The storyline of *Filostrato* is easy to sum up: Troiolo, who is initially presented as a Hippolytus-type character, falls in love with Criseida. Thanks to the mediation of Pandaro, *mezzano d’amore*, Troiolo and Criseida can very soon meet and enjoy each other’s love. Criseida is then unfortunately sent to the Greek camp, following an exchange of prisoners between the fighting opponents. Here she once again very quickly falls in love, this time with the Achaean warrior Diomedes. After days of emotional turmoil, Troiolo accidentally finds out about the affair: Diomedes is wearing a piece of jewellery that he had previously given to his lover as a gift. The young man finally dies on the battlefield in a rather abrupt fashion: “avendone già morti più di mille / miseramente un di l’uccise Achille” [And one day, after a long stalemate, when he already killed more than a thousand, Achilles slew him miserably] (8.27.7–8). This very minimal plot is told in about 700 *ottave* (roughly the equivalent of a *cantica* in Dante’s *Commedia*), in which dialogues, monologues, and laments play a major role. In fact, they tend to comment on the plot, rather than feed it. I would insert the use of love letters within *Filostrato* under this pragmatic rationale: the necessity to diversify and liven up a plot which we can safely call flimsy. We could read the insertion of Cino da Pistoia’s “La dolce vista e ’l bel sguardo soave” (5.62–66) under the same lens: a sort of diegetic sublet that incorporates the words of someone else, in this case in the form of a poetic homage.

Italian critics have insisted on the elegiac nature of *Filostrato*, while at the same time hinting at its ambiguous character, mainly in terms of not

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1 “Un fermaglio / d’oro, li posto per fibbiaglio” [a brooch of gold, set there perchance as clasp] (8.9). Quotations from the *Filostrato* in the original are taken from Surdich’s edition (Boccaccio 1990), which is based on Branca’s Mondadori edition (Boccaccio 1964). English translations, in square brackets, are from Griffin and Myrick 1967. All other translations from Italian are mine. Hereafter, quotations from prose sections will refer to the paragraph in Surdich’s edition.

2 The passage has been mainly scrutinized by critics concerned with the chronological collocation of *Filostrato* in its connections with the *vexata quaestio* of the *ottava rima*. Barsella 2000 reads the quotation as a form of parody.
fully mature accomplishment: Branca has spoken of a “voce incerta fra il romanzo e l’elegia” [undecided voice between romance and elegy]; Bruno Porcelli “elegia imperfetta.” American scholars have been more explicit in questioning the genre affiliation of the booklet and according to Fabian Alfie, who draws on extensive Boccaccio scholarship from the twentieth century, we can now safely say that Filostrato “represents a text operating in the medieval comic tradition”: comic is here seen in terms of parody, the main target for Boccaccio being Dante’s Commedia and Vita nova. Along with others, Alfie insists on the moral nature of Filostrato and reads the use of parody under this exegetical umbrella. In this paper, I wish to point out some passages in which lexical choices may suggest a sharper twist to this comic aspect, namely one that veers into a low, if not vulgar, register and mood. I will start by considering the larger frame of the work, i.e., the author’s prologue, which sets an explicit parallel between the writer and the protagonists of the story he is about to tell. This is an uncanny mirroring that posits very basic exegetical problems, especially in light of the subsequent characterization of the two main dramatis personae. I will then consider the aforementioned love letters that interrupt the diegetic flow of Filostrato three times. Finally, I will point out other passages that showcase, in my opinion, the still unripe, yet visible, comic side of the early work by the Certaldese.

