: "rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!" (5.1061).

Both these speeches violate the boundaries between memory and history, showing how recollection transcends the individual subject in a way that is not so much proleptic but metaleptic, operating what Ned Lukacher calls a double logic,

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[19] Catherine SANOK, "Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*: Women and the Theban Subtext of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde,*" *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 20 (1998): 41-71, 51 and 71.

"in which every cause is always already an effect, every disclosure always a concealment, and every literal truth a figurative lie."[20] These speeches present memory as something in excess of origins or definition. They are a way of recovering or pointing to what Criseyde cannot say about her own history, insofar as they are in excess of origins or definition. They point to the radical impossibility of the origin, even as they admit —poignantly— that the burden of the truth continues to make itself felt. The "truth" of Criseyde's betrayal is not fully present in either the narrator's authority nor in the characters' subjective recollection of events.

Could history be written otherwise? Certainly towards the end of the poem, as the tragic outcome becomes ever more pressing, Chaucer's narrator devoutly wishes that could be the case. When Criseyde allows herself to be loved by Diomede, the narrator is unwilling to endorse blame:

> But trewely, the storie telleth us,
> Ther made nevere womman moore wo
> Than she, whan that she falsed Troilus. (5.1051-3)

"[T]he storie telleth us": The narrator signals that there might be a discrepancy between the event and its telling, though it is not clear here that he doesn't conflate the two, so firm is the impression that the event can have only one possible telling, one that seems inescapable. "Trewely" is not just an ironic reference to Criseyde's "falsing" of Troilus: It also points to the gap between recollection and reconstruction which is central to the psychic processes of memorialisation. But the narrator's desire to break away from the singular recounting of the event and the strong sense of doing justice to the past make Chaucer's poem a subtle examination of the problems of recollection as well as history-writing. Sticking to the facts is difficult, because the subject-matter is one that involves the historian in an ethical and affective relation to the past.

But of course the Middle Ages knows nothing of the unconscious and its problematizing of memory. This much is clear in the epilogue to the *Troilus*, which reveals how firmly the poem is historically tethered to a traditional logic of causality, to locatable meanings, to confident perspectives, to a temporal schema that holds past, present and future in their prescribed chronological order. From his lofty position in the eighth sphere, Troilus gains a perspectival view of the poem's events. Where Criseyde voices a subtle and deeply political challenge to the conventional relations between past, present and future, Troilus's words return the poem to a conservative agenda, one that ascribes a single definite origin to the tragic events of the poem, namely "The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste" (5.1824).

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[20] Lukacher, "Introduction," *Primal Scenes* 23. OED: A rhetorical figure consisting in the metonymical substitution of one word for another which is itself figurative. OED cites Blair 1783: "A trope founded on 'the relation between an antecedent and a consequent, or what goes before, and immediately follows."

If we read Chaucer's poem now with an awareness of our own changed cultural relation to memory, then we also read the Middle Ages in memorial terms. Because of our modern sense of alienation from the past, our understanding of history as contingent, and our consequent questioning of the traditions of history-writing, an account of Chaucer as a historical figure can no longer be a traditional biographical one. Certainly there is an essay to be written on Chaucer himself as an instance of Nora's concept of the *lieu de mémoire*, one that looks beyond the historical realities to recover what memory of the English national past Chaucer sustains.[21] Such a history would still be thoroughly concerned with empirical details but would attend to the constructions of Chaucer's *symbolic* meaning. Chaucer is a *lieu de mémoire* insofar as we continue to attach memories to him: invented as a founding father in the fifteenth century by Hoccleve and Lydgate, his writings have often been co-opted to serve a national project.[22] But if anything, Chaucer is now accelerating rather fast out of the national memory[23] —which perhaps accounts for my own professional need to "remember" him as well as for the vast academic enterprise that is now committed to archiving Chaucer's texts on CD-ROMs, websites and online databases.[24]

Nora's symbolic history seems to me to avoid the problems of the abjected Middle Ages, with its apparently inevitable association of the desire for the past with mourning, or its fetishisation of the past as a lost object. It also avoids a postmodern freefall into relativism. But by opposing memory and history Nora is also mortgaged to a metaphysical division between present and past, and a harden-

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[21] NORA, "Preface to the English-Language Edition," *Realms of Memory* xvii. See also Steve ELLIS, *Chaucer at Large: The Poet and the Modern Imagination* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000), for an analysis of reactions to Chaucer since the late nineteenth century. Setting up of the Chaucer Society in 1868. Popular indifference to Chaucer —subdued reactions to anniversaries of his death. Journalist Jeremy Paxman on the *Canterbury Tales*: "everyone feels in England a sort of sense of ownership about it, but they haven't read it."

[22] See "Chaucer and the Idea of English as a Literary Language," *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor & Ruth Evans (University Park and Exeter: Penn State P and Exeter UP, 1999) 345-350; Christopher CANNON, *The Making of Chaucer's English: A Study in Words*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).

[23] Steve ELLIS, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, Writers and Their Work Series (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1996) 63-4.

[24] For Chaucer CD-ROMs and databases, see Edwin Duncan, "The General Prologue —An Electronic Edition": The URL is http://www.towson.edu/~duncan/chaucer/. Peter Robinson, the Director of the *Canterbury Tales* Project, a collaborative international project located at De Montfort University, Leicester, announced in October 2000 the publication of their third major electronic publication (on CD-ROM), the Hengwrt Chaucer Digital Facsimile, edited by Estelle Stubbs of the University of Sheffield; for further information, see the publisher's website: <http://www.sd-editions.com>. There has been an explosion of online teaching aids on Chaucer. For example, see the Chaucer Pedagogy Page: <http://cwolf.uaa.alaska.edu/~afdtk/pedagogy.htm>, the Chaucer Metapage: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/chaucer>, and Chaucer: An Annotated Guide to Online Resources: <http://geoffreychaucer.org>.

ing of the boundaries that arbitrarily separate medieval from early modern, early modern from Enlightenment. What is at stake in a Criseydan rethinking of the past as a folding back into the present and the present as a folding back into the past is the effort to produce the medieval past not as absolute difference nor as unproblematically coterminous with the present. We must seek a critical discourse for reading history that on the one hand maintains, in Ned Lukacher's words, "the impossibility of moving beyond interpretation to a discourse of truth," but that on the other hand "has not forgotten that the burden of the truth continues to make itself felt." (25)

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