4 Alfie 1998, 347.
5 Hollander points out the lowering of “quai fioretti,” Inferno 2’s famous simile, in Troiolo’s rejoicing over his soon-to-happen rendezvous; other instances are Troiolo’s almost blasphemous utterances against “sommo Giove” for his misfortune, in a scene that quotes from Purgatorio 6, a hypotext which, in passing, is not exactly complimentary in terms of female archetypes (Hollander 1977, 50 and notes). From Surdich, I would also add 2.135.7–8 to this list: Pandaro, pushing Criseida finally to meet with Troiolo, complains, “Assai fa mal chi può far bene nol face, / e perder tempo a chi più sa più spacie” [Very ill doeth he who can act well and doth not, for the wiser a man is, the more doth the loss of time displease him], the end of which quotes Dante’s Purgatorio 3.78 verbatim. At the beginning of part three, as the narrator is about to sing the love between Troiolo and Criseida, Boccaccio inserts an ironic quotation from Dante’s Purgatorio: the second otherworldly kingdom becomes here a far more mundane realm: “Per me appaia il ben del dolce regno / d’Amore, del qual fu fatto Troiolo degno” [the benefits of the sweet reign of Love may in every particular appear set forth by me] (3.1.7–8). In this regard – and dealing with poetic intertextualities in general (“memorie letterarie studio samente appuntate e assaporate” [literary memories dutifully noted and tasted]), Branca admits that Boccaccio “qualche volta oscilla e sbanda, qualche volta si rifugia in calchi che possono persino sembrare parodia” [sometimes does waiver and swerve, sometimes he hides behind calques that can even resemble parody] (Boccaccio 1964, 9–10: italics mine).
The poem opens with a long prose prologue in which the narrator maintains that he is writing his book to overcome the pains of being left by his lady, hopefully temporarily:

E il modo fu questo: di dovere in persona d’alcuno passionato sì come io era e sono, cantando narrare li miei martiri. Meco adunque con sollicita cura cominciai a rivolgere l’antiche storie per trovare cui io potessi fare scudo verisimilmente del mio segreto e amoroso dolore. (Proemio 26–27)

[And the means was this: in the person of some impassioned one such as I was and am, to relate my sufferings in song. I began therefore to turn over in my mind with great care ancient stories, in order to find one that would serve in all color of likelihood as a mask for my secret and amorous grief.]

Readers are reminded of this parallel in strategic points of the poem, firstly in the verse proemio:

Per che, volendo per la tua dipartita,  
più grieve a me che morte e più noiosa,  
scrivere qual fosse la dolente vita  
di Troiolo, da poi che l’amorosa  
Criseida di Troia sen fu ita,  
e come prima gli fosse graziosa,  
a te convienmi per grazia venire,  
s’io vo’ poter la mia ‘mpresa fornire. 6 (1.3)

[Therefore in undertaking because of thy departure – more grievous to me than death and more distressing – to write what was the sorrowful life of Troilus after the amorous Cressida had departed from Troy, and how, previous to that, she had been gracious to him, it is fitting that I come to thee for grace, if I am to finish my enterprise.]

Later, a sort of proemio al mezzo takes place roughly halfway through the libello, as the dramatic section of the love story is about to begin. The emotional entanglement of author-lover is worth reading closely to evaluate the narrator’s psychological involvement in the story, which reinforces its interpretive weight. The lover-poet is torn among pride: “non curo guari se non se’ presente” [I care not overmuch if thou dost not lend thy presence] (4.23.2); self-deceiving: “se da te ’scoltato / non son, non curo, che a forza il core / ti cangerà” [if thou listenest to me not, naught care I, for perforce thy heart will change] (4.24.5–7); pathetic need for help: “Ma se pur viene a’ tuoi orecchi mai, / priegoti, per l’amore il quale ti porto, / che abbi alcun

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6 A few lines later, the narrator becomes even more explicit and states: “sì come Troiolo / doglioso vivo” [like sorrowful Troilus, I live] (1.6).
rispetto alli miei guai” [But if indeed it ever come to thy ears, I pray thee by
the love that I bear thee, have some regard for my woes] (4.25.1–3). In the
last part of Filostrato, the poet addresses his booklet as if it itself were a love
letter that will receive no answer:

E nell’abito appresso lagrimoso
nel qual tu se’, ti priego le dichiari
negli altrui danni il mio viver noioso,
li guai e li sospiri e’ pianti amari
ne’ quali stato sono e sto doglioso,
poi che de’ suoi begli occhi i raggi chiari
mi s’occultaron per la sua partenza,
ché lieto solo vivea di loro presenza. (9.6)

[And in the almost tearful habit in which thou art, I pray thee declare to
her how wearily I live in the griefs of another, the woes, the sorrows, the
sights, and the bitter moans in which I am and have been sorrowful since
the bright rays of their fair eyes were concealed from me by her departure,
for I lived in happiness by their presence alone.]

It is in this sense that Fabian Alfie — drawing from Dante’s Vita nova —
speaks of an “epistolary nature of poetry” that ultimately serves the purpose
of winning over a woman.8

These parallels are too strategically located in the poem to be exegeti-
cally irrelevant. Regardless of the actual existence of the author’s lover and
discovery of her identity,9 it is odd that among all the couples of the “antiche
storie” at his disposal, Boccaccio would pick Troiolo and Criseida as a fitting

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7. The rubric of this three-stanza section straightforwardly pierces the fourth wall: “L’autore
della sua donna suole l’aiuto chiamare, qui il rifiuta dicendo come dolente sanz’esso
sapere gli altrui dolori raccontare” [The author, who usually asks for his lady’s help, re-
fuses here to do so saying that, being in pain because of its absence (i.e., the absence
of help), he can tell of other people’s suffering]. Griffin and Myrick 1967 do not have these
rubrics in their edition: the translation is mine.


9. A plethora of scholars has engaged in the puzzling attempt to date the Filostrato among
Boccaccio’s other early works. The main issue is the identity of the woman the author
refers to in the proemio. Branca maintains that the writer is here talking about “Gio-
vanna,” via the etymological periphrasis/senhal “nome di grazia pieno” (Boccaccio 1964,
3–4). Surdich agrees and notes that this woman could be key to explaining the sharp
difference in his attitude towards Fiammetta, as we read in the Filocolo and Teseida
(Boccaccio 1990, 5–13). Balduino (1984, 231–47) and (Bruni 1990, 160–73) have instead
steered their investigations toward intertextual connections, with a special focus on Pe-
trarca’s RVF 112, quoted in Filostrato 5.54–55, and Cino da Pistoia.
match to his own love story. There are social and political features of Criseida that should make the reader wary of the kind of character we are dealing with. First, as the eloquent opening scene of the book informs us, Criseida is the daughter of Calcas, a Trojan traitor, whose transgression is scorned by the entire community.\(^\text{10}\) Second, it is clear from her origins that Criseida is not an aristocrat, at least not of the same level as Troiolo, who happens to be the last son of the king of Troy himself.\(^\text{11}\) One would expect social constraints to come into play, especially in light of the treason the narrator casts right after the proemio. Third, and most important, Criseida is a widow\(^\text{12}\) and might well belong to the vast intertextual web within Boccaccio’s works, in which husbandless women are often portrayed in negative terms. With this in mind, and knowing that at the end of the story Criseida will opt for Diomedes, it is fair to ask: was this really the narrator’s way to address his lover, in hopes of winning her back?

Textual and linguistic choices do reinforce the un-elegiac reading of Criseida and, as we will see, Filostrato in general. As far as the female protagonist is concerned, her first entrance on the stage posits her far away from the delicacies of the sweet new style (italics mine):

\[
\text{Ella era grande, ed alla sua grandezza} \\
\text{Rispondevano i membri tutti quanti,} \\
\text{e ’l viso avea adorno di bellezza} \\
\text{celestiale e nelli suoi sembianti} \\
\text{quivi mostrava una donnesca altezza}
\]

\(^\text{10}\) “Fu ’l romor grande quando fu sentito, / per tutta la città generalmente, / che Calcàs era di quella fuggito, / e parlato ne fu diversamente, / ma mal da tutti, e ch’elli avea fallito, / e come traditor fatto reamente; / né quasi per la più gente rimase / di non andargli con fuoco alle case” [Great noise arose when it became known throughout the city generally that Calchas had fled therefrom. And Comment was passed upon it diversely, but adversely by all, and it was agreed that he had done amiss and acted as a traitor wickedly. And the greater portion of the people barely refrained from going with fire to his house] (1.10).

\(^\text{11}\) This feature is stressed by Wood 1984, 3–37.

\(^\text{12}\) Criseida herself draws attention to her condition in the text in an almost comic fashion: at the beginning of her affair, she reassures Troiolo in a way that sounds oblivious of her former husband (italics mine): “Però sicuro vai del mio amore, / il quale mai per altrui più non provai” [Therefore live certain of my love, which is greater than I have ever felt for another] (3.50). Even more explicit as she has to leave (momentarily) for Greece: she thus addresses her lover (italics mine): “Or vedova sarò io daddovero, / poi che da te dipartir mi conviene, / cuor del mio corpo, e ’l vestimento nero / ver testimonio fia delle mie pene” [Now shall I be a widow in very sooth, since it behooveth me to part from thee, heart of my body, and black attire shall bear true witness to my sorrows] (4.90). One more example in the next paragraph.
e col braccio il mantel tolto davanti
s’avea dal viso, largo a sé faccendo,
ed alquanto la calca rimuovendo.

[She was tall and all her limbs were well proportioned to her height; her face was adorned with beauty celestial, and in her whole appearance she showed a womanly dignity. With her arm she had removed her mantle from before her face, making room for herself and pushing the crowd a little aside.]

Several times in the text, moreover, the story insists on Criseida’s sexual appetite. The first encounter with Troiolo is quite frantic:

Né si partiron prima di quel loco,
che mille volte insieme s’abbracciaro
con dolce festa e con ardente gioco,
e altrettante e vie più si basciaro,
si come quei ch’ardevan d’egual foco,
e che l’un l’altro molto avea caro;
ma come l’accoglienze si finiro,
salir le scale e ’n camera ne giro.

Lungo sarebbe a raccontar la festa
ed impossibile a dire il diletto
che ’nsieme preser pervenuti in questa;
ei si spogliaro ed entrarono nel letto,
dove la donna nell’ultima vesta
rimase già, con piacevole detto
gli disse: “Spogliami io? Le nuove spose
son la notte primiera vergognose” (3.30–31)

13 The English translation softens the awkwardness of Criseida’s entrance. Griffin and Myrick 1967 render “grande” (literally, and more generically “big”) as “alta” (tall). This is a legitimate option, since the adjective can mean “di alta statura, molto sviluppato,” as we read in the Grande dizionario della lingua italiana; moreover, the following “altezza” is clearly a psychological feature in this context. However, the translation misses the etymological connection in the verse between “grande” and “grandezza,” which confers some clumsiness to the verse, due to the close repetition of the same root, which is of course made necessary by the rhyme (grandezza: bellezza: altezza). By the end of the ottava, Criseida is intimidating the people around her (“largo a sé faccendo”; “la calca rimuovendo”), but just “alquanto.” On this last adverb, Rohls 1992–94, § 497) maintains: “Significato di ‘alcuno’ ha pure alquanto, che troviamo già nel latino imperiale” [‘alquanto’ as well carries the meaning of ‘alcuno’ (some), which is already present in Imperial Latin], his translator Temistocle Franceschi adds: “con una sfumatura accrescitiva” [with an augmentative nuance], although he does not provide evidence for this clarification.
[They did not leave the place they had with sweet joy and ardent dalliance embraced one another a thousand times. And as many times more did they kiss one another, as those who burned with equal fire and were very dear to one another. But when the welcome ended, they mounted the stairs and went into a chamber.

Long would it be to recount the joy and impossible to tell the delight they took together when they came there. They stripped themselves and got into bed. There the lady, still keeping on her last garment, said to him: ‘Mirror mine, the newly wed are bashful the first night’

Previous stanzas built on the crescendo of the erotic scene and the abundance of verbs from the semantic sphere of physical love stress the passion of the moment. In the final couplet, though, one cannot deny the irony of Criseida’s remarks about herself: we know that she does not belong in the league of nuove spose.

If the character of Criseida is far from commendable — Muscetta convincingly shows common traits with Guido delle Colonne’s representation of the “vedovetta” [little/poor widow], as he calls her — on the other hand, Troiolo is also far from blameless. Albeit at times he acts like a brave soldier, the young man is more often depicted as an utterly un-epic character, all the more considering that we are amid the Trojan war, which after all constitutes the narrative context of the sad love story. In his own words: “a Vener non sono util né a Marte” [I am useful neither to Venus nor to Mars] (7.59). Indeed Troiolo is alternatively euphoric or depressed: he either chirps a hymn to Venus that seems definitely over the top to the point of

14 The editors of the Italian text and the English translation employ two different lectiones in this passage: Griffin and Myrick adopt Ignazio Moutier’s 1827 edition of Boccaccio’s vernacular works (Griffin and Myrick 1967, vii); Surdich is using Branca’s text (Surdich 1990, 43). In the second stanza, Surdich reads “spogliomi io?” (should I get undressed?) in the form of a rhetorical question that Criseida asks Troiolo. Promptly, the young man replies with a quick “io te ne prieo” (I beg you do so) in stanza 32. Griffin and Myrick read “spogli mi io” (oh my mirror!), in the vocative form, which seems less justified: in merely diegetic terms, there is no need to introduce a third interlocutor in this conversation; in linguistic terms, it would not be clear what Troiolo is referring to with the “ne” pronoun. Criseida’s overall characterization is not infringed, but one could make a case that Surdich’s (and Branca’s) editorial choice seems more explicit and straightforward when Criseida is the speaker.


16 Therefore, I find it hard to believe that Troiolo is an “amante appassionato e dolente, antenato di Nastagio e Federigo degli Alberghi,” as Branca claims (Boccaccio 1964, 12).
being ridicule\textsuperscript{17} or he curses his bitter destiny. Priam’s son addresses Fortune:

\begin{verbatim}
Se la mia via lieta e graziosa
ti dispiacea, perché non abbattevi
tu la superbia d’Ilion pomposa?
Perché il padre mio non mi toglievi?
ché non Ettòr, nel cui valor si posa
ogni speranza in questi tempi grievi?
Perché non ten portavi Polissena?
Deh, perché non Paris con tutta Elena? (4,31)
\end{verbatim}

[If my happy and pleasing life was displeasing to thee, why didst thou not humble the stately pride of Ilium? Why didst thou not take from me my father? Why not Hector, on whose valor resteth every hope in these grievous times? Why didst thou not carry off from us Polyxena and why not Paris and Helen too?]

The love letters\textsuperscript{18} introduced in the narrative flow prove useful to further outline the psychology of the two protagonists and, more importantly, their contrasting attributes. As Troiolo first writes to his soon-to-be lover, the young man pens a complex, multi-layered epistle that encompasses a significant diversity in terms of registers. The opening is for instance highly refined and erudite:

\begin{verbatim}
Come può quei che in affanno è posto,
in pianto grave ed in stato molesto
come sono io per te, donna, disposto,
ad alcun salute dare? credo chesto
essere non dee da lui; ond’io mi scosto
da quel che gli altri fanno, e sol per questo
qui da me salutata non sarai,
perché non l’ho se tu non la mi dai. (2,96)
\end{verbatim}

[How can he who is placed in torment, in heavy sorrow, and in grievous state, as I am for thee, lady, give food health to anyone? Certainly it should not be expected of him. Therefore I am departing from the practice of others. Thou shalt lack good health from me only for this reason, because I have it not to give, unless you givest it to me.]

Since Alberico da Montecassino’s early studies of \textit{ars dictaminis}, the initial section of a letter was the most significant. In his \textit{Rettorica}, Brunetto

\textsuperscript{17} Hollander 1977, 50–51 and related notes.

\textsuperscript{18} The text mentions other exchanges of letters in 2.131; 3.3; 5.45; 7.105; 8.3 (these last two after Criseida has already gone).
Latini maintains that “[I]a salutazione è così parte della pistola come l’occhio dell’uomo. Et se l’occhio è nobile membro del corpo dell’uomo, dunque la salutazione è nobile parte della pistola” [Salutation is in a letter what the eye is in a man. If the eye is a noble part of the human body, thus is salutation a noble component of a letter].\(^{19}\) Troiolo is here showing a distinct awareness of these conventions: his first lines break with epistolary codifications via a pun (salute/salve) that can be traced back to medieval poetry and, indeed, to Ovid, an author of prime relevance for Boccaccio’s literary education. In his *Heroides*, the Roman poet has a woman address her lover using the same etymological wordplay in Epistle 4 (Phaedra to Hippolytus). The letter is intertextually connected to the story of *Filostrato*, inasmuch as it features a deceitful seductress who turns her back on a younger lover.\(^{20}\) At the syntactic level, the ottava is built on two main blocks, with a strong caesura halfway through the stanza and several subordinate clauses, especially in the latter part. Quite on the opposite side of the stylistic spectrum, we read just a few stanzas later (italics mine):

\begin{align*}
Tu sola puoi queste pene noiose, \\
quando tu vuoli, porre in dolce pace, \\
tu sola puoi l'afflizion penose, \\
madonna, porre in riposo verace, \\
tu sola puoi, con l'opre tue pietose, \\
tormi il tormento che si mi disface; \\
tu sola puoi, si come donna mia, \\
adempiet ciò che il mio cor disia. (2.101)
\end{align*}

[Thou alone, when thou wishest, canst give these sore torments sweet peace. Thou alone, my lady, canst give this painful affliction surcease. Thou alone with tender ministrations canst remove from me the torture that so undoeth me. Thou alone, as my lady, canst accomplish what my heart desireth.]

Troiolo is ‘Filostrato’ here, “in pianto ed in stato molesto.” The mood is translated into lengthy and emphatic ottave, in which compulsive repetition and pounding, one-sentence clauses become the stylistic emblem. Such psychological density — ranging from sorrowful clarity of mind in the opening

\(^{19}\) The original quotation is in Latini 1968, 154.

\(^{20}\) It is fitting to remember that some philological knots of Ovid’s *Heroides* in Boccaccio are hard to disentangle. Perugi 1989 pointed out the importance of codex Laurenziano Gaddiano 71 for the Certaldese and his booklet: the manuscript contains the text of four *Heroides* and an *Istorietta troiana*, containing passages from Andreas Capellanus, the Châtelain de Couci and Petrarca. However, the Epistle of Phaedra we mention here is absent from ms. LG 71.
salutazione (or lack thereof) to mumbling despair in the latter passage — is a suitable example of what Giuseppe Chiecchi labels “schizofrenia letteraria,”21 a condition that the Italian critic extends to other love letters in early works by Boccaccio as well. Criseida’s only written reply is also worth considering, in that it reiterates how the negative features of her character highlight the contrast with Troiolo. In her epistle, the woman attentively constructs a careful and cautious answer to Troiolo’s avances, elliptically leaving the door open to a possible encounter, but at the same time stressing the burden of social constraints on widows:

A te amico discreto e possente,
il qual forte di me inganna Amore,
come uom preso di me ’ndebitamente,
Criseida, salvato il suo onore,
manda salute, e poi umilemente
si raccomanda al tuo alto valore,
vaga di compiacerti, dove sia
l’onestà salva e la castità mia. (2.121)

[To thee, discreet and powerful friend, whom Love greatly infatuatedeth for me, as a man unduly enamored of me, Crissida, her honor preserved, sendeth greeting, and thereafter humbly recommendeth herself to thy high worthiness, being anxious to please thee provided my honor and chastity be safe.22]

The syntax of the passage is elaborate: the stanza is built on a single clause, with a Latin ablative absolute (“salvato il suo onore”) and a final hyperbaton with zeugma in the last couplet. The convention of salutatio is dutifully at work. Despite being “vaga di compiacerti,” she cunningly and coldly crafts a timid answer to her lover. A naïve and emphatic parataxis in
Troiolo is thus counterpoised to a remarkable syntactical awareness in Criseida. The two letters portray two radically different characters: a passionate and ingenuous young man and an astute older lady. As both writers and lovers, Troiolo and Criseida seem to share a reciprocal interest, but quite evidently not with the same enthusiasm.

Rhetoric aside, let’s now take a closer, lexical look at Troiolo’s first letter (2.96–107): the solemn and erudite *salutatio* closes in an ambiguous fashion. Troiolo laments that he cannot have *salute*: “se tu non la mi dai” (2.96.4). The sexual connotation of the expression is still alive in contemporary Italian and is already present in Aretino. In general, the verb *dare* had a very vast phraseology that comprised corporeal references too. If we re-read stanza 101 — which we already analyzed for its syntax — things get even more explicit:

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Tu sola puoi queste pene noiose,
quando tu vuogli, porre in dolce pace,
tu sola puoi l’afflizion penose,
madonna, porre in riposo verace,
tu sola puoi, con l’opre tue pietose,
tormi il tormento che sì mi disface;
tu sola puoi, si come donna mia,
adempier ciò che il mio cor disia.” (2.101)
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The sexual innuendoes I highlight in italics clearly hint at male and female genitalia in ways that are frequent in erotic poetry, and their ambiguity is reinforced by the rhyme position. Troiolo even draws his reader’s attention — just as the narrator is doing with us — to the real meaning of the message. Innuendoes are blurry by definition: therefore, the young lover Troiolo invites Criseida to read between the lines: “sanza fallo alcun tutto tuo sono / or tu sei savia: s’io non dico appieno, / intenderai” [Wise as thou art, thou wilt understand, if I do not speak adequately] (2.105.3–5).

We do not find coarse innuendoes of this kind in Criseida’s reply. Rather, the woman chooses to weave intertextual parodies into her epistle, which prompt our erudite laughter at their sheer oddity, given the new context in which they are encapsulated. Criseida has been pondering Troiolo’s request, “la fede e la speranza essaminando” [“And as I think [...] over reasonably

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23 Arguably the real sense of these words is confirmed, via antiphrasis, a few lines later as Pandaro takes the “lettera pia” [pitiful letter] (2.108.1) to Criseida: a better translation would probably read “pious,” which is the chief meaning of the adjective.

24 I believe *fallo* too is used in ironic terms here. More on this word below.
[...] thy faith and thy hope"] (2.123.3), as if she were a saint questioning Dante in the last cantos of Paradiso. She complains that in this world what we want and what we get rarely overlap: the moral statement “ma non si può ciò che si vuole aguale” [but what is wished can do but little good] (2.126.4), patently echoes Vergil’s remark “vuolsi così colà dove si puote / ciò che si vuole” (Inf. 3.95–96).25 Criseida, as we already pointed out, is very cautious as she addresses her lover. As she speaks to herself, however, she is more straightforward “seco dicendo: ‘A spegner questo foco / conviene a me trovare e tempo e loco” [saying to herself: ‘it is fitting that I find time and place to quench this fire’] (2.115.7–8). The erotic nature of the metaphor needs no further explanation: of the many occurrences, let us limit ourselves to Alibech’s need to “attutare la rabbia al mio ninferno” [extinguish the rage of my hell] (Dec. 3.10.29).

We can find more suspicious lexical items in other passages. A first example is fallo: Boccaccio seems to play with the ambiguity of the noun, which means both “guilt” and “shame”26 but also designates the male reproductive organ. As Troiolo is foreshadowing Calcas’ concerns about his daughter’s affairs, he explains that there could easily be “infamia del fallo che assai / fu” [of his guilt, which was very great] (4.141.5–6); later Troiolo dreams of Criseida’s betrayal and names it “periglioso / fallo” [the perilous sin] (7.23.3–4). The ambiguity of the word choice is reinforced by the caesura placed in its vicinity and, as far as the second example is concerned, an unusual choice of accompanying adjective. In either case, fallo is metonymic for sexual intercourse, in the first case with Troiolo himself, in the latter with Diomedes. The notion of cheating is also likely emerging:

Era la vecchia luna già cornuta nel partir di Criseida [...] Per che sovente con seco dicea: “Allor che questa sarà divenuta colle sue nuove corna, qual facea quando sen gli la nostra donna, fia tornata qui allor l’anima mia.” (5.69)

[The old moon was already horned at the going of Cressida [...] Wherefore he often said to himself: “When it shall have become with its new horns just as it appeared when our lady went away, then will my soul have returned here.”]

25 On a philological level: Griffin and Myrick 1967 read “avale” (meaning “now”) instead of “aguale” (identical): the general sense is clear and the Dantean halo is preserved.
26 On the term’s different meanings throughout Boccaccio’s works: Surdich 1990, 289 (note 5).
The close repetition of “cornuta” and “corna” seems to wink at poor Troiolo’s destiny: the expression referring to being cheated on is present in the *Proverbia quae dicuntur* and in the *Decameron* as well (7.5.58). Diomedes, the new lover, is the one to blame. The Greek warrior is introduced in a dream-scene in the telling shape of a boar (a synecdoche for the family emblem: “e sempre poi portaro / per soprassegna, sì come si vede, / i discendenti il porco” [and ever afterward the descendants, as it is seen, have borne the swine as a crest] [7.27.4–6]), quite an appropriate synonym that nevertheless has comic connotations in medieval Italian. Criseida too is far from innocent. The final words from the narrator on the unfortunate love story — before a final tirade on young lovers and his own mistress — put the ultimate seal on Criseida: “cotal fine ebbe la speranza vana / di Troiolo in Criseida villana” [such was the end of the vain hopes of Troilus in base of Cressida] (8.28.7–8). The last word of the diegetic part of *Filostrato* is explicit in condemning the female protagonist, although the reader has long been aware that Troiolo’s doubts were just the result of a delusional mind. A brief passage as early as part two even seems to turn into a vulgar insult. Troiolo has just received confirmation that Criseida is interested in meeting him. His outburst of joy is thus expressed:

Poi Pandaro abbracciò mille fiate  
e basciollo altrettante, sì contento  
che più non saria stato se donate  
ghi fosser mille Troie             (2.81.1–4)

[Then he embraced Pandarus fully a thousand times, and kissed him as much again, so happy that he would not have made more so had he been given a thousand Troys.]

A sharp caesura follows. The pause arguably stresses the ambivalence of the word: literally the plural of the city, but also a derogatory, misogynist term which we find, for instance, in Sacchetti. The use of “troie” could either be the unwarranted, clumsy outcome of the author: a sort of forerunner of Foscolo’s notorious line from Ajace “O Salamini, o soli di tanti forti, o sciagurati avanzi,” which had the audience burst into laughter. Alternatively, borrowing a line of argument from Auerbach’s *Dante Studies*, we may say that Boccaccio could not be unaware of the possible implications of his verse.27

We have outlined three main areas of critical interest for the *Filostrato*: the un-chivalric parallel between Boccaccio’s dramatis persona and the

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27 Auerbach 2002, 233. I am referring to the famous essay on Saint Francis, where Auerbach explains the erotic implications of Par. 11.60 (“la porta del piacere nessun disserra”).
wreckage of Troiolo’s love; the inconsistent characterization of the two protagonists, at times passionate lovers with whom we tend to sympathize, at times an astute widow deceiving a simple minded giovinetto; the innuendos that range from irony to vulgarity. The first two elements make a smooth case for understanding the nature of Filostrato as not merely elegiac. It is more difficult to make sense of the last feature, and I would like to propose two possible explanations. As I suggested with regard to the last example provided, we may see these occurrences as unintentional slips of a young author’s pen. I do believe, however, these lapsus to be too frequent to be exegetically irrelevant. Research on the audience of Filostrato and/or its language could prove to be fruitful paths of investigation. We could therefore read these occurrences as part of Boccaccio’s “moral agenda,” as Alfie calls it. Alongside the bitter and severe warnings against the risks of love in the proemio and in the congedo, these more comic sections work as ironic — if not sarcastic — counterpoints meant to elicit our laughter.

Needless to say, the two options do not exclude one another: in fact, I think they prove the complex, or even unripe nature of Filostrato. It is hard to deny its moral trajectory, but it is difficult for readers to detect it outside peripheral (and shorter) sections of the libello, where it is formulated in explicit and metanarrative terms. The ethical stance clearly goes hand in hand with a largely prevailing erotic and elegiac register. Throughout Filostrato we also find an additional and diverse stylistic stream, i.e., one that ranges from the parodic — something that had already been clearly noted by scholars — to the comic, which I pose here almost in the sense of beffa. One cannot help but think that this is indeed the result of an author that mette troppe carne al fuoco, as the saying goes, and cannot find a definite pitch for his work. As a result, the reader is confused: should we feel sorry for Troiolo, as the narrator invites us to do? Or should we instead laugh at him, as Pandaro at times does? Lovesickness makes lovers blind to the point where the line between despair and slapstick becomes very thin:

Però non ci rincresca l’aspettare,  
Pandaro mio, io ten priego per Dio;  
noi non abbiamo or altra cosa a fare,  
non ti gravi seguire il mio disio,  
e s’io non erro, veder la mi pare:  
deh, guarda in giù, non vedi tu quel ch’io? —  
— Nò, — disse Pandar — se ben gli occhi sbarro,

28 Dario Mantovani recently presented on the manuscript tradition of Filostrato, and I thank him for sharing his material with me. As far as Boccaccio’s language is concerned, Manni 2003 offers insights on the poemetto that are worth expanding.
quel che mi mostri pare a me un carro. – (7.8) 29

[’Therefore let not waiting to displease thee, my Pandarus, I pray thee in the name of the gods. We have now naught else to do. Let not the attainment of my desire weigh heavily upon thee. If I mistake not, it seemeth to me that I see her. Ah, look yonde, ah, dost thou see what I do?’ ’No’ said Pandarus, ‘if my eyes are really open, what thou showest me seemeth to me naught else but a cart.’]
Works Cited


